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**Julia Christensen, Christopher Cox and Lisa Szabo-Jones, eds. *Activating the Heart: Storytelling, Knowledge Sharing and Relationship*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press. 2018. <https://www.wlupress.wlu.ca/Books/A/Activating-the-Heart2>**

This new collection of essays takes up issues relevant to the conduct of research involving Indigenous communities. The title phrase—*Activating the Heart*—summarizes a central message. The volume encourages researchers to move their inquiries beyond any posture of professedly disengaged, academic objectivity as they carry out their work. It urges them instead toward fully human encounters in which they and their Indigenous participants endeavor to reveal themselves to each other and forge meaningful bonds. Throughout, contributors focus on *storytelling*, in its many forms, as both research method and methodology. They argue and illustrate how that activity and the values that ground it can become vehicles by which both researchers and communities explore meanings that inform their lived experience, make such experience available to each other, and generate new meanings and opportunities. Editors Julia Christensen, Christopher Cox and Lisa Szabo-Jones observe that the volume aspires to influence not only research inquiry but also academic training: to "make room for a different kind of education, one that builds necessary ties between community and academia to engender a space for broader, non-oppressive education models" (xi).

Toward these ends, chapters "examine storytelling as a mode of understanding, sharing, and creating knowledge" (xii). Separate sections of the volume take up each of these three intellectual tasks. The section on "Storytelling to Understand" begins with the essay "Finding My Way: Emotions and Ethics in Community-Based Action Research with Indigenous Communities." Here, Leonie Sandercock—self-described "immigrant Australian-working class white girl PhD-ed and socialized into Anglo-American academia" (7)—discusses her experiences collaborating with a First-Nations community in British Columbia via an "action research" project.

Having accepted an invitation to produce a documentary recording the "local history of conflict between Indigenous Carrier people and non-Indigenous settlers" (3), Sandercock describes the power of stories shared, and individual relationships forged, to influence dynamics within a divided community. Simultaneously, she reflects on her evolving understanding of the ways in which she, herself, is implicated in the story she would tell. Sandercock concludes that researchers realize the potentialities of their work in Indigenous populations only within true partnerships—relationships requiring empathic response and a willingness for self-transformation. Reflecting on her research experiences as a community outsider in the form of a story-poem, Sandercock argues for "a different way of being in the world" than she had learned in her scholarly training: "You/I cannot be in community/Without loving attachment" (23). She closes by describing the way that this decision has shaped her subsequent career decisions to allow ongoing contributions to the partner community.

The subsequent essay, "Notes from the Underbridge," by Christine Stewart and Jacquie Leggett, sketches a range of strategies for knowing a place deeply (39) as preparation for learning and telling its many stories. Their "poetics of attention" focuses on a space below a bridge in Edmonton, Alberta that shelters a number of people. Many of them are displaced from inner-city

areas by rising housing costs; many of them are Indigenous. In this context, the authors seek a "precise and holistic way of attending to place" (30) by creating a series of "soundscapes" that they unpack and combine in various ways. In their recordings of "joggers, dogs, children playing, snippets of conversation, wind, bridge sounds, many birds, and the ubiquitous traffic," the authors find traces of stories (48). These are stories of land loss, treaties, persons rendered homeless within their own traditional homelands, economic shifts, poverty and incarceration, ancient patterns of interaction with the natural world and its creatures, and more. The authors' ideas for listening—not only to human speech but to *all* sounds—suggest a fascinating and (at least to me) novel approach to learning and telling stories that are firmly located in place. At the same time, it extends ideas about who (or what) counts as a "research participant" to an extraordinary and thought-provoking degree.

The final chapter in the opening section of *Activating the Heart* features a highly technical discussion titled "Re-valuing Code-Switching: Lessons from Kaska Narrative Performance." Here, Patrick Moore argues against a tendency among academic researchers to devalue stories in which bilingual storytellers move back and forth between an Indigenous language and English. This scholarly preference, Moore judges, betrays an outdated notion of cultural authenticity that privileges cultural artifacts that can be construed as somehow uncontaminated by influences outside the culture of origin. In his contrasting view, movement between languages—a form of code-switching—can reveal stories within the story. These traces supply information about the speaker's personal history, for example, or the gender dynamics within communities that have distributed certain types of learning exposures unequally to men and women. Code-switching across languages suggests, moreover, a storytellers' high degree of skill—the ability to identify just the right word, regardless of origin, to communicate a thought to a specific audience. These are reasons, Moore concludes, to privilege rather than devalue bilingual texts and their tellers. This perspective easily generalizes, I would add, to research involving cultural objects other than texts.

