

CHAPTER TWO
TROUBLEMAKERS, OUTLAWS AND STORYTELLERS:
FEMINIST TRICKSTERS AS ROLE MODELS

To put it boldly, the new kind of critic and artist associated with the new cultural politics of difference consists of an energetic breed of New World *bricoleurs* with improvisational and flexible sensibilities that sidestep mere opportunism and mindless eclecticism...intellectual and political freedom fighters with partisan passion, international perspectives and, thank God, a sense of humor that combats the ever-present absurdity that forever threatens our democratic and libertarian projects and dampens the fire that fuels our will to struggle.

—Cornel West

The development and continued practice of a democratic ethos is dangerous, difficult and exhausting. It is a risky endeavor, one that is not guaranteed to succeed and that requires feminists to continue thinking, organizing and acting even when they are uncertain about the outcome of their actions or the future of feminism as an effective and relevant movement for the twenty-first century. As Sheldon Wolin suggests in his essay, “Fugitive Democracy,” it is a “bitter experience, doomed to succeed only temporarily” (Wolin 1996, 43).

In addition to requiring that feminists act even when they are uncertain, this type of democratic ethos also requires that feminists engage in a collective examination of their own claims and the claims of others and that they be willing to submit their most basic understandings of feminism (what and who it is and where it should be going) to a process of contestation and critical negotiation. They need to permit other feminists, who have different understandings and experiences, to energize and transform their politics. In

effect, they must allow themselves to be vulnerable to others and give themselves up to the process and passion of democracy as it works (or does not work) in feminism.¹

The adoption of such a precarious ethos requires that feminists have faith and hope in the value of their projects and in the feminist movement's pursuit of social justice without having much evidence to support that faith.² But if, as I discussed in the introduction, feminism has lost many of its guiding principles/master narratives, what can inspire that faith and hope and guide the theories and actions of feminists? And what keeps them motivated to continue with their feminist projects?

Instead of developing new master narratives or searching for ways to guarantee success, feminists can find guidance and inspiration by looking to role models within their feminist communities. Through these role models, feminists can witness and engage with (oftentimes) living examples for how to survive and thrive within the dangerous and exhausting practice of democratic feminism. Feminist role models play an essential role in educating us on how to theorize about oppression, to practice our politics and to maintain our sanity. They also inspire us to keep going, even when we feel our actions might be hopeless.

In different ways, bell hooks, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Patricia Hill Collins all argue for the importance of feminist role models. In "Theory as Liberatory Practice," bell hooks reflects on the value of "women and men who dare to create theory from the

¹ In *Undoing Gender*, Butler describes the passion of democracy: "Democracy does not speak in unison; its tunes are dissonant, and necessarily so. It is not a predictable process; it must be undergone, as a passion must be undergone" (2004c, 226).

² As Cornel West states in "Restoring Hope," "To live is to wrestle with despair...we know that the evidence does not look good. The dominant tendencies of our day are unregulated global capitalism, racial balkanization, social breakdown, and individual depression" (1999, xii).

location of pain and struggle, who courageously expose wounds to give us their experience to teach and guide, as a means to chart new theoretical journeys” (74). She argues that it was because of these individuals and their willingness to risk theorizing about their own pain that she was able to begin (and continue on) with her own struggle against oppression in its many forms.

In “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” Bernice Johnson Reagon argues that, in order to keep their principles intact, feminists need to ensure the survival of those rare political individuals who refuse to reduce their political involvement to one issue, such as sexism or racism. These individuals not only keep up with and actively resist the ever-shifting ways in which oppression functions, but maintain their sanity as they do it. They “hold the key to turning the century with our principles and ideals intact. They can teach us how to cross cultures and not kill ourselves” (Reagon 1983, 363).

Finally, in *Fighting Words*, Patricia Hill Collins promotes the legacy of women and men who have dared to question and speak out against oppression or who were able to transform their rage into resistance. For Collins, this legacy includes those women, such as her mother, who lived on her block in her “African-American, working class Philadelphia neighborhood” (187). In spite of their unending struggles against a system that discouraged and actively tried to crush their dreams of a better life, these women were able to create and sustain hopeful visions of the future for themselves and their daughters by preaching self-reliance and independence. In so doing, they not only served as important role models for Collins; they also served as valuable sources of caring and encouragement, loving her “when no one else did and as no one could” (200).

In thinking about what types of role models are needed for feminists as they attempt to practice the radically democratic ethos outlined in chapter one, we must consider the demands that such an ethos places on feminists. First, in order to practice a feminist democratic ethos, feminists must be willing and able to contest and challenge the political and theoretical projects of feminism even while engaging in those projects. Second, they must recognize and embrace the inevitable risk, uncertainty and danger that this contestation and engagement entails. Third, they must strive to maintain openness and resist the urge to make totalizing claims about or on behalf of feminism in order to overcome their discomfort about difference and conflict. Fourth, they must be able to quickly transform their strategies and tactics for resisting and/or dismantling oppressive systems. Fifth and finally, they must not only survive but also *thrive* within the dangerous and uncertain political terrain that feminist democracy describes by creating a meaningful and compelling vision of feminism's future.

In this chapter, I argue that an excellent resource for feminists in their search for role models is the trickster figure. With her, "divided, fluid, shifting identity" (Smith 1997, 16), her capacity for "challenging the status quo and disrupting perceived boundaries" (Smith 1997, 2), her position at the crossroads between cultures and identities and her legendary ability to elude capture by the dominant (and oppressive) system, the trickster provides feminists with inspiration and guidance as they work to develop and maintain democracy within feminism.

From Coyote to Monkey to Br'er Rabbit, the trickster has long been a significant and much discussed figure within literature and literary theory.³ Recently, the trickster has become important for feminist theorists who see great value in exploring connections between the trickster figure and feminist theory and politics. For example, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, Donna Haraway argues that feminist theory should be seen as a “reinvented coyote discourse” (199). While Shane Phelan, in “Coyote Politics: Trickster Tales and Feminist Futures,” suggests that an investigation of Native American Coyote Stories could “refresh lesbian and feminist politics” (132). And Chela Sandoval, in “U.S. Third World Feminism: Differential Social Movement I,” describes her concept of differential consciousness as “the activity of the trickster” (62). Finally, Jeanne Rosier Smith, in “The Trickster Aesthetic: A Cross-Cultural Feminist Theory,” claims that “the trickster has become a key figure for personal and cultural survival in twentieth-century America,” particularly among women of color writers such as Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa and Toni Morrison (2).⁴

Following this trend, I argue that feminist tricksters are useful role models for feminism. My discussion of the trickster is not an uncritical appropriation—as if

³ For more information on the trickster figure see: Bright (1993), Gates, Jr. (1989), William Hynes (1993) and Smith (1997).

⁴ Although feminist theorists frequently look to the trickster figure of the coyote, which comes out of Native American folk stories, there are other figures that are important for feminist theory. Examining the work of Louise Erdrich, Maxine Hong Kingston and Toni Morrison, Smith also looks to trickster figures in African/African American (Br'er Rabbit and Monkey) and Chinese/Chinese American (Tiger) stories.

appropriation was possible⁵—nor a romanticized idealization of feminist tricksters as pure and powerful Agents for transformation.⁶ Instead, this chapter is a close examination of how some feminists, in this case, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, bell hooks, Chela Sandoval and Dorothy Allison, inhabit (in specific texts) trickster personalities in ways that could be instructive and inspirational for feminists who are attempting to adopt a radically democratic ethos.

To accomplish this examination, I begin by describing three specific feminist trickster personalities—(1) the troublemaker, (2) the outlaw and (3) the storyteller—and detailing how these figures function as important examples of the resisting feminist. Then, I argue that these figures also function as moral leaders for feminists who are attempting to practice feminist democracy. My main argument is that tricksters are important feminist role models for two key reasons. First, they serve as examples of effective but not always fully successful transgression. They provide us with the evidence that we need in order to believe that we can resist and possibly even transform the system. Second, they function as moral leaders who actively work to provoke, educate and inspire us in our feminist projects.

⁵ Shane Phelan argues that “trickster stories confound the ground of appropriation as they call into question notions of identity and property” (132)—the trickster cannot be appropriated because it is not owned by any one culture. She continues, adding: “By insisting that identities be kept clear and unambiguous, that cultures remain distinct, and that individuals fit into one culture at a time, such critics [who charge Phelan with appropriation] would deny the chaos that is Coyote’s home” (133).

⁶ In “Postmodernism, ‘Realism,’ and the Politics of Identity: Cherrie Moraga and Chicana Feminism,” Paula Moya offers a powerful critique of Donna Haraway and her discussion of the cyborg as coyote trickster. Focusing particularly on Haraway’s discussion of the myth of La Malinche, Moya writes: “Haraway conceals the painful legacy of the Malinche myth and over invests the figure of Malinche with a questionable agency” (131).

