
Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository

11-24-2023 2:30 PM

Giving Death to the Production of Knowledge: Collective Resistance through Testimony

Mitch de Lange, *Western University*

Supervisor: Faflak, Joel, *The University of Western Ontario*

Joint Supervisor: Plug, Jan, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Theory and Criticism

© Mitch de Lange 2023

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd>



Part of the [Continental Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

de Lange, Mitch, "Giving Death to the Production of Knowledge: Collective Resistance through Testimony" (2023). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 9794.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/9794>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact wlsadmin@uwo.ca.

Abstract

This thesis describes the structures an institution, specifically the university, deploys to absorb testimonies of violence in order to strengthen its existing policies, norms, and operations. I consider testimonies by survivors of sexual violence, who demand the end of the current order of the university and its existing policies. Some of these structures are symbolic exchange, the production of knowledge, the logic of repression and liberation, and the work of mourning. I suggest these discursive structures protect the existing boundaries of universities while lending them the authority to speak on behalf of survivors. Therefore, rather than engage in an archeology of violence (creating an archive of violence by speaking on behalf of survivors), this thesis determines the basis for immediate collective action by engaging with Jacques Derrida's *The Gift of Death* as well as Derrida's consideration of the specter in *Specters of Marx*. I argue that these texts contain collective possibilities for destroying the subject/other dichotomy that positions the subject to know the extent of another's wounds, to speak in their place, or to offer compensation to them. Moving beyond this dichotomy, I argue that the gift of death signifies a collective space of resistance. By challenging the university's existing functions of exchange in order to reconstitute how it absorbs testimonies of sexual abuse, this space ensures that those who testify will be listened to and acted for immediately.

Keywords

Jacques Derrida; Georges Bataille; Jean Baudrillard; violence; deconstruction; psychoanalysis; the gift; testimony; knowledge production; symbolic exchange; general economy; the work of mourning.

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis examines how an interruption of the knowledge procedures in the university is possible by considering several testimonies of gender-based violence. The primary structure I examine is the repressive hypothesis and how it determines the boundaries, discourse, and location of testimony beforehand. The secondary structure I consider is the production of knowledge from testimony. The final structure I detail is the work of mourning where the university provides compensation to survivors of gender-based violence without any transformation change to its structure. I formulate a response to these structures by arguing for a micropolitics of immediate action through a blend of theoretical influences such as Jacques Derrida's concept of the "gift of death" and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept the "rhizome".

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Faflak for his attention to the detail in my writing and the care he addressed this project with. Without his encouragement and support this testimony would not be written. I hold his advice in the highest regard.

Thank you to Professor Plug for his comments on Chapter One.

Thank you A. for believing regardless. I always wrote this with your story and warmth.

Thank you K.W. for your friendship.

*This project received funding from SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarships (CGS-M)

We were warned about spiders, and the occasional famine.
We drove downtown to see our neighbors. None of them were home.
We nestled in yards the municipality had created,
reminisced about other, different places –
but were they? Hadn't we known it all before?

In vineyards where the bee's hymn drowns the monotony,
we slept for peace, joining in the great run.

— John Ashbery, “Ignorance of the Law Is No Excuse”

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Repressive Hypothesis.....	12
Chapter 2: The Production of Knowledge.....	39
Chapter 3: The Gift of Death.....	63
Coda.....	89
Works Cited.....	91
Curriculum Vitae.....	97

Introduction

In 2020 Michael Doyle published an article detailing the violence former University of Guelph track and field athlete, Megan Brown, experienced over several years by her coach. While in high school Brown was groomed by and later developed a relationship with the Guelph coach. Brown testified about the relationship several times to the Guelph administration without receiving any adequate response or support. In fact, Brown details how the University of Guelph refused to acknowledge her testimony and continued to support the coach despite her attempts to seek justice: “so many people wrote me off as a crazy athlete obsessed with her coach” (cited in Doyle). The beliefs of the University of Guelph community provided the cover for the administration to avoid reprimanding the coach for over a decade. The most the university did in response to Brown’s testimony while she was an athlete was to “create a new code of conduct and implement training on ‘relationships’ for coaches” (Doyle). The university refused to accomplish the bare minimum, which would be to investigate the relationship Brown had with her coach and report the violence. Brown’s testimony thus suggests that the university is more concerned with protecting its existing boundaries and structures despite her repeated attempts to report the abuse and resist the normal functioning of the university.¹