The second section of *Activating the Heart* takes up the theme of "Storytelling to Share" and considers the power of stories to "convey significant lessons, as well as to engage different audiences in knowledge exchange" (xv). This section opens with Kendra Mitchell-Foster's and Sarah de Leeuw's "Art, Heart, and Health: Experiences from Northern British Columbia." It discusses a well-conceived "arts-based approach" for bringing together groups of persons residing both inside and outside of an Indigenous community. These groups—one composed of persons who had or were planning careers in health and medical professions, one composed of members of a First Nations reserve—engaged together in activities such as crafting pottery, masks, and narratives. Building on the foundation of shared food and creative process, participants were then invited to tell stories, with special attention to their own ideas and experiences relevant to health and well-being (100). As one participant told facilitators, "Making 'good art' was not the goal of ArtDays; instead, it was to explore the role of art in health and healing" (106).

Given my own professional commitments to culturally-relevant health research conducted in partnership with Native communities, this chapter was a favorite. It leads readers to imagine similar projects for bringing together reservation residents with persons who, while existing largely outside those communities, may nevertheless prove vital to tribal life: providers of law

enforcement, legal and social services, educational or recreational opportunities, and the like. In my own experience, shared creative process allows for interactions that are not only mutually informative but also affirming and even joyful. Such shared activities not only allow populations to communicate specific information and ideas about themselves. They also build a strong foundation of shared memory that can influence how people interpret future interactions of a more challenging variety.

Jasmine Spencer's following essay, "Grandson, / This is meat": Hunting Metonymy in Francois Mandeville's *This Is What They Say*," addresses itself to very different way of sharing and responding to storytelling. It offers a highly technical application of the "cognitive linguistic theory of frame metonymy" to the storytelling of Metis-Chippewa trapper Francois Mandeville (1878-1952). This chapter draws attention to textual patterns, especially the teller's development of a recurrent motif (meat and the eating of meat), and will speak mainly to readers with very specific disciplinary expertise.

Pages of dense argumentation and analysis lead Spencer to conclusions such as "the human as a positional construal of narrative topography must constantly be rearticulated" and that "[o]ntological sympathy—alignment, homophony, polyphony—is essential to the perpetuation of self and other" (139). Volume editors characterize this essay as an invitation to see the story themes of hunting and trapping as "the generative spaces through which indigenous epistemologies spring forth" (176). That they offer no further elaboration will, however, make it difficult for many readers to judge exactly how this may be true.

The final section of *Activating the Heart* explores the theme of "Storytelling to Create." It includes "sleepless in Somba K'e," a short poem by non-Indigenous author, Rita Wong. Dedicated to the Coney River, Wong's exploration of "dimensions of community, environmental issues, and water-based ecology" encourages readers to meditate on how the river's story articulates with the stories of human and other-than-human lives. It exemplifies, the editors observe, storytelling as "a form of respect and reverence for the traditional homelands of the Yellowknives Dene, upon which [Wong] found herself a visitor" (176).

A following chapter by Metis author Bren Kolson, "Old Rawhide Died," illustrates the power of story to richly evoke place, time and relationships. Told from the perspective of a little girl growing up in an indigenous community in Canada's Northwest Territories, it relates how a radio storyteller became an important element in family life.

The final chapter is Zoe Todd's "Metis Storytelling across Time and Space: Situating the Personal and Academic Self Between Homelands." Identifying herself as an Indigenous person (Metis / otipemisiw) raised in her Canadian homeland, Todd describes her transition, almost two decades ago, to living and working in Scotland. Beginning with a story, she goes on to discuss the role of storytelling in helping her to define and shape relationships with colleagues and research partners. She also devotes considerable attention to thinking about how stories, and especially their roots in the natural world, have spoken to, reminded her, grounded her. Her thoughtful reflections will interest the many Indigenous people who likewise live and work away from their traditional homelands.

The editors' Introduction and Conclusion highlight the contributions of the collected essays to larger ideas. Here Christensen, Cox and Szabo-Jones conclude that,

[a]cross the chapters, two main themes emerge: first, storytelling as an approach to knowledge sharing...and, second, storytelling as a political and epistemological act in taking back space for Indigenous ways of knowing (and at the same time creating new spaces for other culturally embedded ways of knowing within the Eurocentric academy" (171).

The volume's development of the first theme is beyond argument. Contributors have explored storytelling—what it can do and some innovative ways of doing it—in diverse, interesting and instructive ways. By contrast, its treatment of the second theme may engender some disappointment among readers who otherwise find reasons to praise this collection.

While both individual chapter contributors and the editors return repeatedly to the theme of epistemology, no one supplies a formal definition. Comments scattered throughout the work suggest to me that the authors typically intend the term in its most general sense to reference formal and informal philosophies of knowledge: the sets of assumptions circumscribing ideas about what knowledge is and how one gets it. Definitional issues aside, I also found it somewhat challenging to unravel exactly how the concept articulates with the volume's other arguments.

