ONE

Boundaries

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INTRODUCTION

Mary

We live in an increasingly boundary-conscious world, despite this being the next millennium, despite the discourse on otherness and difference, despite the best teaching in the field of curriculum studies to the contrary. Our quagmire in Iraq and in trouble spots around the globe indicates this. We Americans, led by an administration that touts itself as the supreme arbiter of dispute and injustice, commit boundary crossings in order to maintain world supremacy, fight terrorism, and plunder oil fields not within our boundaries. Martha, writing of the history of oppression in Sri Lanka by foreign rule, observes that boundaries are necessary for the colonial enterprise. In order— yes, in Order—I believe the phrase is "to liberate" oppressed people, colonists devise political strategies to justify invasion. The classical liberal idea of "liberation" necessarily carries the boundary baggage: wealthy foreigners go into (preemptively strike) lands afar and disrupt the life patterns of indigenous people. The boundary is between colonizer and colonized, wealthy and (often) poor, third world and first world, them and us—all for noble sounding goals. "In the name of progress and development, boundaries are held in place by ideological markers," Martha observes. Trouble is, rich oil fields or other glittering natural resources are seldom mentioned as the idea behind invasion. If I sound bitter, it is because I am appalled by the headlines—"More soldiers die in Iraq"—that have been the continual mantra since Saddam was toppled.

Boundaries, Delese argues, are ingrained in our systems, especially our medical system, as a management device of "socialization." Early on in their training, medical students are introduced to a little procedure that many of us

may not know: the lesson of "the first patient." This is a cadaver—dead flesh—on which students can carve, amputate, and inspect. Students are implicitly trained to think of their patients as metaphoric cadavers. Patients become embalmed Its, objectified by the medical gaze. Further citing the thick boundary that separates doctors from patients, Delese deconstructs the signification of the white coat. Meant to convey sanitation, immunity, and professionalism, the coat literally invests the wearer with title, power, and authority—all the labels of whiteness. I often amuse myself by reimagining the protocol of naming, which goes along with the white coat. Doctor comes into examination room, "Hello, Mary, my name is Dr. Robert Wilson." Patient responds, "Hi there, Rob. My name is Dr. Doll."

In our classrooms, boundaries tend to be strictly enforced, especially for elementary students or cadaver trainees. What this means is that the process of differentiating Them from Us reinforces the stereotypes that prop up gender, class, identity, and power boundaries. Fixed boundaries reify. Classroom architecture abets in this process: even in the art culture, where I teach, the podium occupies a phallic central position, in front of which are chairs neatly lined in rows. What this instantiates, of course, is the false belief that the one who stands knows more, is mightier, deserves obedience from those who sit. One talks, others listen.

My take on boundaries, like that of my collaborators, questions line drawing. I discuss the figures of trickster, fool, jester, and clown in earlier societies, whose function it was to trouble the middle region between borders. Between the standing and the sitting lies a fertile space. This is the territory of greatest potential movement that draws on the very energy of that which it seeks to exclude. Border figures like fools unfix categories and taunt rigidity, the sort that believes we must be carefully taught (as the song goes) to hate the people our grandparents hate. Indeed, in the new millennium there still exist stone-age attitudes, even literal stoning. Something there is that loves a wall. We should be so lucky in today's strife-ridden world to encourage a permeability of boundaries. We should be so lucky to act more knowingly, like fools.

THROUGH THICK AND THIN:
BOUNDARIES IN MEDICINE

Delese

> He longed to soothe her, not with drugs, not with advice, but with simple, kindly words.
>
> —Chekhov, "A Doctor's Visit" (2003, p. 176)

A border is a margin, edge, brink, rim, brim, or simply the line that separates two things. Some of these boundaries are useful, even necessary, as when a

mother says protectively to her child, "Now don't go out into the street," or when a zoning board protects citizens' safety and aesthetic sensibilities by not allowing malls or gas stations within a certain distance from their homes. Sometimes boundaries are drawn to distinguish between health and illness, as in "border-line hypertension," referring to "the dividing point between two separate spaces or anything indicating a limit or confine. It is where one stops and the other begins, or simply the edge, the point at which a defined entity stops" (Sommers-Flanagan, Elliot, & Sommers-Flanagan, 1998, p. 38). When applied to humans rather than physical objects, boundaries take on meanings that have more to do with appropriate and inappropriate expectations and interactions within a relationship; here, the doctor-patient relationship.

Volumes have been written about the boundaries between "the" doctor and patient. I highlight the word "the" because "the" relationship is usually treated as a unitary, nonspecific dyad regardless of the context and uniqueness of both doctor and patient (feeble attempts at cultural differences notwithstanding). Even in the first, nonclinical year of medical school, students are taught about the sacredness and obligations inherent to the doctor-patient relationship, and the dangers that can arise if the relationship is not tethered to the twin gods of objectivity and reason. But like the hyphen in the phrase itself separating doctor and patient, the relationship as conceived by medical educators has everything to do with boundaries, a preoccupation with getting "too close," with maintaining "professional distance" images that conjure up, literally, a kind of invisible but rigidly constructed border or boundary separating the doctor from the person for whom she is providing care.

The composition of these boundaries can be thick, or thin, or a mixture of both. The thickness of our boundaries is part of who we are. The person with thick boundaries is able to focus clearly on one thing, keeping other things at bay. She makes a distinction between thought and feeling, between reality and fantasy, waking and dreaming (Hartmann, 1997). Moreover, a person with thick borders

> has a definite sense of personal space around himself or herself; and tends to have a clear autonomous sense of self, never losing him/herself in a relationship. This person will usually have a very solid sense of group identity and of sexual identity, saying something like: "Men are men, women are women." . . . This person will prefer well-demarcated, hierarchical social structures, and often sees the world in terms of black and white with few shades of gray. (p. 149)

In a word, this is doctors and their boundaried/bounded selves, distinct from their patients, distinct from all others in the health professions. As one of the most penetrating forms of socialization in North American culture, medical education makes those boundaries even more impenetrable regardless of the

boundaries students arrive with. As Berger and Luckman wrote almost forty years ago in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), the educational/training experience of three professions—the military, the religious life, and medicine—operate as primary socializations. That is, the values, beliefs, world views, and standards inherent to these professions eventually transcend the socialization of initiates' families. Once in, the us (doctors) and them (patients, all other health care professionals, the "laity") boundaries begin to appear.