THE TRICKSTER AS A MODEL FOR RESISTANCE

Although the trickster can be linked to a number of different personalities, three in particular—the troublemaker, the outlaw and the storyteller—are important for my discussion of the feminist trickster as role model.⁷ As I will indicate, these figures share many similarities, not the least of which is the fact that they are all (at least partially) positioned within feminism and inhabited by theorists who do feminist work. Yet, they highlight different methods for resisting and surviving (within) the system. And they are produced from different locations within the system, locations that are largely the result of their relationship to the power structure.

As a figure who is fully ensconced in the system and who benefits from many of its privileges, the troublemaker is a trickster who exemplifies resistance from within. As a figure who can function on the inside but exists mainly on the outside within marginalized communities, the outlaw is a trickster who exemplifies resistance from without. Finally, as a figure who creates meaning and develops community from a (oftentimes imagined) place that is not even recognized by the system, the storyteller is a trickster who exemplifies resistance from beyond. Their different methods sometimes come into conflict, but when combined, provide us with a valuable range of examples for

⁷ Because the trickster is in the folklore of a wide range of cultures, it possesses a wide range of personalities/personas. In *A Coyote Reader*, William Bright offers a list of these personalities in terms of the coyote. They include: wanderer, bricoleur, glutton, lecher, thief, cheat, outlaw, spoiler, loser, clown, pragmatist and survivor.

how feminists have effectively engaged in feminist democratic politics.⁸ I would like to briefly sketch these three figures and then discuss some of their key similarities and differences.

a. Resisting from Within: the Troublemaker

The trickster exhibits typically the ability to overturn any person, place, or belief, no matter how prestigious. There is no “too much” for this figure. No order is too rooted, no taboo too sacred, no god too high...that it cannot be broached or inverted.

—William Hynes

Turn everything upside down, inside out, back to front. *Rack it with radical convulsions...*

—Luce Irigaray

...trouble is inevitable and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it...

—Judith Butler

The troublemaker is an instigator who causes confusion and creates chaos for others by perpetually challenging the system and its laws. She works from inside the system, corroding and corrupting the texts of the law to the point where they cannot easily be read or understood. The troublemaker frequently takes two distinctive forms: as a trick-player who relies on humor and playfulness to disrupt the system and as a gadfly who relentlessly questions and pushes the limits of the system. Within feminism, Luce Irigaray, specifically in her earlier works—*Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*—offers an excellent example of the trick-player while Judith Butler,

⁸ Each figure speaks to a different moment and location within the process of resisting and transforming the system.

specifically in *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies That Matter* and her essay “The End of Sexual Difference?,” exemplifies the gadfly.

The troublemaker as trick-player is part comic, part fool, part jester and full time wordster. Her tricks range from lighthearted teasing to malicious mocking to cunning deception and are frequently focused on disabling the current system, a system that denies women of subjectivity and the ability to express or represent themselves. In order to achieve this disabling, the trick-player often practices shape shifting and situation-inversion.⁹ As a shape-shifter, she fluctuates between a variety of forms, putting on a number of different masks and performing a number of different roles, without ever fully inhabiting in any one form. As a situation-invertor, she turns things upside down and inside out, disrupting order and flipping hierarchies. And she shifts the focus away from those who have mastery and are in control to those who are silenced and denied subjectivity.

One excellent example of this trickery through shape shifting and situation-inversion is found in the early work of Luce Irigaray. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray practices shape-shifting by writing from a shifting perspective, traveling between her own voice and the voices of several key thinkers—the fathers of Western thought. Critically engaging with these thinkers, which include Freud, Lacan, Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Marx, Kant and Descartes, she does more than simply describe or paraphrase their work, she inhabits their voices, using their own statements against them. She acts as a

⁹ See Hynes (1993).

mime, repeating their words in a mocking way and as a ventriloquist, injecting her own ironic and critical perspective into their ideas.

Irigaray's roles as mime and ventriloquist are particularly evidenced in her style of writing. Throughout the first section of *Speculum*, which is entitled "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry," she presents fragments of Freud's thought that are damaging to women and then weaves her own derisive yet simultaneously humorous questions and critical comments in between and alongside those fragments. To do this, she frequently interjects her own voice into Freud's words by offering an unfaithful repetition of his text. At one point, she writes:

From the onset of the phallic phase, the *differences between the sexes are completely eclipsed by the agreements*...THE LITTLE GIRL IS THEREFORE A LITTLE MAN...The little girl uses, with the *same* intent [as the little boy] her *still smaller* clitoris...a penis *equivalent*...man *more* fortunate [than she].....the *ultimate differentiation* of the sexes...the little girl when she discovers her *disadvantage*.....the libido suffers a *greater* repression...nature pays *less* attention to the girl's demands than is the case with masculinity.....When laying *side by side* the development of the little boy and little girl, we find that the latter must, to *become a normal woman*, [?] suffer a *more* painful and *more* complex evolution... (25-26).

While all of these words are taken directly from Freud's "Femininity" in *New Lectures on Psycho-analysis*, Irigaray employs deceptive techniques in order to present her reader with a subversive version of the text. In this passage, she chops Freud's words up into fragments, interrupting the flow of his thoughts with ellipses, asides and misplaced punctuation, capitalization and italics. She inserts question marks in order to challenge

his ideas and she uses italics and capital letters to emphasize particularly troubling passages.

For example, by capitalizing the phrase, “the little girl is therefore a little man,” her goal is to highlight the ways in which Freud’s theories on sexuality are dominated (and dictated by) an “economy of the Same” (Irigaray 1985b, 74). This economy of the same is one in which “‘Sexual difference’ is a derivation of the problematics of sameness... determined within the project, the projection, the sphere of representation of the same” (Irigaray 1985a, 26-27). This sameness is one in which all theories and ideas on sexuality are “now and forever” by and about men and where all understandings of women are always in terms of how they fail to be men.¹⁰

In this passage, Irigaray inhabits Freud’s voice in order to undermine and mock his authority. She uses his own words against him by exposing the “blind spots” and limitations of his thought. And, she repeatedly interrupts him with her playful and creative use of syntax and punctuation. Through her interruptions, she never allows his voice to stand as the final word on these ideas.

In addition to her shape-shifting (that is, traveling between her own voice and Freud’s) Irigaray also practices situation-inversion in *Speculum* by: (1) playing with the order of how the “fathers” are presented within the book and (2) reading those “fathers” from the perspective of those who are silenced. First, *Speculum* is intended to be a history of (male) philosophy, but instead of beginning with one of the earliest thinkers, Plato, it

¹⁰ Shortly after this quotes, Irigaray concludes: “A man minus the possibility of (re) presenting oneself as a man = a normal woman” (27).

starts with Freud and works backwards to Plato.¹¹ Irigaray's choice to begin with Freud and end with Plato is not a mere reversal. Irigaray places a middle section in *Speculum* in which the order of thinkers is restored and the chapters begin with Plato and move forward to Lacan. This section, which is entitled "Speculum," functions as a type of concave mirror, one through which the "fathers" words/thoughts/theories are reflected. But, because this mirror is concave, it curves in, and its reflection of these theories becomes distorted to the point where they are no longer recognizable or readily useable.

Second, Irigaray distorts these ideas by reading and writing from the vantage point of those who are silenced by them, namely woman.¹² In the middle section of *Speculum*, Irigaray discusses how women are the nameless and silent ground upon which the (male) subject stands and the "'matter' upon which he will ever and again return to plant his foot in order to spring farther" (134). In recognizing their fundamental yet unnamed (and unchosen) role in supporting the phallogentric system, Irigaray wonders:

If there is no more "earth" to press down/repress, to work...no opaque matter which in theory does not know herself, then what pedestal remains for the ex-sistence of the 'subject'? If the earth turned and more especially turned upon herself, the erection of the subject might thereby be disconcerted and risk losing its elevation and penetration. For what would there be to rise up from and exercise his power over? And in (133)?

¹¹ In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray discusses this inversion: "Strictly speaking, *Speculum* has no beginning or end. The architectonics of the text, or texts, confounds the linearity of an outline, the teleology of discourse...by 'beginning' with Freud and 'ending' with Plato we are already going at history 'backwards'" (68).

¹² This is evident in the passage on Freud that I mentioned earlier. In this passage, Irigaray uses Freud's exact words but, by writing in her subversive and playful style, she alters the meaning and perspective of those words; they are no longer centered on men or the phallogentric system, but focus on the effects of those words on women and the feminine elsewhere that gets obscured by that system.

Irigaray offers *Speculum* as an attempt to “turn the earth” by reading women back into Freud’s (and the other fathers’) theories. Irigaray believes that women should no longer serve as the unrecognized foundation of a male system and their unique way of being—of speaking, of experiencing pleasure, of writing—should no longer be dismissed or ignored as an opaque mystery.¹³

In order to “turn the earth,” Irigaray functions as a trick-player, relying on shape-shifting and situation inversion. What distinguishes her brand of troublemaking is her emphasis on humor. She believes that the first reaction to the oppressive system of the fathers and the first liberation from that system is laughter (Irigaray 1985b, 163). This humor, in the form of mocking those in power by distorting their words or disrupting their logic, allows us to stop taking the system so seriously and to begin to think about alternative systems and logics.

