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**Luncheon Keynote Address**

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## **Coming Down From the Ivory Tower: Opening Up the University**

I am delighted to be in Saskatoon. I love Saskatoon and I love this hotel; this is my favorite hotel in the country. And I have really good memories of Saskatoon, because this is where I stepped down as president of NAC. It was the only time that NAC ever had a general meeting outside of Ottawa. So that was a good thing. I was also getting out of the line of fire. Little did I know that I would come back to Saskatchewan the following year to live for almost a year starting in January. That was in Regina, though, which I don't like quite as much as I like Saskatoon, with all due respect to the people from Regina here. So, I have a fair history with Saskatchewan and I'm happy to be here in the spring because I never knew until I lived here how beautiful spring was on the prairies. It is one of the miracles of this country. So thank you for inviting me.

The second reason that I am happy to be here is that I have just found this conference phenomenal and want to congratulate the organizers and all the speakers. I'm usually the one who comes to be proactive, but I think that lots of speakers have been proactive. I'm going to have to really ratchet it up to compete. The level of knowledge and discussion here about the kinds of things that matter to me and the processes that I have been involved with in the last ten years has really been quite inspiring. Frankly, I didn't expect to find this at an academic conference. So, I think there is something very important happening here. I want to talk about that and where we can possibly go with it. So, instead of calling my talk "Climbing Down From the Ivory Tower"—because it seems to me that most people here are already in the process of doing that— maybe I'll change that to "Tearing Down the Ivory Tower."

Ovide Mercredi talked about ways of knowing as different than content of knowledge, and I think this is very fundamental to talking about any kind of community-university partnership or, really, any kind of work across diversity. I want refer back to this concept of different ways of knowing as compared to what we know (content of knowledge).

When I became the president of NAC, I was very determined, along with two or three other Aboriginal women, to make sure that we reflected the reality of women in this country, which meant that we needed to have Aboriginal women, women of color, poor women, disabled women, all actively involved on the executive. But I wasn't too bright about how to do that. I knew that I wanted to do it, but I didn't really have any knowledge about how to do it.

I came out of a left background, and while the left has content, the process that is sometimes used is not always very good. As a woman, is the way that you become successful, say a woman doctor or a woman lawyer, to be as much like a man as humanly possible? And that's what I had learned. I had a big mouth and I could debate. I still have a big mouth. I could, you know, fight with the best of them and got paid for four years on Newsworld doing that on "Face-Off." That's what I knew how to do and I was pretty

good at doing it. And I was pretty good at getting attention. But I wasn't too good at listening and I wasn't too good at understanding this question of different ways of knowing.

One time, I think it was the second meeting of the NAC executive, somebody got upset. This woman started to cry and she left the room, and I noticed that the Aboriginal women were physically uncomfortable. So I asked someone what was wrong. An Aboriginal woman said, "We don't do things like that." I said, "Well, explain." She said, "No, it's okay. It's just that we're not used to functioning like that. That is, if someone's emotional, you have them leave the room so they don't bother the rest of us with their feelings." I said, "No, please explain." She explained that, in Aboriginal culture, emotions are part of what's going on and that if you want to understand what's going on, and if you want to make a good decision, you have to take those emotions into account as well as the ideas and thoughts that you have.

I wasn't too persuaded by that, but I wanted to be inclusive, and so I listened. I said, "Okay, let's try that." We talked about it, and agreed to try a new approach. If

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someone was feeling badly or even feeling happy, then we would give them space to express that. I was a little worried, to tell you the truth. I was worried that this was going to turn into a touchy-feely new age kind of thing. But what happened, instead, was really quite remarkable. What happened is that we became more efficient, because people felt able to express their feelings at the time and we could take

that into account in our discussion. This was as opposed to what they used to do, which was to become really angry or really upset about something and then cover it up or walk out of the room, and then, three agenda items later, return and hit the group on an issue that had nothing to do with our current discussion. Of course, by then, we couldn't properly sort it out because it wasn't relevant to the current issue being discussed; it was relevant to what was discussed a half hour ago when they had repressed their feelings.

So, what happened was that I started to realize that there were different ways of doing things that made a lot more sense than the ways that I knew. I started to listen more and learned more, and I think that understanding that there are different ways of knowing is central. It doesn't, however, mean that your way of knowing in academia is not useful or important—what Ovide Mercredi called the Eurocentric way of knowing, or what I would call the patriarchal way of knowing, which is basically, "I know better than you," that way of knowing. The other patriarchal way of knowing is, "You better do what I say or else." That's the way that education often gets done, with the teachers basically saying, "You do what I say or else you won't get a good mark, you'll get kicked out of school, you won't succeed." That's the way that academia seems organized

to me. “You do as we say, you publish in journals, you do this kind of work, or else you won’t get tenure, you won’t succeed, you won’t be accepted by your peers.” It sounds kind of simple, but it is very powerful.