In medicine it is no accident that dissecting cadavers occurs during the initial weeks of medical training: a well-documented rite of passage that breaks a cultural taboo against cutting human flesh, with the cadaver becoming students' "first patient," one that is utterly compliant, one that makes no demands, one that asks no questions. Diane Roston (1986) recognized what was going on in the anatomy lab when she, a first-year medical student, wrote: "Now student, / to anatomy: / cleave and mark this slab of / thirty-one-year-old caucasion female flesh, / limbs, thorax, cranium, muscle by rigid muscle / dissemble this motorcycle victim's every part / (as if so gray a matter / never wore a flashing ruby dress)" (1986).

Limbs, thorax, cranium, and muscle by rigid muscle are studied for two years, structures found here on slabs but also in texts, slides, and power points separated from living humans. Interaction with patients is limited, and practice is done on actors—"coached" patients as they're called in medicine—so that students learn facile, scripted responses to patients as they are learning to do histories and physicals: fake responses to fake patients. Later during bedside teaching rounds in the third year, students peer down on accommodating "real" patients whose bodies become the object of their inquiry, the props for their teachers, ground zero of the medical gaze. Even as they touch, probe, listen, palpate, cut, and repair, inside and outside bodies, they do so with a growing psychic distance between themselves and patients. No place here for someone who questions what has been established as "good," "normal," and "natural." These are labels at the core of medical reasoning.

But as part of the professional initiation into a doctorly identity, U.S. medical students are seduced into believing that if they get too "close" to a patient (what does this mean? interested in? disclosing personal information to? suffering with?), their judgment might falter as the required "clinical distance" between doctor and patient is compromised. In addition, if they become too close to their patients, their personal lives will suffer as they become workaholics who bring their psychic "work" home with them. Moreover, by the time students begin to see patients during their third year of medical school, patients have become part of the vast mass of humanity known as "the laity"; that is, there are doctors, and there are all others.

Medicine, as it is enacted in the United States, is grounded in paternalism, a positioning that requires boundaried hierarchies. Such paternalism is enacted in astonishing overt ways in clinical settings where many clinical faculty still

locate themselves and convey this to students as the ones who know, patients as the ones who do not know and the ones who do not need to know. Anatole Broyard, the *New York Times Book Review* editor who chronicled his own dying in a series of essays, had trouble with these boundaries and spent much time dissecting the doctor's persona, watching the relationship unfold with his critic's eye. "I think," he wrote in "The Patient Examines the Doctor" (1992),

> that the doctor can keep his technical posture and still move into the human arena. The doctor can use his science as a kind of poetic vocabulary instead of using it as a piece of machinery. . . . I see no reason why he has to stop being a doctor and become an amateur human being. Yet many doctors systematically avoid contact. I don't expect my doctor to sound like Oliver Sacks, but I do expect some willingness to make contact, some suggestion of availability. (p. 44)

Broyard offers an astonishing (for doctors, anyway) suggestion regarding boundaries and the necessity of keeping them rigid. Instead of distancing themselves from suffering as a protective move, Broyard suggests that doctors need to "save" themselves and can do so by "dissecting the cadaver of their professional persona." That is, the doctor

> must see that his silence and neutrality are unnatural. It may be necessary to give up some of his authority in exchange for his humanity, but as the old family doctors knew, this is not a bad bargain. In learning to talk to his patients, the doctor may talk himself back into loving his work. He has little to lose and everything to gain by letting the sick man into his heart. If he does, they can share, as few others can, the wonder, terror, and exaltation of being on the edge of being, between the natural and the supernatural. (p. 57)

Abraham Verghese, a doctor, writer, and reflective observer of the profession, similarly wonders at these emotional boundaries that are constructed during training, particularly the fact that while patients are encouraged to express their most intimate selves to doctors, doctors are socialized to hide their feelings behind their title, power, and authority. "Despite all our grand societies, memberships, fellowships, specialty colleges, each with its annual dues and certificates and ceremonials," he writes, "we are horribly alone." He continues:

> The doctor's world is one where our own feelings, particularly those of pain and hurt are not easily expressed. . . . We trust our colleagues, we show propriety and reciprocity, we have the scientific knowledge, we learn empathy, but we rarely expose our own emotions. There is a silent but terrible collusion to cover up pain, to cover up depression; there is a fear of blushing, a

machismo that destroys us. The Citadel quality to medical training, where only the fittest survive, creates the paradox of the humane, empathetic physician . . . who shows little humanity to himself. The profession is full of "dry drunks," physicians who use titles, power, prestige, and money . . . physicians who are more comfortable with their work identity than with real intimacy. . . . It is not individual physicians who are at fault as much as it is the system we have created. (Verghese, p. 341)

Of course, boundaries in medicine have to do not just with liminal space, but with the physical space between doctors and patients. The white coat worn by doctors in most clinical settings represents, literally, a boundary between themselves and their patients. First conceived with the concept of aseptic surgery, which originated in the United States around 1889, the white coat's purpose was to protect doctor and patient from cross-contamination. In subsequent years, white coats gave doctors the appearance of scientists, which in the United States validates the practice of medicine. Later, when patients were moved from home to hospitals for care, whiteness became associated with medical institutions. Couple those with Western cultural meanings associated with whiteness life, purity, innocence, superhuman power, goodness, and it is easy to see how the white coat became the favored garment for doctors. All over the United States as medical schools welcome entering classes, white-coat ceremonies are enacted when senior students or faculty give neophytes a white coat, initiating them into the profession. The so-called white-coat ceremony is intended to impress upon medical students the importance of compassion and humility in the midst of the high-tech, bottom-line-oriented practice of today's medicine.