While not completely different from the trick-player, the gadfly uses other methods in her troublemaking. In particular, she relies on her ability to unsettle her audience by perpetually and persistently pointing out the limits of the system. Although her activities are the source of frustration for many, her goal is not to anger or overwhelm her audience.¹⁴ Instead, she is like Socrates in the *Apologia*, “arousing, persuading and

¹³ Irigaray opens *Speculum* with Freud’s notorious passage from his essay of femininity: “Ladies and Gentleman... Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity...” (13).

¹⁴ In an interview about her writing, Judith Butler talks about the process questioning and troublemaking and the anxiety it can create: “What it’s really about is opening up the possibility of questioning what our assumptions are and somehow encouraging us to live in the anxiety of that questioning without closing it down too quickly. Of course, it’s not for the sake of anxiety that one should do it (I don’t think one should do anything for the sake of anxiety), but it’s because anxiety accompanies something like the witnessing of new possibilities” (Butler 2004a, 307).

reproaching her readers” to think critically about the system that dictates and regulates how they should behave but that they so easily take for granted.¹⁵ An effective example of the feminist troublemaker as gadfly is Judith Butler.

In the preface to one of her earliest works, *Gender Trouble*, Butler reflects on trouble and its value, concluding “that trouble is inevitable and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it” (vii). In terms of feminism, Butler believes that the best way to make trouble is through a perpetual contestation of the terms and ideas that one is generally expected to accept as given or as foundational and the best way to be in trouble is through an examination of the difficult, contradictory and seemingly unreadable moments or locations within the discourses of the dominant system.

One way in which Butler makes trouble is by employing a notoriously difficult style of writing that is filled with questions, awkward sentence structure, densely packed prose and complicated language. For Butler, language is not neutral and neither are the ways in which it is communicated through our speech (in our grammar and style). Instead, it is a cultural practice, one that relies on specific, politically loaded rules in order to dictate how we communicate. And, because it is not neutral, Butler is wary of claims for clarity and lucidity. She writes:

The demand for lucidity forgets the ruses that motor the ostensibly “clear” view. Avital Ronell recalls the moment in which Nixon looked into the eyes of the nation and said, ‘let me make one thing perfectly clear’ and then proceeded to lie... Who devises the protocols of ‘clarity’ and whose interests do they serve? What is foreclosed by the insistence on parochial

¹⁵ Socrates writes, “I am the gadfly which God has attached to the state, and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you” (30e-31a).

standards of transparency as requisite for all communication? What does 'transparency' keep obscure (1999, xix)?

Butler uses difficult language and grammar in order to trouble her readers' ability to easily read and uncritically consume her work and the work of those whom she writes about. She wants her readers to pause, reflect and really think about the language, the ideas and the claims that she and others are making. She wants them to ask: at what (and whose) expense are these claims made and whose interest is served when these claims are promoted as common sense and given? Butler believes that this process of questioning and making trouble for language can open up new ways of thinking about the world and the claims that are made about it.

Butler is not only interested in making trouble, however. She is also interested in examining some ways in which (a) being in trouble can generate some valuable and productive questions and/or discussions about those moments in language or those figures in discourse that "make us wonder" and that "remain not fully explained and not fully explicable" (Butler 2001, 417).¹⁶ For the feminist trickster theorist, this aspect of troublemaking is not about creating trouble, but pointing to locations where it already exists, where our most sure ways of knowing are pushed to their limits.

Throughout her work, Butler illustrates the pushing of these limits through an examination of a set of terms whose meanings are assumed to be foundational for feminism and its politics yet are widely contested by feminists: sexual difference, gender and sexuality. She suggests that sexual difference, and its relation to gender and sexuality,

¹⁶ In his book, *Sustaining Affirmations*, Stephen White also discusses Butler's "being in trouble," but in relation to Heidegger.

“is not a given, not a premise, not a basis on which to build a feminism” (Butler 2004c, 177); rather “it is the site where a question concerning the relation of the biological to the cultural is posed and reposed, where it must and can be posed, but where it cannot, strictly speaking, be answered...” (Butler 2004c, 177). This posing and reposing of the question comes in a number of different forms: What is the status of the terms (sexual difference, gender, sex)? How are they used and/or misused by feminists? What is the distinction between sexual difference and gender? What are the implications of privileging one over the other? Where does sex (read as biological, psychic and ‘natural’) end and gender (read as social, discursive and constructed) begin? How can we “read” sex and gender differently?

All of these questions emerge when we are confronted with figures who challenge and confuse our accepted ways of understanding how gender, sexuality and sexual difference function. These figures, which Butler describes as subjects, are beings in trouble who push the limits of our ways of knowing—sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally. In “Gender is Burning,” Butler describes one such figure in her discussion of Venus Xtravaganza, “a Latina/preoperative transsexual, cross-dresser, prostitute” who is featured in the film, *Paris is Burning* (Butler 1994, 130). As a drag queen who participates in drag balls and lives (and loves) as a light-skinned heterosexual woman in her everyday life, Venus embodies the limits of intelligibility concerning gender, sexuality and sexual difference: she is a biological man who performs and lives as a woman and desires and is desired by men. Her very existence raises important

questions about what it means to be gendered and how gender is connected to sexual difference.¹⁷ These questions disrupt understandings of gender as natural and given.¹⁸

b. Resisting from Without: the Outlaw

The trickster is cast as an “out” person, and [her] activities are often outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out-of-bounds, and out-of-order.

—William Hynes

A second figure of the trickster is the outlaw. While the troublemaker as trick-player uses humor and wordplay to disrupt the system, the outlaw is a warrior who relies on more forceful methods. She is a bandit and a guerrilla and is interested in fighting her battles against the dominant system head-on. She boldly refuses to follow the law and deliberately disobeys its rules. Two aspects of her personality aid the outlaw in her war against the dominant system. First, she is an outsider whose ability to function on the inside provides her with a unique perspective and a certain amount of freedom. She is, in the words of Patricia Hill Collins, an “outsider-within”. And second, she is a pragmatist who strategically chooses her weapons, theories and critiques. While bell hooks—in *Talking Back* and *Yearning*—illustrates the outsider-within, Chela Sandoval—in *Methodology of the Oppressed*—illustrates the pragmatist.

As an outsider-within, the outlaw moves back and forth between the inside and the outside. She is an insider because she is able (or forced) to live on the inside, among

¹⁷ In connection to the questions mentioned earlier concerning sexual difference and gender, Venus raises questions such as: Who are what is it/he/she? What does it mean to be a real woman? What is “proper” feminine behavior? Does gender naturally correspond to a certain biological sex?

¹⁸ In her discussion of Venus, Butler is careful to point out the Venus is not an example of pure subversion. Just as her performance of gender has the potential to raise important questions about what it means to be a woman, this performance also has the potential to reinforce traditional (hyper-heterosexual) gender norms.

the “normal,” and is therefore privy to its rules and regulations. But, she is outsider because she does not fit the “mythical norm” and/or because she challenges that norm and the laws that construct and protect it.¹⁹ So, while she is familiar with the law, having observed it first-hand, this familiarity is always from the perspective of one who is not fully subject to its edicts or effects.²⁰

The outlaw uses this status as an outsider within to cultivate a unique perspective and privileged position. This unique perspective allows the outlaw to be critical of the system in a way that one who is fully and completely invested in the system could not. It “fosters new angles of vision on oppression” (Collins 2000, 11), provides for “an oppositional world-view—a mode of seeing unknown to most of [her] oppressors...” (hooks 1990, 149) and “causes a shift in perception,” enabling outlaws to “see the deep structure below the surface” (Anzaldúa 1987, 38-39). It also allows for a certain amount of freedom; the freedom to elude the law, to exist beyond its boundaries and its limiting and limited understanding of what counts as acceptable, intelligible or proper and the freedom to refuse the law, to “say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor” (hooks 1990, 150).

In “Keeping Close to Home: Class and Education,” bell hooks discusses her own role as an outsider-within at Stanford University and how she worked to challenge and

¹⁹ The term “mythical norm” is taken from Audre Lorde and her essay, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex” in *Sister Outsider*. She writes: “Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts knows ‘that is not me.’ In america, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure” (1984, 116).

²⁰ In the introduction to her book *Erotic Welfare*, Linda Singer discusses the unique status of the outlaw—whom she refers to as the bandita—and her unique relationship to the law. She writes: “The bandita is successful in transgressing and eluding the law because she understands and in some sense identifies with it, albeit from the other side” (22).

subvert the elitist and classist laws of the academy. As “a southern black girl from a working-class background who had never been on a city bus, who had never stepped on an escalator, [and] who had never traveled by plane,” hooks was painfully aware of her outsider-within status and the conflict that existed between her working-class heritage [outsider] and her newly acquired position as a privileged student at the prestigious Stanford University [insider] (1989, 74). Instead of turning this pain into a shame over her own heritage and family, she chose to use her position as an outsider-within to challenge and transform the academic system. She writes: “Even though I received an education designed to provide me with a bourgeois sensibility...I knew that I could resist. I could rebel. I could shape the direction and focus of the various forms of knowledge available to me” (1989, 75).