Readers in search of clarity on this subject must put together discussions from different parts of the book. On the basis of such efforts, I concluded that the editors situate their own epistemological inquiries in view of what they seem to conceive as *two* broad and competing philosophies of knowledge. On the one hand, they assert that "[a]cademic research remains largely rooted in colonial ways of seeing and knowing (for example, privileging research methods and forms of communication geared towards acquiring information to provide concrete outcomes)." This orientation contrasts with their own, Indigenous research priorities, which are "aimed at entering open-ended, long-term relationships" (xi). The editors identify additional distinguishing features of Indigenous philosophies of knowledge when (in a reflection on the volume's title) they summarize that, "Activating the heart through storytelling places emotion, relationships, reciprocity, recognition, and justice at the centre" of research interactions (178). They further underscore the idea of two distinct philosophies of knowledge with contrasts between such terms as "Eurocentric scholarship models" (xiii) as over against Indigenous "community-based knowledges" (xii).

Individual chapters in the volume elaborate the idea of a seemingly similar philosophical binary, as when Mitchell-Foster and De Leew characterize "non-Indigenous world views and ways of knowing" as focused on "the head" and Indigenous views as focused on "the heart." While the first incorporates a "bias toward logic...and analytic thought," the second celebrates "feeling...and emotion" (91-92).

Such distinctions invite very significant questions. Do we, as scholars aspiring to relate respectfully to Indigenous philosophies of knowledge, really wish to sign over exceptional rights to "facts," "concrete outcomes," and "logic" to the "Eurocentric academy"? Do we truly accept that work within Indigenous philosophies should be relegated so completely to the domain of emotions, values, and human relationships?

The fundamental problem here is that, by their repeated division of intellectual territory into these objective and subjective domains, *Activating the Heart* embraces the very epistemological dualism that it otherwise critiques as dominating conventional scholarship and squeezing out alternative, Indigenous perspectives. Epistemological dualism—with roots in the philosophies of Descartes, Aristotle, and Plato and other Western thinkers—posits that mind and body, self and other are irremediably separated. It consequently constitutes claims deriving from different types of observations as subjective and objective, which it treats as unequally reliable. Within the confines of epistemological dualism, claims associated with the experiences and values that *Activating the Heart* picks out as defining Indigenous research—emotion, relationality, reciprocity and the like—will always have the lesser part.

To my mind, Indigenous scholars and our allies can hope for more. But that will require us to interrogate epistemological dualism very explicitly and deliberately—and then to move outside it. As a co-author and I have argued elsewhere (Garrouette and Westcott 2013), explorations of Indigenous storytelling *can* reveal assumptions about what knowledge is and how one gets it that are entirely distinct from—but no less intellectually defensible than—those embedded in dualistic philosophies of knowledge. We have argued, as well, that further such efforts may well open genuinely new possibilities for inhabiting the world and engaging its beings. In particular, they may point new ways to articulate claims originating within Indigenous philosophies that are—to borrow a phrase from Foucault's (1972) work in epistemology—"in the true," that exist within the category of claims recognized as candidates for adjudication and designation as *knowledge*.

Contributors to *Activating the Heart* repeatedly gesture toward a similar goal in calls for "a fundamental rethinking and reorientation around what constitutes knowledge in the first place, and how we might cease to privilege certain modes of knowledge sharing over others" (178). While their instincts are right, they do not move us closer to the goal. Their resort to epistemological dualism prevents them from imagining such real departures from what they characterize as "colonial ways of thinking."

None of this should detract from the volume's valuable lessons. Its collection of interesting, well-written essays offer worthwhile reflections and creative strategies relevant to research interactions in Indigenous (and other) communities. Anyone hoping to conduct academic inquiry in Indigenous communities needs to appreciate that they and their participants may hold very different views on the appropriate goals of interaction. They should be reminded that Indigenous communities long ago tired of research that treats their members as "informants" whom researchers from "outside" impersonally tap for information that they go onto apply for their own purposes and exclusive benefit. They need to prepare thoughtfully for entering communities that have endured more than 500 years of invasion and assault and live with the ongoing consequences of such trauma—sometimes with despair and desperation but also with considerable grace and resilience. They should consider the ways that their own work as researchers might articulate with healing communities *and* with their own self-transformation.

The discussions in *Activating the Heart* point, then, to issues that researchers hoping to work with Indigenous communities ignore to the peril of their projects and the wellbeing of communities. It highlights challenges that attend the efforts of even the well-intentioned and

and explores ways that storytelling, and the values that it implies, may help address them. In so doing, the volume invites both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars to take on these challenges, and it leaves them better equipped to do so.

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