What we don't impress upon students during such ceremonies is that the white coat also marks boundaries, symbolizing caregiving hierarchies and spheres of practice, the social and economic privilege of doctors, and medicine's well-established practices (not unlike those of the law or the priesthood) in determining membership in the profession. What we don't impress upon students is that the white coat is only an article of clothing, and that their bodies underneath are as complicated, variable, and imperfect as the bodies they'll be caring for. To link a white coat to a mythologic, Welbyized image of a physician who is always decisive, who is "immune" to variations in economic and social status, race, ethnicity, national origins, and sexual desire; to differences in body type, size, appearance, and hygiene; and to variations in family structure, religion, occupation, political beliefs, and moral life sets students up not just for failure but also for guilt, cynicism, and denial when the ideal fails to materialize (Wear, 1998).

In fact, wearing a white coat, the occupational clothing of a prestigious group with substantial power over human lives, may actually promote thick boundaries between doctors and patients rather than the opposite. Doctors

may become the coat, sometimes keenly aware of and sometimes unconscious of the way persons respond to them with deference, respect, shyness, self-consciousness, or even silence. A medical student, upon donning the occupational clothing of her profession, quickly recognizes that it establishes her "right to a given status without her need to prove herself" (Joseph, 1986).

But if the white coat represents a boundary between doctor and patient in a face-to-face interaction, the boundaries between clinical and nonclinical settings represent something even more impenetrable. Hospitals, clinics, and doctors' offices are fortresses; they constitute medical turf. Patients are allowed in at regularly scheduled intervals, to interact with doctors, using protocols determined by doctors, answering questions determined relevant by doctors, and in general acting and responding in ways determined appropriate by doctors. In addition, patients are vulnerable because of what ails them; they are their illnesses and symptoms. Never mind their lives outside the fortress; Proust said that his doctor did not take into account the fact that he had read Shakespeare (Broyard, p. 47). That is, the boundaries between doctors and patients are multiple, separating doctors and all others by doctors' real and perceived power, knowledge, social class, and status.

What does a doctor with thin boundaries look like? John Stone (1980) shows us in a poem. The narrative voice is a doctor at the home of one of his former (maybe current) patients, we don't know. What we do know is that six or seven years before, he had performed surgery on her heart, a valve replacement or some such thing. Today he is visiting her—is it a house call, or is he just stopping by to say hey? Whatever the reason, protocols and hierarchies and power differentials change: "Here, you are in charge," he thinks.

> *He Makes a House Call*
>
> Six, seven years ago
> when you began to begin to faint
> I painted your leg with iodine
>
> threaded the artery
> with the needle and then the tube
> pumped your heart with dye enough
>
> to see the valve
> almost closed with stone.
> We were both under pressure.
>
> Today, in your garden,
> kneeling under the sticky fig tree
> for tomatoes
>
> I keep remembering your blood.
> Seven, it was. I was just beginning to learn the heart

inside out.
Afterward, your surgery
and the precise valve of steel

and plastic that still pops and clicks
inside like a ping-pong ball.
I should try

chewing tobacco sometimes
if only to see how it tastes.
There is a trace of it at the corner

of your leathery smile
which insists that I see inside
the house: someone named Bill I'm supposed

to know; the royal plastic soldier
whose body fills with whiskey
and marches on a music box

How Dry I Am;
the illuminated 3-D Christ who turns
into Mary from different angles;

the watery basement,
the pills you take, the ivy
that may grow around the ceiling

if it must. Here, you are in charge of figs, beans,
tomatoes, life.

At the hospital, a thousand times
I have heard your heart valve open, close.
I know how clumsy it is.

But health is whatever works
and for as long. I keep thinking
of seven years without a faint

on my way to the car
loaded with vegetables
I keep thinking of seven years ago

when you bled in my hands like a saint.

Let us praise the opportunity for patients to "be in charge"; let us praise care-
givers with thin boundaries!

BOUNDARY LESSNESS

Mary

In the film *A Beautiful Mind* the John Nash character, played by Russell Crowe, gives an incredibly real performance of a man's belief that he can decode enemy messages and the secret meanings of numbers so as to save the world. A mathematical genius, Nash studied patterns in nature. His genius extended beyond the boundary of normal perception; he saw what mere mortals did not. That, in any case, was the outward Nash, whose slip into madness didn't seem mad at all. At first. Gradually, we learn that the formulae he scratches on windows and on pieces of paper all over his study walls are not normal. Nash is schizophrenic.

What Sylvia Nasar, author of the biography of John Forbes Nash, Jr., tells us is that the disease, schizophrenia, is misunderstood. It can be a "ratiocinating illness" that allows for a "heightened awareness, insomniac wakefulness and watchfulness" not overt disorientation or confusion (1998, p. 18). Because of seeming rational explanations by a patient, the disease is not easily discernible. But eventually, the boundary between sanity and madness dissolves: "His longstanding conviction that the universe was rational evolved into a caricature of itself, turning into an unshakable belief that everything had meaning, everything had a reason, nothing was random or coincidental" (Nasar, p. 19). Nash had no defense against the onslaught of the alien voices in his head. Even the viewer of the film is sucked into the voices and connivances, believing them to be true. The condition is that of a swamped and invaded ego, one of the dangers threatening the psyche when the ego has no firm boundary to separate it from the dynamic energy of the unconscious (Harding, 1963, p. 230).

Edgar Allan Poe's characters come to mind in this regard. Their skill at ratiocination is such that they can explain away their repressions, until the "return of the repressed" causes disintegration of the ego. Poe's frequent use of the fallen house as metaphor for the self demonstrates an early, pre-Freudian understanding that the house of the self collapses when the ego's wall crumbles to the demands of the id. Another example of the loss of ego control, this time to the demands of the super ego, is seen in Katherine Mansfield's story, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel." Two sisters, maiden ladies, are indistinguishable one from the other, having been suffocated all their lives by an overbearing father, the late colonel. Mansfield suggests that without the protection of an ego able to discern difference and erect boundaries, the result is the preemption of the center of consciousness. Only when the old man has died do the sisters begin to experience a sort of life on their own terms. But their experience is faltering, their behavior childish, and their imaginations stunted by years of obedience to an outside force so powerful as to snuff out the daughters' individuality. The two are glomed into

each other's self so much that they even fantasize in the same manner and complete each other's half sentences.