One way in which hooks has continued to rebel and transform this knowledge is in her writing. Throughout her books, hooks breaks the rules of the academy: she frequently refuses to include footnotes, she is too prolific—sometimes writing multiple books in one year, she draws heavily upon personal experience and personal testimony and she even refuses to capitalize her own name (which isn’t even her “proper” name, but a pseudonym). Finally, she makes her primary audience—the one to whom she holds herself accountable—not the academy with its “rigorous” standards of how to be an theorist, but the communities of women and men (both inside and outside of the academy) who fight against oppression everyday.²¹ Through all of these methods, hooks

²¹ In *remembered rapture: the writer at work*, hooks discusses her rebellious methods. In “women who write too much,” she discusses how writing is a form of survival for her and that her propensity for writing so much comes out of a need to express and claim herself. She also discusses the political motivations behind those who critique her for how prolific she is.

functions as an outlaw, one who raids the academy, taking from it all of the useful knowledge that she can and then bringing that knowledge to her communities.²²

In addition to her outsider-within status, the outlaw trickster is characterized by her role as a pragmatist who uses her unique perspective to aid her in strategically and tactically choosing theoretical weapons for battling the system from a number of different fronts. She is not distanced from the action like some all-knowing Strategist subject, but located squarely in the street and in the “concreteness of body to body engagement” (Lugones 2003, 207). It is in the street where the outlaw skillfully picks through weapons (theories, methods, critiques), choosing what works and discarding the rest. She has no loyalty to any one theory or method that she chooses; she simply uses them until they are no longer effective. And, their effectiveness depends on how they respond to the needs of the outlaw and her communities.²³

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval illustrates the outlaw as pragmatist through her discussion of differential consciousness. Describing it as a “tactical subjectivity,” she argues that differential consciousness involves weaving “between and among” various theories without ever fully adopting any one theory as *the* answer or “the single most correct site where truth can be represented” (Sandoval 2000, 59). A central element in this practice of differential consciousness is mobility; the

²² Although not referring specifically to hooks, Singer offers a similar description of the outlaw, which she calls the “bandita.” Singer refers to bandita as a “trader...of the relics she has ruthlessly appropriated by robbing graves, taking that which can be translated into negotiable currency, i.e., that which has or is of value, and leaving the remainder” (22).

²³ In *Fighting Words*, Patricia Hill Collins offers a list of criteria for how theory can remain effective for communities: “(1) How does this social theory speak the truth to people about the reality of their lives?, (2) Does this social theory equip people to resist oppression? Is this social theory functional as a tool for social change?, and (3) Does this critical social theory move people to struggle “ (198-199)?

outlaw is constantly moving between and among theories, never using one for too long and always remaining aware of how these theories will lose their effectiveness. And, she is constantly moving between and among her various identities (as insider and outsider) and her different worlds (e.g. academy, local communities, global communities), juggling all of them carefully and skillfully. As a tactical subject always in motion, the outlaw has developed a number of survival skills; skills that provide her with “the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters” (Lorde 1983, 98) and enable her to choose both which theories will work and when and who she can trust as an ally in the battle.²⁴ These skills, which are closely connected to the outlaw’s outsider-within perspective, help the outlaw to become “an urban guerilla” who is “trained through everyday battle” (Sandoval 2000, 59).

c. Resisting from Beyond: the Storyteller

The trickster’s medium is words. A parodist, joker, liar, con-artist, and storyteller, the trickster fabricates believable illusions with words—and thus becomes author and embodiment of a fluid, flexible and politically radical narrative form.

—Jeanne Rosier Smith

I’m a storyteller. I’ll work to make you believe me. Throw in some real stuff, change a few details, add the certainty of outrage. I know the use of fiction in a world of hard truth, the way fiction can be a harder piece of truth. The story of what happened, or what did not happen but should have...

—Dorothy Allison

²⁴ Sandoval describes these skills as grace, flexibility and strength: “...enough strength to confidently commit to a well-defined structure of identity for one hour, day, week, month, year; enough flexibility to self-consciously transform that identity according to the requisites of another oppositional ideological tactic if readings of power’s formation require it; enough grace to recognize alliance with others committed to egalitarian social relations and race, gender, sex, class, and social justice, when these other readings of power call for alternative oppositional stands” (2000, 60).

Her speech, her storytelling is at once magic, sorcery, and religion. It is enchants. It animates, sets into motion, and rouses the forces that lie dormant in things, in beings. It is “bewitching.”

—Trinh T. Minh-ha

The final trickster figure is the storyteller. In contrast to the troublemaker who disrupts the logic of the system from within and the outlaw who rebels against it from without, the storyteller trickster weaves words together—in oral or written form—to create meaningful narratives outside and beyond the system. Her goal is not only to critically challenge the hegemony, but also to ensure that the stories (the traditions, the histories, the people) of her communities do not get lost, forgotten or destroyed. In creating and sharing her stories, the trickster storyteller serves three important functions. First, she is a truth teller who bears witness to the stories of her people/her allies/her communities/herself and testifies to others about those stories. Second, she is a conjurer who enthralls her audiences with her words, drawing them in so that they feel like they are a part of the story. And third, she is visionary who uses her stories to create new meanings and imagine new possibilities for herself, her communities and her audience. The storyteller trickster is exemplified by Dorothy Allison, particularly in her book-length meditation on storytelling, *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* and her collection of essays, *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class and Literature*.

Central to her role as a storyteller trickster is Allison’s desire to tell the truth about herself and her family; to bear witness to the tragedy and resiliency of her family and to testify to others about her painful upbringing in an honest and truthful way. In *Two or Three Things* and *Skin*, she tells stories about growing up poor, queer and abused in

Greenville, South Carolina, about how her stepfather sexually abused her from the time that she was five, about how she was despised by others because she was poor and taught to despise herself and about how she felt alienated from her lesbian feminist collective because of her white trash background.

Allison is compelled to tell these truths because if she does not, no one else will. She argues that we are encouraged to lie to ourselves and to each other about who we are or who we should be and about what is happening or has happened to us. We lie to survive or to fit in, to forget or to be accepted by others. In the essay “Shotgun Strategies,” Allison argues that her mother could not save her from being sexually abused by her stepfather because of these lies:

I knew absolutely that my mother had no idea what was going on in our home: partly because she was telling lies to herself to stay sane, partly because we were lying to her to save her and ourselves, and partly because the world had lied to her and us about the meaning of what was happening. The world told us that we were being spanked, not beaten, and that violent contempt for girl children was ordinary, nothing to complain about. The world lied, and we lied, and lying becomes a habit (1994, 55).

Allison uses her stories to finally tell the truth about her experiences and about her complicated love for her family, especially her mother. She tells this truth not only for herself, that is, not only to reclaim her own story, but also for her family. “My sisters do not remember all of our childhood,” she writes, “and one of the roles I have played in our family is being the one who gives it back to them” (Allison 1995, 55). Through her

storytelling, Allison becomes the “living memory of her time, her people” (Trinh 1989, 124)²⁵.

As a trickster storyteller, the truth that Allison tells is not based on accuracy or told from the perspective of a solitary and completely reliable narrator. It is truth that is crafted through storytelling and, as such, is based on Allison’s ability to capture the attention and the compassion of her audience. In this way, the trickster as storyteller functions not only as a truth teller, but as a conjuror.

Instead of historical accuracy or absolute truth, what motivates Allison’s storytelling is her desire to enable others to emotionally connect with her characters, characters that, in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, closely resemble her own family members. She wants her audience to feel (or at least feel for) the pain and struggle of these characters and to acknowledge and always remember that they are “human, flawed and extraordinary” (Allison 1994, 36). And she wants her “stories to be so good that they are unforgettable, [and] to make my ideas live, my memories sing, and my own terrors real for people I will never meet” (Allison 1994, 172-173).

Reflecting on her role as a storyteller in *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure*, Allison writes,

I’m a storyteller. I’ll work to make you believe me. Throw in some real stuff, change a few details, add the certainty of outrage. I know the use of fiction in a world of hard truth, the way fiction can be a harder piece of truth. The story of what happened, or what did not happen but should have... (3).

²⁵ In “Grandma’s Stories,” Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, “An oracle and a bringer of joy, the storyteller is the living memory of her time, her people. She composes on life but does not lie, for composing is not imagining, fancying, or inventing” (124).

Storytelling enables Allison to communicate her own pain and suffering in a way that makes us believe, compelling us to listen and to struggle to understand that pain. It also enables her to express a “harder piece of truth,” a truth that may not accurately express the details of an event but can effectively convey the pain and outrage that the event caused. And, storytelling allows both Allison and her readers to imagine new possibilities for responding to oppression and to construct new realities in which the pain of oppression can be understood or eliminated altogether.