It’s so powerful that when women came into academia, they had to fight for a space, via Women’s Studies, for different knowledge; that is, the knowledge about women. Also at the time, if you look at early Women’s Studies battles, while fighting for a different way of knowing there also came the feminist way of knowing, which was to value the experience of women’s lives because, after all, feminist theory began through consciousness raising groups. Women were talking about what they had suffered, what they wanted, what they desired. And that was a way of knowing that was valued in feminist theory. When Women’s Studies began, the idea was to challenge the way of knowing academia and bringing in the new knowledge. And they succeeded dramatically and wonderfully.

When I went to university, I didn’t read a single book by a woman. If you looked in the library under “women,” there would be next to nothing there. And so feminist scholars have brought this huge body of knowledge to the university. But in the way of knowing, feminist scholars, by and large, have adapted to the university structure. Why? Because it’s the only way you can be successful, it’s the only way you can make your mark, it’s the only way you can have power inside the institution. Often, by the time you get there, you forget why you worked so hard to get there. You forget what it was that got you there.

To see another group of people who understand the importance of different ways of knowing beginning to work, I see another opportunity to challenge the patriarchal Eurocentric hold of a particular kind of way of knowing in the academia that keeps universities from playing their powerful societal role. So, I am very inspired by this conference.

The second thing that I want to talk about concerns what Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond said about the difference that difference makes. We were ahead of our time in challenging a lot of the ideas in the women’s movement, namely, that the white middle class feminist experience was the authentic women’s experience. And what we learned in the process of trying to bring women of color and Aboriginal women to leadership roles was that there are different perspectives in how we see reality. This doesn’t mean that reality doesn’t exist, but when someone asks on the first day, “How do we know who is authoritative when we go to the community,” the answer is, “We don’t know who is authoritative, but the way in which to get an authoritative voice is to hear many voices.” That’s how you get close enough to an authoritative voice. We don’t accept the authoritarian voice any more in the women’s movement, and many young people no longer accept it. The authoritarian voice is some institution telling us who is the authoritative voice, about which journals are the authoritative voice, or deciding who gets elected prime minister or elected president of an organization.

What we are starting to understand is that to get the most authoritative voice—or, in journalism, we talk about achieving objectivity—the best way to arrive there is through multiple subjectivities, through multiple perspectives. Because my experience in the world is as a white middle class Jewish feminist who was born in the United States, there might be a few other things I won't go into. It's different than the view of the world of someone who is black and grew up in Halifax. And so, by listening to that person, I can understand the world better, more deeply, than if it was just through my own perspective. And those are the kind of differences that makes a difference.

One thing that has impressed me about this conference is the depth of conversations that I very rarely hear at a conference. People are not just talking about ideas and analysis; there is discussion about experience and emotion. And that's very rare, because in our society, both in politics and in academia, we value ideas and analysis too much, but undervalue experience. And so, what this academic-community partnership permits is a way of bringing together those different ways of knowing, of bringing together the theory and ideas and analysis, which western society is very good at, with the experiences of ordinary people and their communities, whether they are Aboriginal people or black people or white people or working class people or poor people. What they have is so deep and so important.

You know, when you hear an elder speak, they never speak with that attitude of “you better listen to what I say or else.” At least none who I've heard have done that; maybe there are some who do that. But they speak from a depth of experience and knowledge that means that people listen to what they say because what they say has a lot of wisdom. It comes from a life long experience and way of experiencing the world. I never thought I would say this in a million years, but even I am starting to say that it isn't just intellectual or emotional, it is also spiritual, but not on the level that we can necessarily name and understand in an intellectual way. It is very powerful and often comes to similar conclusions. I mainly tend to think about things politically, so I think this is very exciting.

This morning, Victor Rubin said that it is not just about having good partnerships, but about transforming academia, transforming the institutions. And everybody I say that to reply, “Oh no, that is too hard to do. We'll carve our place and we'll do right in our place.” But they're so dug in there, and that is right term—they are very dug in. It is the same in journalism, and the same in politics. Where the women's movement has succeeded is the places where there is no vested power, or not much of it. When we have managed to really challenge and break through patriarchy, it has been in those places where there is not much overt power. But there is a lot of power in universities, there's a lot of power in politics, and there's lot of power in journalism. That is what we have to focus on now. We have to challenge that power. We have to overthrow the patriarchy, we have to overthrow the male hold on the monopoly on power. And we need male

allies to do it. Women alone can't do it. And that is why I am thrilled to see so many male allies in this room who understand that that patriarchal hold on knowledge and power is not good for society. There are many men in this room who I know are part of this struggle already, and hopefully many more will join. So I am very happy about that.