An opposite problem of psychic boundaries too directed by id or super ego is that of the ego boundary too absolute. Samuel Taylor Coleridge uses the metaphor of a walled-in garden to give expression to this idea of the hermetically sealed ego. In his "Kubla Khan" a picture is given of an emperor who erects a pleasure dome among "enfolding spots of greenery" through which runs a sacred river. We can interpret the river as the life force itself. But unless the sacred river is connected to the larger cosmic ocean, the spirit will die—or, in Coleridge's symbology, will become a cave of ice. When the ego hardens, the boundary around it is so rigid that access to life-giving forces is blocked. Similarly, Jack London's arctic tundra suggests a landscape frozen off from the springs beneath it. London's world rebels against the romance of nature. In "To Build a Fire," the unnamed man believes too much in the power of his mind and too little in the power of the wild. The latter, with its deep spring buried below, causes the freezing death of one who lacks imagination. Too, in her classic *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman shows that the wife's postpartum depression is worsened when she is cut off from the outside world. The situation is that of virtual imprisonment—inside her ego, inside her room. The wallpaper, with its bars and smooches, becomes a metaphor of the imprisoned woman closed off from sanity and closed inside her own increasing psychosis. Her dominating, overly "kind" doctor-husband exacerbates the problem by sedating her, denying her social intercourse, keeping her in an attic room with a nailed-down bed, and forbidding her access to journal writing. This "mad woman in the attic" has no recourse to defenses of any kind. But in an amusing feminist twist, Gilman suggests that the wife's madness is actually the beginning of escape, since she is able, finally, to see her husband not as an overly kind man but, simply, as "that" man—like any other impediment to autonomy. Similarly, she is able to see, in the phantom woman behind the bars in the yellow wallpaper, a replica of herself as a prisoner.

The above examples reveal a two-fold nature of psychic boundaries in Western culture: either the boundary is not well established, in which case the ego is invaded; or the boundary is too well established, in which case the ego is insulated. The idea of the boundary in archaic societies was seen as a magical defense against chaos. Well before the advent of ego psychology, early cultures thought of boundaries as physical necessities for safe social functioning. Anything foreign was regarded as an enemy that required warding off by clear delineations like moats, walls, ditches, labyrinths, or stones. Mircea Eliade summarizes traditional ideas about these matters:

> In archaic and traditional societies, the surrounding world is conceived as a
> microcosm. At the limits of this closed world begins the domain of the

unknown, of the formless. On this side there is ordered . . . space; on the
other, outside the familiar space, there is the unknown and dangerous region
of the demons, the ghosts, the dead and of foreigners. (1961, p. 37)

What to the primal mind was the threat of formlessness is to the modern
mind the invasion by the unconscious—each threat of sufficient danger to
require the erection of a boundary: either literally or psychically.

Now, I ask what would it be to think differently about boundaries? Myths,
for instance, configure boundaries differently. They are completely permeable,
allowing for easy passage to and fro. Recall the way Greek gods and goddesses on
Mount Olympus frequently mingled in human affairs. Zeus was forever assum-
ing disguises so as to seduce human maidens. Ulysses gained access to the Under-
world. Psyche, a mortal, ascends to the gods' domain, Mount Olympus, upon
completion of her nonmortal tasks. As Edith Hamilton describes the miracle of
Greek mythology, it is a "humanized world, men freed from the paralyzing fear of
an omnipotent Unknown. . . . The terrifying irrational has no place in classical
mythology" (1942, pp. 9, 10). In Navajo myths, a truly cooperative community of
humans and gods ensured that each fulfilled and completed the other. Far from
irrationalizing the other, mythic understanding welcomes a mingling energy.

The Navajo Emergence Myth (n.d. Centerpoint) is case in this trans-
gressive point. Pot Carrier, along with eight ants and beetles, exists in the dark
underworld seen as a house of four chambers. Moving from the first to the
second chamber, he discovers that he has forgotten his pots, so he must go
back down to retrieve them. The myth tells of other incidents of confusion
and disorder before the house of the self can be constructed: there is much
moving about, restlessness, hithering and thithering. The notion of bound-
aries is nonexistent. Instead, selfhood is achieved by moving beyond the con-
fines and engaging with foreignness.

Border figures, like clowns, tricksters, tramps, and fools, also show a dis-
regard for boundaries, since boundaries ring off chaos from order and flatten
out the world. In fact, it is the bringing of chaos into order, disturbing the sta-
tus quo, that delights these figures. Jamake Highwater (1981) comments that
the extraordinary is regarded by Native Americans as gifted and sacred. The
clown performs a spiritual ceremony with his foolishness because of his intu-
ition of another reality (p. 175). Similarly, Paul Radin's (1956) research on the
trickster figure reveals its disdain for boundaries. Adding disorder to order
provides an experience of what is not permitted, expanding the idea of whole-
ness. Tricksters, clowns, and fools reaffirm their vital connection with bound-
aries, making boundaries themselves subject to vitality. By so doing, these fig-
ures invert assumed beliefs, showing the utter arbitrariness of established value
systems (Willeford, 1969, p. 136).

One of these assumed values is the idea of a fixed identity, boundaried we
might say. Someone once wittily remarked that her multiple personalities gave

her access to "the party within." Exactly. Today I am studious; tomorrow, silly; this moment I am happy; the next, sad. And what I was like forty years ago has absolutely no meaning for what I am like today! Another of these assumptions is that reality and rationalism go together. John Nash's wry comment is appropriate here. In his Nobel autobiography he wrote about the two worlds he occupied. On the boundary of both, he remarked: "rational thought imposes a limit on a person's concept of his relation to the cosmos" (in Nasar, p. 295).