This final feature of storyteller points to the third function of the trickster as storyteller: She is visionary who uses her stories to create new meanings and imagine new possibilities for herself, her communities and her audience. Through her stories, both how they are told and what is communicated in them, Allison uses her imagination and her ability to tell a good story to describe things how they should happen and to remake the world in a way in which “nothing [is] forbidden; everything [is] possible” (Allison 1995, 2). A significant part of this visionary storytelling is the idea that the stories of the trickster only gain their meaning and power through the active participation of the audience. For the storyteller, “the story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being” (Trinh 1989, 120).

d. Similarities

Although the troublemaker, outlaw and storyteller have different approaches and unique personalities, it is possible to discern several general characteristics that all three

share.²⁶ First, the feminist trickster defies easy categorization. Possessing multiple meanings, inhabiting many different forms, speaking a variety of languages and employing numerous theories, she is always more than any categories, identities or theories that are imposed upon her. The inability to easily categorize the trickster is the result of both the trickster's failure to fit discrete categories and her refusal to be captured by any limited and limiting definitions.

Her failure to fit into these categories is due to her complex and complicated experiences of race, gender, class and sexuality and the fluidity of her multiple subject positions. She is never just one subject (Irigaray) who has one label (hooks) or resides at one location (Collins). Her refusal to fit is the result of her deliberate elusiveness. She is a slippery and wily figure who "rarely adopt[s] the kind of fervid belief systems" that would fix her in any particular position or ideology (Sandoval 2000, 58). She shifts between theories, working with them while they are still useful (Sandoval) and only long enough to expose their limits (Butler). And her stories do not fit into traditional narrative form. She employs multiple voices and perspectives and juxtaposes conflicting narratives. And she never completely finishes a story or tells the same story twice (Allison).

Second, the trickster is an ambiguous and contradictory figure. This ambiguity stems from her position at the edge and is something that she both embodies and

²⁶ Because the trickster is such a slippery figure, it is difficult to "capture" them in any general meanings. Moreover, there is always the danger that such a move will strip the trickster of its rich and complex history. However, as both Hynes (1993) and Smith (1997) point out in their studies of the trickster, a discussion of the trickster figure in a broader sense could help us to develop some cross-cultural connections. And, it could help to bring a variety of seemingly conflicting and contradictory feminist theories into conversation with one another.

embraces. Her embodiment of ambiguity is the result of the conflicting positions that she maintains. Because of her multiple and shifting forms, the trickster possesses too many identities yet no one identity, enjoys the freedom of not being fixed in any limiting definitions yet suffers the alienation of not truly fitting in anywhere and understands her position at the edge to be a source of strength and weakness and of vulnerability and possibility.²⁷

Recognizing the necessity and inevitability of these contradictory positions, she embraces her ambiguity by developing an appreciation for contradictions and learning to see the world as a place of both/and as opposed to either/or. As Gloria Anzaldúa describes in *Borderlands*, the trickster “learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality [and] operates in a pluralistic mode...” (79). And, she is able to function in different locations simultaneously. Describing her own experience as an outsider-within, bell hooks writes: “Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both” (1990 149).

Third, because of the ambiguity, the trickster is an outsider. She is frequently cast (and cast aside) as an “out” person, one whose “activities are often outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out-of-bounds, and out-of-order” (Hynes 1993, 34). Her outsider status and outrageous behavior produce contradictory effects. On the one hand, they limit her.

²⁷ A number of different feminists have discussed the pain of this ambiguity, including Patricia Hill Collins, in “Learning from the Outsider Within Revisited” (1998), bell hooks in “Keeping Close to Home: Class and Education” (1989) and Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands* who suggests that this ambiguity leads to “mental and emotional states of perplexity [and] insecurity and indecisiveness” where she is “torn between ways” (1987, 78).

Frequently denied subjectivity or “a proper name”, the trickster is relegated to “those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life” (Butler 1993, 3) with “the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed [and] the half dead” (Anzaldúa 1987, 3). She is despised and discounted. Moreover, her theories and/or stories are not taken seriously because she develops them through “improper” means; she does not follow the rules of theory-construction or storytelling. She does not use proper form or language that is rigorous (read: complex) enough.

On the other hand, her outsider status frees her. Existing beyond the restrictive confines of the proper and intelligible, she is (at least somewhat) free to transgress boundaries, to break the law or to imagine meanings beyond the oppressive system. Whether it is as a trick-player (Irigaray), a gadfly (Butler), a warrior (hooks/Sandoval) or a truth teller (Allison), she is able to elude capture by those who wish to imprison her in their oppressive rules or meanings. “It is useless, then, to trap [her] in the exact definition of what [she] means, to make [her] repeat (herself) so that it will be clear,” Irigaray writes, because she is “already elsewhere in that discursive machinery where you expected to surprise [her]” (1985b, 29).

Fourth, the trickster possesses a type of agency that is strikingly different from that of the sovereign and autonomous modern Subject who confidently wields power, produces deliberate and effective results and maintains a high degree of authority over her actions.²⁸ The trickster fails to have complete control over any of her theories/stories or their effects. Although her strategies can be effective they can also have unpredictable

²⁸ See Flax (1991) and her discussion of the modern subject.

and sometimes damaging results. Also, because of her outsider status, she is not considered to be an authoritative figure that should be admired, but a fool that should be ridiculed or a criminal that should be punished.²⁹ This uncertainty and lack of authority does not suggest that the trickster has no agency but that her agency cannot be linked to mastery, control and guaranteed results. Instead, it is linked to vulnerability and uncertainty and involves “digression and indirection” and traveling where “the trails are not clearly marked” and “not all routes are the right one” (Singer 1993, 23).

Fifth and finally, the trickster is both a survivor and a renewer of cultures. Motivating all of her tricks, rebellion and persistent questioning is an urgent desire for the survival and renewal of herself and her communities. Both critic and creator, she is not interested in pursuing her trickster activities just for fun or merely for antagonizing (and infuriating) others. She uses trickery and wordplay to “strengthen and renew communities with outrageous laughter” (Smith 1997, 3). She develops “a multiplicity of weapons” (Phelan 1996, 146) to enable communities to fight oppression from a number of fronts. And, she poses a number of critical questions and points to various locations of trouble to empower and inspire communities to engage in their own practices of theorizing and thinking.

Fundamental to all of her trickster activities is a desire to shape new meanings and new possibilities for feminism and feminist theory out of the seemingly incoherent, contradictory and multiple perspectives that exist within feminist communities. To create new meanings, she does not present her listeners with a singular and linear narrative that

²⁹ See Phelan (1996).

encompasses (and captures) all that feminism is or could be in one telling, but offers them an open-ended account, one filled with “breaks, disruptions, loose ends, and multiple voices or perspectives” (Smith 11). This open-ended account allows the trickster to engage with her audience and to “invite and even demand reader involvement” (Smith 23) in the process of creating new meanings for feminism.

e. Differences

As embodied by Butler/Irigaray, hooks/Sandoval and Allison respectively, the troublemaker, outlaw and storyteller, to varying degrees, all possess these general characteristics. But, as evidenced in my brief sketch of each, they also apply these characteristics to the practice of the trickster in different ways. While the troublemaker disrupts the system from within, the outlaw rejects it from without and the storyteller creates meaning from beyond it. The differences between these figures are partly due to the different critical traditions from which they come: Irigaray and Butler draw upon poststructuralism and postmodernism; hooks looks to black feminist pragmatism while Sandoval relies on (U.S.) third world feminism; and Allison is shaped by lesbian feminist activism of the nineteen seventies and eighties.

The troublemaker trickster, as illustrated by Luce Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, is a comedian. She works to disrupt the system through her clever, seductive and humorous writing. Although she does not limit her writing to one particular style, she does draw heavily upon Derrida and his process of deconstruction. In fact, she adopts several of his practices, all of which influence how she functions as a trickster. These practices include: engaging in her critique from within the

text by reading the text differently, exposing the blind spots and focusing on the silences and gaps of that text and flipping the hierarchy so that the reading of the text originates from that which is silenced.³⁰ A central part of Irigaray's practice of deconstruction is play. Irigaray plays with the voices of Western thinkers by twisting, distorting and miming their ideas. She also plays with language by choosing words and phrases with double meanings. And she plays with her reading audience by tricking and confusing them. Using slippery syntax, she forces them to wonder, who is speaking, Irigaray or Freud?

Underlying all of this play is Irigaray's sense of humor and an emphasis on the value and necessity for women of experiencing pleasure. Much like other french feminists, such as Helene Cixous, Irigaray focuses attention on pleasure as an essential part of the experience of being (and becoming) a subject. While she is especially concerned with highlighting the ways in which women have been denied pleasure within the psychoanalytic model (Freud and Lacan) of feminine sexuality, her discussion of pleasure can also be linked to wider forms and expressions of joy, such as playfulness.³¹ In this way, playfulness can take on a number of different meanings and produce a number of different effects. Practiced as harsh mocking, it can help reduce some of the

³⁰ For more on Irigaray's connection with Derrida, see Weed (1994).