Now that I have laid out the big picture, I want to come down to some other ways of accomplishing our goals. We have been trying to do it in political terms—that's my main area. We have to challenge how politics is practiced. We have to involve participatory democracy. We have to empower citizens to reject the notion that we have no option but to elect these guys—and some women—who function in a patriarchal way. You do not have to be a white male to be a patriarch. There are lots of women, Margaret Thatcher, of course, being the most obvious example, who play the role of patriarch.

So, we have to begin to challenge these institutions, how they do things, how they see knowledge, how they see power. And that is what I see happening in this conference—the beginnings of that kind of challenge in a new way, an exciting new way, and I am very inspired by it.

I just want to shift gears a bit to another way of opening up the university. You are talking about university-community partnerships, which is the university going out into the community, working with the community in many ways, hopefully, under the leadership of the community in ways that benefit both. I want to talk about something that we are doing at Ryerson with the Canadian Auto Workers, and that is establishing the Sam Gindin Chair. The mandate of the chair is to make Ryerson a hub of activity through interactions between social justice activists and academics. This is a rather new idea. What we have done is the first step to opening up the University to the community. (And I know that there are some university chairs—the University of Winnipeg, for example—that have already done this kind of thing.) We're saying that whatever shortages the University has, whatever cutbacks there have been, it still has enormous resources to which the community has not had access. For example, we have rooms to meet in. Accessing enormous resources is one thing that we are doing to open up the University to the community. One of the things that we have done is, instead of organizing conferences and having a political program, we have opened up a space to say to people, "Come in to this space and organize yourselves." We'll organize a few cross-sectional discussions, but there are all these popular movements to do great creative things. We'll give you a space to come together and organize.

**We need a different kind of world, a world based on relationships of cooperation, a world based on compassion, not domination, a world based on sharing power, not exercising power over others. The power not just of ideas, but putting ideas into practice.**

It is happening at the global level, at the World Social Forum, where there were ten thousand people in the first year, sixty thousand in the second, and one hundred and twenty thousand people from five continents this year at Porto Alegre, Brazil. At some of the huge antiwar demonstrations, you saw the biggest global protest in human history, which came out of the World Social Forum. You don't read about it in the newspapers, but it is nevertheless a very powerful thing. And we organized a Toronto social forum, initiated with a community partnership where the majority, of course, was from the community. Fifteen hundred people participated—an incredibly diverse group. This is the kind of thing that we are doing.

Additionally, I hope you will participate in the progressive research portal. There are flyers on your table concerning a website that we just recently launched. The idea is to create a database of researchers—academic and independent—to let us know what their areas of interest are, and then activists, students, and others who want to collaborate can go on to the website and find people across the country who are doing similar kinds of policy work. So that it is one kind of approach, rather than a group activity. And you don't have to have a million dollars to do it. It is a very simple idea that came out of a group of academics in Toronto talking to some labour people about needed research. And so I hope that you will all register when you get home. We are hoping that by the end of this summer we will have a really significant database of researchers, and then we will start promoting it across the country and in the community. We are also engaged in working with community groups on an activist school that we hope will be cross-country.

So the idea is to use the resources in the community. We will also be supporting some kinds of research to use the resources in the community and in the university to reach out and bring the community into the university to share the resources. This is not just to share the skills and knowledge, but to share university resources.

So, what I want to say is that I think there is something really important happening in the world today. On the one hand, we have these crazy right-wingers in Washington leading us to a world catastrophe, but, on the other hand, there is resistance happening everywhere I go and everywhere I look. And it's not just a resistance that is opposing war and inequality and exploitation. Resistance is building a new kind of relationship, because we need to challenge the existing form of governance, which is a relationship of domination that we feminists call patriarchy. It is what colonialism is about, what imperialism is about, what war is about. It is about relationships of domination—"If I have the power, I can make you do what I want you to do." That is what the world is about now, and what this resistance is about. Everywhere, here in this conference, if you work with young people, antiglobalization, the women's movement, we have people saying, "Enough." We need a different kind of world, a world based on relationships of cooperation, a world based on compassion, not domination, a world based on sharing

power, not exercising power over others. The power not just of ideas, but putting ideas into practice, and the kind of creative energy that it unleashes leads to new ways of knowing, new kinds of knowledge, new kinds of creativity, and will build to meaningful change. If you look at these, you will see.

This has been the best conference that I have seen and it all came out of the community. It is building a force for change that will not be able to be stopped, and that will create a better kind of world. Our slogan from the World Social Forum is “A better world is possible.” Thank you for letting me believe in that.