A very different idea of boundaries is seen not only in myth but in ancient Eastern thought and modern Buddhism. What early Western societies thought of as threat, this other strand of thinking envisions as opportunity. The unknown is not regarded as enemy but as energy, not as witchcraft but as wisdom. Ego is a hindrance to the embrace of the unknown, and so ego must dissolve into the river of cosmic consciousness. Laotzu expresses this idea, so foreign to Western ears: "A man at his best, like water, / Serves as he goes along" (in Bynner, 1980, p. 29). Romantic poets like Coleridge image water as that which cannot be contained; its flow erases boundaries. To Western thinking, boundarylessness creates confusion, if not disease. But con-fusion, like dis-ease, brings things together and calls into question the very nature of objects, people, and the world as understood by the discriminating mind. Labels, like boundaries, limit understanding; fusions, like water, expand.

In my younger years I lived by boundaries. I took my gender training seriously and behaved like the lady I was supposed to be. I smiled, crossed my legs, married, and produced progeny. I joined clubs, held office, took notes. I was praised for my good efforts and told never to change. But change I did and cross boundaries I did. I am now in a relationship with a woman twenty-two years younger than I. People find this unsettling. What can we possibly have in common? But if you know Marla, you know she has an old soul. And what does age have to do with it, anyway? I eschew labels for they diminish my personhood, shrink me into a convenience that others can understand. There is nothing convenient to understand about my life change. Yes: confusion calls into question the nature of things. And people. If boundaries are crossed, confusions arise. So be it. One of the basic functions of the fool, trickster, and clown is to question labels, even those basic ones like "good," "normal," and "natural." These are, really, wash-out ideas that need to be flushed down the drain.

I would like to end by referencing Jamaica Kincaid, one of the most boundary-crossing writers I have encountered in my recent reading. Frankly, she confuses me; that is why I read her. All of her major work revolves around her mother: just as her life unfolds, she enfolds her mother's life. What I think I see her doing is attempting to separate herself from her mother's powerful influence—an ego-strengthening program. But as she attempts to do this, she is also, at the same time, emptying out her ego in a Buddhist move to become egoless, boundaryless, and so to engage not her literal mother but the cosmic

mother. This process is described in her book "At the Bottom of the River," a title that suggests a sense of de-evolving along with the water creatures so as to acquire a fluid consciousness. Consider this remarkable passage:

> I stood up on the edge of the basin and felt myself move. But what self? For I had no feet, or hands, or head, or heart. It was as if those things—my feet, my hands, my head, my heart—having once been there, were now stripped away, as if I had been dipped again and again, over and over, in a large vat filled with some precious elements and were not reduced to something I yet had no name for. I had no name for the thing I had become, so new was it to me, except that I did not exist in pain or pleasure, east or west or north or south or up or down, or past or present or future, or real or not real. (1992, p. 80)

How close this merging of all things is to the Buddhist notion of emptying out so as to be present to the suchness of things in the entire cosmos! Emptying the willing mind, the ego, allows one to be open to the transmission of energies, the currents beneath the mainstream. In the flow of things, there are no names or labels, no categories, no boundaries. Formlessness for Laotze is unending motherhood, the way of life (in Bynner, 40). The thought might terrify. The thought might en-trance. The thought might stretch the boundary.

RE-VISIONING BOUNDARIES

Martha

Children need boundaries, I tell my preservice teachers. Emotional safety. The sense that someone is in charge. And, of course, this is true in a classroom of thirty young students. Create the boundaries together, I tell them. Engage students in the process because it is the right thing to do, because they do have rights, and because it prepares them for effective participation in the democratic process. After class I call myself on the carpet. How could I have discussed this with students without troubling the idea that boundaries operate all around us in oppressive ways? I revisit the idea of boundaries myself so that I can examine it with my students in ways that will allow us to work together to push back the boundaries of our understanding. I fear this must be handled with care, for boundaries are often dangerous places.

In the classroom, boundaries are typically defined and enforced by the teacher. Little or no input from the students needed. Top-down directives. The metaphorical is almost visible: Do not cross this line. It's this way in the world beyond the classroom, too. Look historically at any country where capitalism has woven its way into the social and economic order and watch a new boundary develop predictably. Private and public become separate spheres

(Nicholson, 1980) and the shared work of subsistence existence is restructured in increasingly dramatic ways. Someone (male) begins to seek work on the land of another. Someone else (female) must stay at home, tend the garden, the household, and the children. Housewife/Breadwinner. Ideology in support of the economic winners. The boundary between the private and the public sphere—invisible and taken-for-granted. Whether work is carried out on one side or the other has tangible results for the worker. Sparks fly if you suggest this presumably immutable boundary of gender is a continuum, is fluid. To intimate that a person's location on one side or the other is culturally constructed, externally determined—sacrilege! Political and economic forces and ideological constructs are always at work shifting boundaries in ways that shape lives and labor to promote and eventually maintain the social relations preferred by the economically privileged.

Boundaries abound. All forms of "ethnic difference" (nonwhiteness) lie on one side of the boundary. Who drew this line? There is the boundary between those who have a home and those who are homeless. Shelter-dwellers and refugees in the United States, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Palestine. The words of cultural critique flow easily when speaking about rigid, oppressive boundaries, but look historically and see that, over time, the shifting of these boundaries has been subtle and elusive. And it could be that it is in this subtle and elusive shifting that the power is held fast. I need to track them down, examine their movement across time in a particular place. Can I invite my students to identify how ideological conceptions, signs, if you will, have been pressed into the service of those who have a vested interest in the location and movement of boundaries? Power, Foucault (1982) reminds us, circulates. To think of it as fixed and easily identified and acknowledged is to miss the boat.

Monarchies and warlords wielded their power straightforwardly. The divine right of kings was flaunted, not hidden. Boundaries were clear. Peasants struggled, regardless of gender. Royalty lived, well, like royalty—whether they were kings or queens. When lands were colonized, no one had to guess who held the power. But with the advent of colonization, as Western society claimed "enlightenment," a new set of classical liberal ideals were touted as egalitarian and liberating. Political methodology merged with academic interests and, eventually, business, until a network of power circulated in less clearly identifiable ways. Boundaries, while still rigid, blurred into the background as ideology shaped the modern subject, white and "other," male and female, meritorious and derelict. To trace the intrusion and expansion of Western ways in a particular place may shed light on how shifting boundaries operate oppressively. Perhaps there will be connections between disenfranchisement within that specific location and the marginalization of various subjectivities in other settings where people deploy discourse (Foucault, 1980) in both oppressive and empowering ways.