³¹ In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray discusses feminine pleasure and its link to playfulness: "Female pleasure has to remain inarticulate in language, in its own language, if it is not to threaten the underpinnings of logical operations... That 'elsewhere' of feminine pleasure can be found only at the price of *crossing back through the mirror that subtends all speculation*... A playful crossing, and an unsettling one, which would allow woman to rediscover the place of her 'self-affection'" (77). The expansion of pleasure, and 'self-affection' as more than sexual, can be linked to Audre Lorde and her essay, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power". Lorde writes: "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and the use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (55).

seriousness and the self-importance that Western thinkers (and readers of their theories) attach to their projects. And, practiced as lighthearted laughter, playfulness can enable feminist theorists to loosen their grip on some of the identities (such as woman) and theoretical positions that they rigidly (and vehemently) defend.

The troublemaker trickster, as illustrated by Judith Butler, is a gadfly who persistently interrogates the system in order both to make trouble for it and to expose those locations where it is already in trouble, those locations at the limits of the system where the system's ability to function (that is, to remain intelligible and understandable) breaks down. Although Butler looks to a variety of traditions in her practice as a troublemaker, two of her primary influences are Theodor Adorno and Michel Foucault. From Adorno and his development of critical theory, Butler adopts a suspicious attitude toward society and its promotion of common sense. From Foucault, she adopts two critical methods for challenging that common sense: genealogy and problematization. Using genealogy, Butler traces (historically, culturally, socially) the political operations and regulatory practices that undergird our common sense assumptions. And, using problematization, she works to develop effective and productive ways in which to engage in critical explorations and disputes over the meaning and motivations of those assumptions. For Butler, these two projects are explicitly linked to queer theory and its (sometimes problematic) relationship to feminism and represent the most effective way in which to practice feminism, that is, by constantly calling its basic terms into question and engaging in crucial debates over what feminism is and what it should be.

The outlaw trickster, as illustrated by bell hooks and Chela Sandoval, is a warrior who rebels and rejects the law and its oppressive rules. Unlike the trick-player who disrupts from inside the system, hooks and Sandoval rely on their outsider status to reject the system from just beyond its borders. They are not entirely opposed to Derridean deconstruction (envisioning it as one more tactical weapon that could be of use), but they come out of two other traditions: hooks is closely linked with black feminist pragmatism and Sandoval with U.S. Third World feminism.

From black feminist pragmatism, hooks' role as an outlaw can be connected to Patricia Hill Collins' projects of visionary pragmatism and black feminist standpoint theory. The project of visionary pragmatism "emphasizes the necessity of linking caring, theoretical vision with informed, practical struggle" (Collins 1998, 188) and fosters a creative tension between theory (as vision) and practice (as pragmatic action) where theoretical visions must stay connected to the lived practices of everyday people and pragmatic actions must maintain a hopeful vision of the future. In her essay, "Theory as Liberatory Practice," hooks echoes this project, arguing that theory, especially her own theory, comes out of her own struggles to make sense of the world and her own desire to critically challenge and transform the status quo. She writes: "theory emerges from the concrete, from my efforts to make sense of everyday life experiences, from my efforts to intervene critically in my life and the lives of others" (70).

The project of black feminist standpoint theory emphasizes (and cultivates) the unique perspective that Black women domestic workers experienced due to their status as outsiders-within. Black women were outsiders-within because they worked on the inside,

as domestic workers in private White households, but still remained outside, as Black women who were never “like one of the family” (Collins 1999, 7). Because of this position, they had access to two important types of insider knowledge; as African-Americans, these women frequently participated in African-American resistance traditions and, as domestic workers, these women “often possessed remarkable insights about White people and their everyday lives” (Collins 1999, 7). When combined, these two types of knowledge resulted in a “distinctive collective perspective on race, class, and gender relations” (Collins 1999, 6). In her discussion of this perspective, hooks argues that her own status as an outsider-within enabled her to develop “an oppositional world-view—a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity” (hooks 1990, 149).

From U.S. Third World feminism, Sandoval’s role as an outlaw can be connected to the overall work of the feminists within in U.S. Third World feminism who created “an original form of historical consciousness” in 1970s U.S. feminist theory (Sandoval 2000, 42). The development of a new historical consciousness, what Sandoval calls the differential consciousness, in the 1970s involved the creation of “a common language [and] theoretical structure” (Sandoval 2000, 42) that enabled a wide range of U.S. feminists of color to mobilize under a shared social movement. This movement emphasized the value of difference and multiplicity and focused on fostering connections between participants in “feminism, race, ethnicity, sex, and marginality studies and historical, aesthetic, and global studies” (Sandoval 2000, 64). For Sandoval, differential

consciousness serves as an important model for how feminist theory (and theorists) with very different perspectives can come together and successfully fight the multi-faceted and multi-fronted oppressive system.

Finally, the storyteller trickster, as illustrated by Dorothy Allison, is linked to important strains of feminist thinking about voice, personal narrative and the value of stories, both oral and written. Allison was introduced to feminism and feminist theory through her participation in and organization of lesbian feminist activist collectives in the nineteen seventies and early eighties. Fundamental to these collectives was the practice of individuals coming together in a safe and separatist space to share their stories of pain and oppression with each other in consciousness raising groups. According to Allison, the strength of consciousness-raising was its ability to convert lesbian feminists' personal stories of pain and vulnerability into powerful resources for resisting the system. Sharing her pain enabled Allison and others like her to develop insight into the lies that they had been told and that they told themselves and to forge powerful connections with each other based on need and hope.³² While Allison was very aware of the limits of consciousness-raising—the reduction of the overarching political movement of lesbian feminism to the specific and unique stories of individuals and the devolving of political meetings into

³² In “Shotgun Strategies,” Allison describes how consciousness-raising helped her to start the process of working through the pain she felt as someone who had been sexually abused by her father. She writes: “I went into that Sunday afternoon lesbian CR group, sat down, and everybody started talking—mostly about other women who were not there with whom they had recently broken up. But one of the women, the one sitting in the beanbag chair across from me, spoke about her father. Whispered that she really needed to tell people how much she hated him, how she dreamed every night of going home to kill him...I leaned forward to hear every word she said and did not say, to see the strain in her neck and the way her hands pulled at each other, the pain and rage plain in everything. She was close to breaking as I felt myself, as desperate and along. I wanted to touch her, not like a lover, but like family, to offer comfort and love and hope. Instead, I offered her the one unfailing gift of my family—bitter humor. I gave a little laugh and said, ‘I’ll do yours, if you’ll do mine.’ I was joking, but I was also half-serious. And then I told her I’d had the same dreams. It was the first time I had told anyone I wanted to kill my stepfather” (1994, 52).

therapy sessions, she took from it the important belief that the sharing of our stories, our personal truths, can enable us to not only survive but to remake the world in ways that are less oppressive and less hateful.

While the differences between these three figures are partly due to the theoretical traditions from which they draw, those differences are also due to the locations from which they function. As I have indicated throughout this section, each of the trickster figures maintains a different relationship to the dominant system and each of them resists the system from a different location. The troublemaker resists from within, the outlaw resists from without and the storyteller resists from beyond. These different locations are largely the result of the amount of status that each figure maintains within the system.

The troublemaker, as exemplified by Irigaray and Butler, possesses a certain degree of privilege; she is (at least on some level) an accepted and legitimate member of the established system. She can converse easily and comfortably in its language(s) and is very knowledgeable about its intellectual traditions. In fact, she has been fully raised within those traditions and they have helped to shape who she is as a theorist/scholar.³³ For this reason, she cannot remove herself from them as easily as other trickster figures. To resist the system, she enjoys disrupting it from within and "jam[ming] the theoretical machinery" by exposing its limitations.³⁴

³³ In the case of both Irigaray and Butler, they are trained philosophers who have a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Western tradition and its key thinkers like Freud, Lacan, Hegel, Marx, Aristotle or Plato.

³⁴ This is not to suggest that the troublemaker makes trouble merely for the pleasure of it. She has strong commitments to social justice and cultural/political transformation that motivate her troublemaking activities. But, she does, particularly in the case of a figure like Butler, relish the chance to disrupt (confuse, unsettle) the system.

Similar to the troublemaker, the outlaw, as exemplified by hooks and Sandoval, is knowledgeable in the dominant theoretical traditions, having lived and worked (by choice or force) on the inside of the system for varying lengths of time. However, unlike the troublemaker, she has had non-hegemonic traditions and strong oppositional communities to draw upon in her development. Moreover, she has never been as accepted by the dominant system as the troublemaker has and, as a result, has been able to cultivate an outsider perspective to a much greater degree. Her resistance is not motivated by a desire to disrupt but by a need to lessen the oppression and subjugation that she and her community/communities experience on a daily basis. She resists the system from without, just beyond on its borders, on behalf of and with the help of her oppositional communities.

Finally, the storyteller, as exemplified by Allison, may have some understanding of the dominant system—its languages and traditions, but she does not operate from within it. Instead she speaks in a different language and relies primarily on traditions from outside of the system. Her own mode of communication/discourse, that is, her storytelling, is deemed illegitimate by the system and relegated to the status of fiction or fantastical myth. And, the stories of her people are often suppressed. Because her languages and traditions are not even recognized by the system, she has chosen (and also been forced) to resist the system from beyond in a location that she has conjured up through her remarkable storytelling.