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**Q:** Judy, thank you very much, that was quite inspiring. I have two things that I was hoping you might comment on, and thank you for the praise of some of the initiatives that you have heard about here at this conference. I am concerned that in some quarters the idea of community-university partnership is code for corporate domination of the university. I was hoping you might address that, particularly with regards to the federal government initiative regarding commercialization of university research.

**JR:** Well, yeah, it was my fear when I came here that this would be what I heard, but it is not what I have heard at this conference. But, I agree with you, that the reason why the university-community partnership is funded is to sort of cover up the privatization corporatism efforts. I assume that that is part of the thinking in terms of why there is significant funding for this. I’m not speaking about the funders themselves, but their political masters. But my view is that we have to continue to fight the corporatization of the university. It’s about the privatization of the public sector and I think it is a really serious assault on academic freedom. But it seems to me that we can use the community, and it seems that what people in this room are doing is using that opening, that funding for community-university partnerships, to create a different kind of model where the university becomes so essential to the community and the community so essential to the university, that it will be much more possible to resist the corporatization and the idea that university can sell itself to the highest bidder. So I think that is what’s possible here, and because I’m an eternal optimist I like to focus on the possible and the positive, and that is what I see happening. Maybe I’m overreacting in a positive way, but thanks for pointing that out. If that is true, I agree with you that the danger is there. But I think that the way to counter the danger is to build positive alternatives that can point to a different way in which the university can go forth because the old way is no longer possible. We know that, so we need a new way, and I think that what you’re doing here is showing that direction.

**Q:** Thank you for your comments about the authoritative voice and how it should actually be a voice of subjectivity. But I’m also wondering if it isn’t easy for people to know how to say, “Yes, that fits very well with some of our subjective disciplines but it is still a way of knowing.” I was wondering how you would relate to that.

**JR:** I was talking to someone last night at dinner about the internet, about the discussions that go on in the internet, and open source technology. New ways of knowledge are emerging there, as well, which is about, instead of accepting what an authority says, learning through the experiences and comments of people like you. This person said, “Well, that’s a rejection of science.” I was taken aback, so I had to think about that for awhile. My answer, now that I’ve thought about it, is that, no, it isn’t a rejection of science. It’s just an understanding that science and scientific method is not the only way of knowing. It’s one way of knowing and it’s very good for knowing certain things, but it’s not good for knowing everything. I think that in Western society we use the scientific method as a way of knowing everything. And I think that’s the problem. It’s obviously valid for physics, but it might not be valid for understanding human relationships. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying that nothing is true or nothing is real. What I am saying is that there are different ways of knowing and there are different perspectives to get you to the truth. I think that’s what we have to value—diversity and different perspectives—which is something that we haven’t done. One perspective has dominated.

**Q:** First, I want to say what a pleasure it was to hear you speak. In your talk, you spoke about Women’s Studies. What I am really interested in is that Women’s Studies has created a sort of an idea of stability of gender. In your role in the academy and a spokesperson for Canadian feminism, how do you see feminism embracing different ways of knowing about gender, about the stability of gender in particular?

**JB:** First, I don’t think that I am a spokesperson for feminism in Canada anymore. I haven’t been involved in the women’s movement in a while, so that is a small correction. I said that Women’s Studies started out challenging the ways of knowing in the academy. But it has become institutionalized, and often when things become institutionalized people want to hang on to that power, and that’s what has happened in the women’s movement. Part of what I tried when I was president of NAC was struggling against that monopoly of power of white women who did exactly the same thing that men did to them. In that, they succeeded, although NAC was marginalized as a result. In Women’s Studies, that hasn’t changed yet. I hope that it will, and I think that the way that I am talking about it is the way that it has to change. This doesn’t mean that you have to agree with everyone. I have some serious concerns about some of the ways that transgendered people argue their case, because it challenges what I understand about socially constructed gender. So I think there is a real debate there, but I think that it’s important to listen and to recognize that one perspective, however hard fought, however one has suffered to get into that position of power, is not the only perspective. Never forget what it is to be marginalized after you manage to fight out of it. And I think that’s basically what I said about all kinds of dominant knowledge. It is true also for the institutionalized Women’s Studies programs. They should not be reinforcing one way of knowing, they should be open to these other perspectives and these other ways of knowing. Somebody once said that if you’re not willing to admit that everything you just said was wrong, you’re not

really open to learning. That's something I don't claim to have achieved, but I do think that you have to be open to admit that you're wrong, to learn, and that's not easy if you spent a lot of your life fighting to get where you are. But I think that's the kind of leadership we need now, both in the women's movement and everywhere else.

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