*Revisiting the Boundary between Private
and Public in Sri Lanka: A Cautionary Tale*

To suggest there was an idyllic time of equity and peace in any culture is suspect. Sri Lanka provides a case in point. There have always been contentious divisions between groups of people in Sinhala (early Sri Lanka) and from the early centuries of the millennium until the 1600s, the struggle for power and control was obvious.

> From the late third century AD to the middle of the twelfth century, Sinhala was dominated by Tamil kings and by a succession of invaders from southern India. Native princes regained power briefly in the late twelfth century and again in the thirteenth century. From 1408 to 1438 Chinese forces occupied the island of Sinhala, which had been partitioned into a number of petty kingdoms. (Sri Lanka/Encarta, 2001)

Today the population of Sri Lanka is approximately 19.5 million. About 74 percent of the population of Sri Lanka is Sinhalese, 18 percent are Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils, and the remaining are descendants of Moors (Arabs), Burghers (Dutch), Malays, and Veddas (Sri Lanka/Encarta).

The Sinhalese and Tamils are two distinct nations which have inhabited this "teardrop island" south of India for more than two thousand years. Conflict between these two nations, although present across time, has gradually escalated since the British granted independence to the country, then called Ceylon, in 1948. This political clash has ranged from struggle over legislating a national language to violent rioting and police action which began in the late 1970s and rose to tragic, genocidal proportions by 1984 when more than five hundred Tamils were killed in anti-Tamil riots, and Tamils in the south and on plantations fled to the north (Ponnambalam, 1983). Centuries of colonial disregard for humanity and environment left the people and the land with little to work with. When the damage had been done, the final in a series of "mother countries" left the scene—pulled back her boundaries.

Today, civil war rages between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the current Sinhalese-dominated government. Child conscription is escalating among the Tamils and thousands of people are among the "disappeared" (Jayasinghe, 2002). This island environment, devastated by centuries of rapacious colonization, is unable to provide enough work for the economy to remain viable. First men and now women have been forced to outsource their labor to gulf countries for low and undependable wages (Joseph, 1998). The devastation and death toll resulting from the recent December 2004 tsunami disaster seems especially cruel in the face of the tenuous conditions of the land and the people.

Amid this extreme social turmoil, can any conclusions be drawn about the significance of boundaries in our everyday lives? Can we understand, in some

small way, how power has circulated and influenced the material circumstances of the people of Sri Lanka as labor patterns created and recreated social relations? Learn about how power operates in discursive ways (Foucault, 1980)? Can revisiting the shifting boundary between the public and the private spheres in Sri Lanka help me understand the marginalization according to ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, and socioeconomic status that exists in other contexts? Will it allow me to revision boundaries, understand ideological constructs and political strategies more clearly, and reorganize my orientation to boundaries in empowering ways? The journey through time begins.

Kinship and Labor in Early Sri Lanka

While definitive evidence concerning kinship and labor patterns in prefeudal Sri Lanka is unavailable, some scholars have speculated that binna marriage, in which the daughter and her husband live in her parents' household, might be an extension of an earlier matriarchal system of property ownership and descent. Early foreign travelers all noted the fact that women often had more than one husband. This polyandry "bears similarity to the system of matriarchy of the Nayars of South India, some of whom migrated to Sri Lanka in ancient times" (Grossholtz, 1984).

What of boundaries in this long time past? Determining which labor patterns during these early times were "private" and which were "public" is difficult. Being viewed as in control of reproductive contributions to the society (giving birth, gathering food and water, and eventually planting and harvesting) might have given women's labor honor and standing in the community that is unlike our modern day conceptions. In addition to lineage being traced through women, their reproductive rights included polyandry and looseness of the marriage norm (Mies, 1986). Hunting forays and war between kinship groups were part of men's contribution to the group. While men and women's labor may have been valued differently, we have no reason to believe one sort of contribution dominated another. Rigid definitions of public and private were unnecessary.

How often I think of feminism and collaborative gender relationships as a modern idea. I often assume that prior to Mary Wollstonecraft society hadn't even conceived of such noble ideals as equitable levels of respect and power for all members of society. Relatively new forays into archeology and anthropology tell another tale (Eisler, 1987). Ancient Sri Lanka was likely a more hospitable culture for women than the United States in the nineteenth century. And so I wonder, how can I speak to my students of racism, sexism, homophobia, and economic oppression in ways that remind them that these discriminatory beliefs and practices have been exacerbated, not quelled, by the many "advancements" of our modern, technological society? Romanticizing the distant past is pointless, but noticing that long ago there was an absence

of boundaries in the allocation of daily work, and attempting a response that connects us with the past, may matter.

I want my students to understand the connections between who labors in what ways: When they are teachers, will they make the decisions about the labor force of the classroom? Old habits die hard. Teachers do the creative work, the thinking, the organizing, the planning. Students reproduce information—their preferences, interests, ability to choose, lie dormant, perhaps atrophying. In an equitable, viable community, work is shared and boundaries blur. Behavioral boundaries? One wonders if they do not emerge from the value of shared daily experience. Adults who respect the wisdom of children and who have important information and skills to share with them receive respect without a word. Guidelines are negotiated, agreed upon, for the good of the community. Shared labor blurs boundaries and role definitions and structures a more equitable environment.

Feudal Sri Lanka

During early feudal times, a system of communal use of lands defined the living patterns of the people of Sri Lanka. Villages were likely self-sufficient, a system of public plots: one for paddy growing, one for house and vegetable gardening, and one for alternating agriculture. This village pattern persisted into the twentieth century in some of the isolated areas of north central Sri Lanka, and the essentials of this social and economic system were little disturbed by the advent of kingships (Grossholtz, 1984). The allocation of land from the king came with a requirement of service. This meant that each citizen contributed to the construction of the water supply (an elaborate and sophisticated irrigation system) and the maintenance of roads and temples.