While their different locations in relation to the system and their different approaches to resistance can create some conflict between these figures, the way in which

they resist from those different locations generates a wide range of examples of effective opposition to the system.³⁵ When taken together, these examples provide us with the evidence that we need in order to believe that even though the process of democratic feminism is uncertain, risky and never guaranteed to result in transformation, it is possible to survive within it and even maintain some of our sanity as we practice our various forms of resistance.³⁶ And, even though the system is more pervasive and far-reaching in its control than ever before, it is possible for us to effectively resist it from a number of different locations.

THE TRICKSTER AS A MORAL LEADER

The troublemaker, outlaw and storyteller do not only serve as effective examples of resistance, enabling us to maintain our hope and faith in our theories and practices and to continue engaging in feminist politics. These figures also serve as moral leaders, guiding us in our own efforts to resist the system and transform ourselves into more democratic feminists. The tricksters' practices are partially aimed at self-preservation, but this is not their only focus. Because they feel a strong responsibility to the various

³⁵ This is not to suggest that tricksters necessarily serve as exemplary models for *how* to resist. As I will suggest in the conclusion, there are many limitations to the methods each of them employs. Instead, the tricksters (as examples of the resisting feminist) demonstrate to us that resistance, regardless of how difficult, complicated or even tenuous, is possible.

³⁶ In "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," Reagon describes the importance of those individuals who can keep up with the many issues and agendas that comprise a feminist democratic movement. She writes: "Anytime you find a person showing up at all of those struggles, and they have some sense of sanity by your definition..., one study with them, and two, protect them.... They can teach you how to cross cultures and not kill yourself" (Reagon 1983, 363).

communities (feminist and otherwise) with which they identify, they are committed to strengthening and renewing those communities and the individuals within them.³⁷

The trickster is a moral leader because she is not only interested in helping individuals to be stronger and more effective feminist theorists/activists, but because she is interested in helping those individuals to adopt a radically democratic ethos. In adopting this ethos, feminists learn to embrace critical contestation and to be playful, open-minded and flexible in their practices and interactions with others. And, they learn to develop a new kind of guiding vision, one that is not based on guaranteed success or tied to any specific agenda or practice, but that tells the ongoing story of the feminist democratic project in its many complicated, potentially conflicting, fragmented and overlapping forms.

An overarching element of this radically democratic ethos is the idea that feminist democracy is a passionate politics that requires more than an intellectual investment in feminist theories and actions. In adopting a democratic ethos, feminists need to move beyond limited notions of reason and logic to tap into their deepest feelings—what Audre Lorde describes as the erotic—of creative potential and physical and spiritual nourishment (Lorde 1984, 53-59). These feelings are not highly individualized cravings of what is best for *me* or what *I* want, but collective desires for justice, transformation and care of self and others that come out of communities and are connected to a deeper democratic ethos.

³⁷ Tricksters are not moral saints who dedicate themselves exclusively to helping and guiding others, however. They are not loving saints who believe their own happiness and fulfillment is only achieved when others are happy and fulfilled. Nor are they rational saints who sacrifice their own happiness for the sake of others (Wolf 1982, 420). Instead, they are individuals who are interested in their own survival/happiness and who recognize that that survival/happiness is connected to the survival/happiness of others.

Essentially, this deeper democratic ethos is about maintaining a commitment to justice, one in which we are not merely persuaded through “logical” arguments or mounting evidence to critique oppressive systems, but are compelled—or moved as Patricia Hill Collins suggests in the concluding chapter of *Fighting Words*—to actively engage in the difficult struggle for transformation and to fight for better futures. The feminist trickster, whether she be a troublemaker, an outlaw or a storyteller, is dedicated to using her abilities as a trickster to move others to struggle and to help those others to develop a democratic passion within their own feminist practices.

How the feminist trickster uses her abilities to act as a moral leader and what those abilities are differs widely between the three figures. The troublemaker uses her ability to disrupt and ask troubling questions and her sense of humor to provoke and unsettle her audience. In so doing, she hopes to stir up the democratic passion within individuals. The outlaw uses her unique perspective and pragmatic skills to empower and equip her audience with the critical tools that they need to convert their passion into productive and effective political theories and actions. In so doing, she hopes to help individuals cultivate their passion. And the storyteller uses her skillful mastery of words and her ability to tell a compelling story to transport her audience beyond their limited perspective and to give them a powerful and hopeful vision of different worlds, worlds where other ways of being are possible. In so doing, she hopes to inspire individuals, enabling them to translate their passion for justice/democracy into a vision that guides their theories and actions.

a. Provoking Feminists: the Troublemaker

In order to stir up the democratic passion (or energy/spirit) within feminists, the troublemaker has a two-fold approach. First, as a gadfly, she aims to provoke individuals and force them out their comfort zones by focusing on those instances in which their ideas, assumptions or claims do not make sense or become difficult to understand. This provocation is not intended to anger or paralyze individuals, but to stimulate them, to draw “them out of [their] ritualized borders and entrenched limits and confining horizon” (Hanssen 1998, 12) and to incite them to imagine and fight for new ways in which to articulate, represent and/or understand the basic terms and goals of feminism.³⁸

The troublemaker as gadfly is a moral leader because she does not merely provoke for the sake of provoking.³⁹ She provokes in the hopes of forcing individuals to think critically about their ideas and claims. She wants to instill in them the value of critical thinking and reflection. And she wants to empower them to be critical agents who are able to question and contest their own ideas and the ideas of others. For her, disruption through critique and contestation is an important source of democratic energy within feminism and it must be safeguarded to ensure that that democratic energy continues on for future generations of feminists.⁴⁰ It is this democratic energy and the

³⁸ This provocation is also not done for the thrill of disrupting terms or for creating anxiety in others but because the limits of our knowing have created a crisis that must be addressed (Butler 2003, 307-308).

³⁹ This desire to provoke can get the gadfly trickster into trouble sometimes, however. Even as she recognizes the ethical and political import of provocation, she is also drawn to thrill that she gets when she creates chaos.

⁴⁰ The democratic energy present in the activities of the gadfly is well articulated by Cornel West and his description of Socrates (the original gadfly) in *Democracy Matters*. West argues that Socrates believed “that to be human and a democratic citizen requires that one muster the courage to think critically for oneself.... Socratic questioning yields intellectual integrity, philosophic humility, and personal sincerity—all essential elements of our democratic armor for the fight against corrupt elite power” (West 2004, 208-209).

passion that it generates within feminists, the gadfly contends, that could enable us to transform our politics/theories/actions in ways that more effectively challenge the system. Central to this safeguarding is the gadfly's belief that all feminists have the capacity to engage in critique and must be continually encouraged to do so in a variety of ways.

If the troublemaker as gadfly works to provoke individuals in order to stimulate their democratic (critical) energy, the troublemaker as trick-player works to unsettle individuals in order to get them to be more playful (and creative) in their ethico-political practices. The trick-player injects her theories and practices with a sense of humor in the hopes of reversing the understanding of feminist democratic politics as only risky, dangerous and painful to all who practice it. She wants individuals to recognize the creative and joyful potential for engaging in a radically democratic ethos.

Through her playful approach, the trick-player works to invert individuals' negative assessments of feminist democracy. Instead of lamenting the uncertainty of feminism and its future, she wants individuals to embrace the unpredictability of feminist political/ theoretical/ ethical projects as a cause for wonder and appreciation. And, instead of understanding self-critique and contestation as necessary burdens to endure when practicing democratic politics, she wants individuals to envision them as sacred and joyful responsibilities that can energize them and their practices (Welch 2004, 110).⁴¹

⁴¹ In *After Empire: The art and ethos of enduring peace*, Sharon Welch discusses how tricksters envision the practice of democracy differently. She contrasts Iris Marion Young's description of participatory democracy as filled with "angers, frustrations, fears, uncertainties, drudgery, disappointments, and defeats" (107) with the trickster's understanding of it. She writes, "many practices of democracy, however, can also be the occasion for recognizing community and recognizing fallibility. For example, consider one aspect of democratic politics that Young deplors: 'In a democracy nearly everything is revisable, and because unpredictable public opinion counts for something, uncertainty shadows democracy.' This frustration, from the perspective of trickster hermeneutics and the recognition of our own fallibility, can be experienced as one of the ironic joys and gifts of participatory democracy" (Welch 2004, 107).

Fundamental to the trick-player's guiding vision of feminist democracy is the idea that laughter, joy and playfulness are essential elements in developing and sustaining a democratic ethos. We need to learn to not take ourselves and our ideas so seriously, to laugh at our limits and to laugh with others instead of becoming overwhelmed by the uncertainty and fragility of our political practices. In her promotion and practice of playfulness, the trick-player not only demonstrates the possibility of this joy, but she encourages us to practice it ourselves.

b. Training Feminists: the Outlaw

The outlaw approaches her role as a moral leader in a very different way than the troublemaker. Instead of provoking or unsettling individuals in order to incite them to think critically, she is interested in training those individuals how to be more effective practitioners of feminist democracy. As an outsider outlaw, she wants to help them to convert their passion for justice and their democratic energy into useful feminist theories and practices. She aims to facilitate this conversion by encouraging individuals to draw upon those resources that exist within them—their deepest feelings of moral outrage and anger or their unique perspective as marginalized outsiders—and by educating them on how to translate those resources into powerful tools of resistance and transformation. And as a pragmatist, she wants to help individuals learn how to be more savvy and streetwise in their use of feminist theories and in their development of feminist goals.