Kinship patterns remained oriented to the village, each consisting of paddy land and house lots with vegetable gardens and the right to use forest lands for chena cultivation. Chena land consisted of forest plots which families cleared and used to grow fruits, vegetables, or other crops for three or four years. After this time the land would be allowed to rest for approximately seven years. Ancestral lands were passed from generation to generation. Families worked together to cultivate the land. The labor of women and, during peak seasons, children was vital. Kurakkan (finger millet) was the principal food crop of the chena. Women were responsible for the labor-intensive work of reaping this nutritional crop that could be stored for up to ten years. Paddy cultivation which was predominantly handled by men was less reliable due to its dependence on sufficient rainfall. Still, everyone's labor was needed to reap daily food from the soil and, we might expect, everyone's labor was valued. "Cultivation rights were available to everyone; society was communal in nature and organized to benefit and care for all its members" (Grossholtz, 1984).

Where land remains plentiful and its careful use is maintained by communities who have a vested interest in its yield, social structures are not subjected to the sort of strain that leads to extremely inequitable reordering of social relations. Certainly there were boundaries between royalty and peasants, but within the communities themselves remnants of earlier days of subsistence living persisted.

Nevertheless, a boundary began to emerge between the private, close-to-home activities (reproduction and care of the family members) and the public sphere which acknowledged the right to use certain land. Decreasing availability of land for cultivation, combined with a stronger presence of religious patriarchal ideology, led to an increase in the need to control women's sexuality. Women's lives became increasingly restricted and descent was traced through male lineage. Economic necessity, however, kept these restrictions from limiting women's involvement in cultivating the land. While a sexual division of labor existed, women still had considerable control over the efforts to supply their family's subsistence needs. Women's labor remained an essential part of the sphere that was beginning to be defined as public (away from home).

Concerns for property rights and the male domination of religious experience in the United States have influenced our perceptions of whose work matters and whose voice should be heard. When I consider the gradual erosion of women's rights in Sri Lanka in the distant feudal era, can I feel a kinship with women no longer with us? Women's lives, then and now, began to be reshaped by ideological perceptions that privilege male inheritance and facilitate collaboration among religious, political, and business interests.

How are the expectations and discourse of classrooms today shaped by these subtle notions of whose labor is acknowledged and whose is marginalized? What gender-laden traditions are reflected in the messages about gender-appropriate school and life experiences? Boys line up here, girls there. The difference matters, obviously. I need some boys to help me carry the tables down to the auditorium. Will you girls wipe up the sink area? We have fire-*men* visiting the school today. I need a helper to befriend our new student—Sarah, you're so good at helping. . . . And so the labor is divided in subtle ways and the public/private boundary finds its way into the classroom. School is not the equitably accessible bridge from the private to the public sphere that we often imagine. It is, in fact, a place where implicit lessons are learned about boundaries and one's place on either side of the divide. Virginia Woolf's warnings about dangerous bridge-crossing that requires us to embrace the very values and beliefs that constrict lives ring in my ears (Woolf, 1938). Boundaries do create security—but for whom?

Western Intrusion: Portuguese and Dutch Colonization

Marco Polo said it well: ". . . in good sooth the best island of its size in the world." Sri Lanka's beauty and bounty, however, were endangered. The early

Westernization of Asia marked the beginning of the end of the legendary spice trade that brought the Portuguese to the coast of Sri Lanka in 1505. For one hundred and fifty years the Portuguese carried on a brutal assault on the Sinhalese in an attempt to control the island and its resources and to locate fortresses for international military purposes in the harbor of Sri Lanka.

During the time of the Portuguese occupation of Sri Lanka, subtle changes in labor occurred. Products of the island were collected and shipped to Europe and the Portuguese officials collected land taxes, death duties, and revenues from the sale of exports. Resources were manipulated (i.e., the burning of cinnamon) in such a way that Sri Lankans had to sell their labor as a minimally paid commodity. The boundary between public and private shifted as Sri Lanka's trade market was dismantled through the mismanagement of resources and a brutal unwillingness to consider the history and the culture of the people of the island (Grossholtz, 1984). This, coupled with internal disruptions, violence, and the deterioration of the tank irrigation system for paddy rice cultivation, left the native people impoverished and vulnerable.

Ironically, the Sri Lankans believed the Dutch promises to rid them of the dreadful woes that had accompanied the Portuguese occupation. From 1640 until 1796 the Dutch pressed the Sri Lankan's economic and political circumstances into further ruin. The Dutch claimed the king's right to all the land but took none of the king's obligations to provide land and the right to labor. Laboring conditions in the public sphere, increasingly separate from the private, deteriorated to the point of becoming intolerable. The Dutch continued and elaborated the Portuguese practice of forcing the cinnamon peelers to work for pay. The colonizer's counterpart to the king's required service became full-time labor, even forced labor without pay in labor camps. The caste of cinnamon peelers, called chalia, were compelled to work in these camps. They resisted in various ways. Some fled to the interior of the island (Kandy) while others resorted to marrying their children to nonchalia caste persons. Famines swept the land periodically and because the internal economy had been crushed, whole families sold themselves into slavery. Western views of gender resulted in men and women being included differently in these new international schemes. Women were expected to work as unpaid or poorly paid appendages to male laborers. Family and village boundaries, informal yet indicative of safe haven, dissipated as the best option for survival could sometimes be found away from kin. Meanwhile, the Dutch East India Company realized a typical profit of 80 percent on their investments in Sri Lanka. Grossholtz (1984) refers to "an arbitrary theft of the goods and labor of Sri Lanka."

Rape and pillage come to mind. Removal of dignity. Impregnation of an alien and hostile way of life. In a way never before imagined, family ties were replaced by connections with strangers for the sake of survival. The harmony of an earlier time—communal use of the land, shared goals, the expectation of social

responsibility, shared wisdom from intergenerational ties—was disrupted. Boundaries become rigid when the goals of those who hold the power undermined timeless values. Boundaries established with violence force the question, Why the boundaries in our schools? Between the school and the world? Between classrooms? Between administration, teachers, and students? Between students? Boundaries abound. Grade levels, ability groups, enclosed rooms, narrow and prescribed curriculum all create increasingly rigid boundaries. For whose good?

The Extreme End of Colonial Sri Lanka: British Rule

In 1796, the British began what was to be the capstone of colonization, the true beginning of the country's conversion to capitalism. They governed Sri Lanka until 1947, their rule coinciding temporally with the industrial revolution in Europe. England needed raw materials for British industry, markets where they could sell their manufactured goods, and an outlet for capital created by their domestic wage labor. Their plans for their colonies were even more expansive than those of the Portuguese or Dutch. No longer affecting changes on existing trade patterns or concentrating their efforts only on the island's periphery, they penetrated the central regions, eventually claiming rights to all land and labor.

The imposition of the plantation economy dealt a final blow to the village structure of Sri Lanka. Roads were built and the land was sold without regard to traditional uses and economic patterns. The labor of the native people was appropriated for the building of roads that eventually brought an end to what had been the isolated location of the Kandyan resistance in the central region of the island. Life in these regions had been ravaged during the Portuguese and Dutch rule by the destruction of the local economy and the obliteration of the irrigation system. The people were impoverished. With no understanding of their complicity in the difficulties these Native Sri Lankan's faced daily, the British justified the use of Sinhalese and Tamil forced labor by critiquing their unwillingness to participate in British development as "indolence" (Grossholtz, 1984).

The roads built throughout the country enabled plantation owners to travel and send goods back and forth as needed for their production purposes. The first plantations were dedicated to the production of coffee. Particularly brutalizing to the village system was the Crown Lands Ordinance (1840): "All forest, waste, or uncultivated land was to be presumed to be the property of the Crown until contrary is proven." All chena areas were now the property of the Crown. Land in the Kandyan highlands was the first to be sold and virtually all of it was sold to foreigners, who could purchase up to four thousand acres of land, tax free for five years. Land sales to indigenous persons were restricted to one hundred acres. Eventually, the villages were partitioned and sold, including chena land. The transfer of land rights from native to foreign lands and the reconceptualization of labor and land use was complete.

Native Sri Lankans now sold their labor as their only resource available to them. Still, they resisted these new forms of labor. Aware that their land had been confiscated under a spurious rationale, they were nevertheless pushed to work in exploitative jobs on the coffee, tea, and rubber plantations, roads and water systems that offered little hope, despite the rhetoric of colonizers.

Boundaries between the wealthy colonizer and the indigenous people of Sri Lanka were never more clear. The depth of division between these two groups became the defining dynamic of life. Just as the homeless on U.S. streets are deemed lazy—unwilling to work hard enough to remedy their situation—the resistant behavior of Sri Lankan laborers was mistaken for lack of initiative. The boundary between public and private worlds still existed but the most salient boundary was the boundary between colonizer and colonized. When the British withdrew and Sri Lanka became independent, social relations of the people of the island that had startled Marco Polo with its beauty and bounty were in such a state of chaos that social turmoil has marked Sri Lankan life. The outsourcing of the labor of indigenous people has become commonplace, though fraught with exploitative and abusive practices. Assisted by the boundary adjustments, powerful colonizers took what they chose from a land and a people they never understood.

What shall I tell my teacher education students about boundaries? The glib teacher lore is beginning to pale as I consider the importance of crossing boundaries, erasing boundaries, standing against boundaries. Can I reinstate the relationships that diminish the need for boundaries—intergenerational community, social responsibility, common goals, respect for the environment? What boundaries do I draw each day? At what cost? Draw a boundary between schools that succeed and those that fail, between students who "make it" and those who don't? Accountability becomes the watchword. And how do our perceptions of who's making it and who isn't, create boundaries within the walls of individual classrooms?

Boundaries Revisited

What if our students thought differently about boundaries? What if we thought deeply together about privilege and poverty as we discuss classroom communities? What lessons might we learn? Dewey (1938) reminds us:

> The institutions and customs that exist in the present and that give rise to present social ills and dislocations did not arise overnight. They have a long history behind them. Attempts to deal with them simply on the basis of what is obvious in the present is bound to result in the adoption of superficial measures which will only render existing problems more acute and more difficult to solve. (p. 77)

I want to invite my students to dredge a little deeper with me as we think of their opportunities to be cultural workers. Learn from Sri Lankan and other boundary stories and think seriously about boundaries in our communities and classrooms. Can I make explicit what has been part of the null curriculum? Can I infuse important yet ignored learning into our daily schoolwork? Eisner (1979) provides the example of politics and economics as untapped possibilities for classroom attention. Helping students develop a critical eye regarding the boundary making of politicians and economists—that might be a worthy goal. Cognizant of the powerful effects of work allocation on social relations, can I reconstruct labor and relationships within the classroom? Can schools with permeable walls be created where community members enrich the life within and children enrich and learn from life without?

Thinking differently about boundaries changes my mind. I have to adjust my commitments. I want to work with my students, drawing new mental boundaries that allow us to imagine a bond with Sri Lankan women forced to decide between laboring abroad (thus, hardly knowing their children) and living in dreadful poverty. Can we feel connected to the human suffering of the growing number of homeless among us? Will we think differently about life in our classrooms if we realize that the current boundaries between socioeconomic classes, between genders and ethnic groups, between the gay and the straight among us are all asymmetrical? That they create false binaries that blur the particularities of lived experience?

What new thoughts will allow me to consider what we have in common across boundaries and how we might take the risk of crossing and resisting those boundaries, restructuring the social dynamics that hold them in place? What would our classrooms be like if boundary work were central to curriculum? More importantly, what world could we and our children make if we believed that our time together could lead to rethinking and restructuring boundaries? We need new and empowering cross-historical and cross-cultural boundaries that allow us to regroup our alliances with an eye toward new coalitions and a commitment to a world where we join hands across old boundaries, erasing oppressive power and revisioning new possibilities.