The outsider outlaw has learned that unless she is able to control her democratic energy and passion for justice, she will not be able to survive the difficult and exhausting process of engaging in feminist politics of resistance and transformation. For example,

the anger and moral outrage that she feels over the injustices that both she and her communities suffer has the potential to consume her if she is unable to focus it into specific theories and actions.

Describing the anger that she, along with other women of color, has repeatedly felt, Audre Lorde argues that she has had to learn how to turn her anger into a symphony, one in which she orchestrates that anger so that it does not tear her apart. For Lorde, fundamental to this orchestration is the recognition that anger, when used properly, can serve as an important resource, providing feminists with strength and insight (Lorde 1984, 129). “Every women,” she writes, “has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change” (Lorde 1984, 127).

But this passionate energy, in the form of anger or outrage, can only become a powerful source for us when we engage in the difficult process of working, thinking *and* theorizing through that energy and learning how to translate it “into action in the service of our vision and our future” (Lorde 1984, 127). For this reason, the outlaw works to encourage others to tap into their deepest feelings of injustice and to work through those feelings individually and collectively.⁴²

In addition to promoting the importance of working with and through one’s deep feelings of outrage and injustice, the outlaw also encourages individuals to draw upon their own unique perspectives and experiences (their daily practices) as marginalized

⁴² See Lorde (1984), Lugones (2003), Anzaldúa (1987) and hooks (1990).

outsiders and to convert those perspectives into oppositional forms of knowledge about dominant structures and systems. Having cultivated her own unique outsider perspective, the outlaw sees tremendous value in developing these oppositional forms of knowledge because they enable individuals to envision and articulate how oppression works in new and innovative ways. They also enable individuals to draw upon their own experiences and daily practices as sources for alternative, potentially transformative, feminist theories and agendas. In this way, much like the gadfly, the outlaw believes that the ability to develop and practice a democratic ethos is possible for a wide range of feminist individuals and *not* just those who are typically considered feminist theorists.

The pragmatist outlaw aims to train individuals on how to engage in feminist theorizing and strategizing on the “street-level, among embodied subjects, with ill-defined ‘edges’” (Lugones 2003, 208). She is not interested in training those individuals to be Theorists who create battle plans while residing at a safe distance from the battleground. Instead, she hopes to transform them into streetwalkers who generate tactical (and pragmatic) possibilities while *on* the battlefield and while in the midst of “urban guerilla warfare” (Sandoval 2000, 59). As streetwalkers, individuals are able to look to a multiplicity of theoretical tools in order to make their feminist practices more effective.

c. Inspiring Feminists: the Storyteller

Finally, the storyteller functions as a moral leader because, through her powerful and enchanting stories, she is able to weave together a compelling vision of feminist democracy that can guide and inspire individuals in their feminist theories and actions. In

doing this, she not only presents individuals with this vision, but she also invites them to think and act beyond their limited perspective and participate in shaping and transforming that vision for the future. Fundamental to the storyteller's activities as a moral leader is her desire to convey the transformative and healing power of storytelling to individuals and her belief that any vision of feminist democracy is always in process of being developed and must be created anew with each generation of feminists.⁴³

The feminist democratic vision that the storyteller offers is not a complete or fully cohesive one. It does not involve a linear progression towards the best possible feminist nor does it center on one particular type of agent who acts in one particular way in order to achieve that better future for feminism. The future that this democratic vision offers is one that could happen but is not guaranteed to be realized by future feminists. It is the vision of a future that provides us with guidance and inspiration instead of a specific agenda for what is to be done.

The feminist democratic vision is not owned by any one tradition within feminism or any one group of feminists and its message and meaning are always more than can be captured in any one telling. In creating and communicating this vision, the goal should not be to synthesize all feminist thought and action or to reduce feminism to one culturally specific vision, but to promote the flourishing of different and sometimes conflicting strains and perspectives. As a result, it is characterized by breaks, disruptions and many loose ends.

⁴³ Drawing upon the work of Carol Lee Sanchez, Sharon Welch describes how the message (story) of democracy must be "pass[ed] on to future generations" (Welch 1999, 88).

Ultimately, any feminist democratic vision is a fragment, “a living thing, an organic process, a way of life” that is made up of a collection of stories culled from the experiences and voices of the many different individuals and collections of individuals who identify as feminist or who embrace feminist agendas. As such, this vision demands the active and continued participation of all feminists in order to be an effective, compelling and non-exclusionary story of feminist democracy. As a moral leader, the storyteller aims to encourage feminists to participate in the creation of the vision by emphasizing the importance of sharing our stories, listening to each other’s stories and collectively weaving those stories together into a guiding vision.⁴⁴

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this chapter, I have argued that tricksters, in the form of troublemakers, outlaws and storytellers, are important role models for feminists as they attempt to develop and cultivate a democratic ethos. They serve as effective examples of the resisting feminist, enabling individuals to believe that it is possible to survive and thrive within the difficult, uncertain and dangerous process of feminist democracy. They also serve as moral leaders, guiding individuals as those individuals attempt to create and sustain their own

⁴⁴ This idea of the democratic vision as containing multiple fragments of stories shares some affinities with Collins and her discussion of Elsa Barkley Brown’s discussion of the quilt at the end of *Fighting Words*. Arguing that quilt serves as an effective way in which to think about a notion of justice, Collins writes: “In making their quilts, Black women weave together scraps of fabric from all sorts of places. Nothing is wasted, and every piece of fabric has a function and a place in a given quilt. Black women quilters often place in juxtaposition odd-sized scraps of fabric that appear to clash with one another... These quilts may appear chaotic, yet patterns that are initially difficult to see become apparent over time” (Collins 1998. 248).

democratic ethos. But, while these tricksters are role models, they are not moral or political saints who embody pure virtuous behavior or who always exemplify successful resistance. They may serve as examples *of* the effective resisting feminist, proving that she does and can exist, but they do not always serve as examples of *how* we should resist.

For example, the troublemaker trickster has the potential to let her desire for provocation and stirring up trouble cloud her vision of why she is engaging in troublemaking in the first place. As a result, she provokes for the sake of provoking. And her actions become motivated by the pleasure that she gets in unsettling, disrupting and deconstructing claims and ideas instead of by an urgent passion for justice guided by a compelling vision for better futures. In the case of both Irigaray's and Butler's work as troublemakers (in *Speculum/ This Sex and Gender Trouble/ Bodies That Matter/ "End of Sexual Difference?"* respectively), can they always tell the difference between provocations that incite democratic passion and ones that shut it down? Moreover, do a confusing and ironic writing style (Irigaray) and difficult language (Butler) always lead to critical reflection on the limits of discourse or, do they result in frustration, alienation and apathy?

The outlaw trickster has the potential to let her focus on tactical subjectivity overwhelm her ability to generate a guiding vision. In her use of multiple strategies and her emphasis on mobility, she can become too elusive and too unwilling to commit to any specific agenda or project. On other hand, by privileging her outsider perspective as an important source of oppositional knowledge, she can become too invested in (and too uncritical of) that perspective. In the case of Sandoval's work as outlaw (in *Methodology*

of the Oppressed) what is the guiding force, beyond survival and resistance, which determines how and why we choose our specific strategies and tactics? In the case of hooks' work as an outlaw (in *Yearning*), how can we be invested in our unique perspectives while still allowing those perspectives to be transformed through the process of democratic feminism? Additionally, how can look to our outsider perspective yet still be critically aware of its limits and its changing nature?

And, the storyteller has the potential to let her desire to conjure up imaginary and more just worlds distract her from thinking about the specific and concrete ways in which those worlds could or should be realized. Additionally, in imagining a better world, she has the potential to retreat to that imaginary world instead of dealing with the world or worlds in which she presently finds herself. In the case of Allison's work as a storyteller (in *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* and *Skin*), when do her imaginary worlds become too imaginary? How can she link her imagined world, a world in which anything is possible, with the imagined worlds of others or the real (that is lived) world of the dominant system?

All three of these tricksters have dangerous and limiting tendencies. The troublemaker can provoke too much. The outlaw can be too pragmatic or too invested in their outsider perspective. And, the storyteller can overemphasize imaginary worlds at the expense of concrete, lived ones. On their own, none of these figures can present feminists with a comprehensive and effective model for how to practice feminist democracy or how to understand the feminist democratic ethos. It is not the case that an effective feminist democratic movement can be based on critique and critical contestation alone. Nor can

that movement be based solely on pragmatic, tactical strategizing or the creation of oppositional forms of knowledge. Finally, the feminist democratic movement cannot be focused exclusively on developing imaginary worlds in which injustice and oppression are eliminated. However, when they are put together, these three understandings of the feminist democratic ethos are powerful resources as we attempt to cultivate and practice a democratic ethos in twenty-first century feminism.