In 2021 Meghan Simard reported her attempts to resist the operations of Queen’s University after she experienced sexual violence on campus. She suggests that her attempts to testify against the abuser and the lack of response from the Queen’s community were “more traumatizing than the rape itself.” Much like Megan Brown’s testimony, Simard’s testimony did not generate any support for immediate collective action against the university. Instead the university community reacted against her and refused to resist Queen’s University, which by its

¹ The only public response to date by the University of Guelph was to apologize to Megan Brown and express they were “deeply troubled and affected” by her story (Doyle).

own silence implied that her testimony was false.² Simard's testimony describes a similar problem that Brown faced. The problem Simard raises is not that she was silenced, repressed, or ignored. The vital issue she demands that Queen's ought to address is that her testimony was absorbed by the established channels of the university with little direct action from members of the university community. By absorbing the testimony, the university might appear as if it is listening to the survivor when it is, in reality, eliminating the particular resistance in the survivor's testimony.

In her 2019 memoir *Know My Name* Chanel Miller addresses the secondary violence she experienced following the University of Stanford's procedures on gender-based violence. Miller details how she was assaulted behind a dumpster on Stanford's campus while she was unconscious and her struggle to attain a sense of justice through the criminal justice system. She testifies that the policies of Stanford not only retraumatized her for reporting the violence she experienced, but also absorbed her demands for the end of violence. Her desire for justice is not simply the desire for the liberal reform of the institution, but a sustained interruption of the space of the university where no one is ever violated again within its boundaries: "we [student survivors of sexual violence] all had a story, many stories. I had come the furthest out of all of them in terms of getting justice. I suppose this is what justice looked like, sitting exhausted with a melted cup of dripping yogurt" (396). Miller situates justice as a concept with gradations and degrees. There is the liberal sense of justice where institutions recognize a "victim" and compensate them for their damages, which is the bare minimum for justice. The other form of justice, which she desires, is a space of collective sharing where her story of sexual violence never happens again to anyone. This is a space that recognizes the irreparable nature of each

² As of 2023 there has been no public response by Queen's University to Simard's testimony for the CBC.

member's wound and advocates direct action against violence and the everyday operations of the university.³ It is through this sense of communal irreparability that Miller suggests survivors are a force for change against the liberal tendency for compensation and reform. Therefore, Miller suggests that there is a justice that must arrive to break through the liberal sense of justice and disrupt the standard procedures of the institution.⁴

Megan Brown responded to the public perception that she was “crazy” and “obsessed” with her coach by claiming that “in actuality, I was a teenager who was deeply traumatized by the situation my coach put me in” (Doyle). Brown’s courage to clarify public reaction suggests that her testimony exceeds any attempts by the university community to situate her experience within a system of knowledge that explains the full extent of the abuse. This movement beyond the appropriate channels of communication points to an indescribable expenditure that cannot be weighed, measured, or replicated through the production of the university’s existing structure (Bataille 9). Her testimony exceeds any possible dialectic, hermeneutic, or closed system that gathers knowledge and cannot be reduced to what the Guelph community describes as “crazy.” Instead it is a site of radical singularity that places the very normative structures of power at the University of Guelph under question. This singularity cannot be learned or discovered by the members of the university; rather members must act immediately as if their own body has been violated.⁵ It is at this point that a survivor’s testimony might compel those who witness the testimony to refuse to allow the testimony to be absorbed into the function of the university.

³ Giorgio Agamben writes in *The Coming Community*: “redemption is not an event in which what was profane becomes sacred and what was lost is found again. Redemption is, on the contrary, the irreparable loss of the lost, the definitive profanity of the profane” (102).

⁴ Walter Benjamin’s distinction between “divine violence” and “lawmaking violence” is relevant: “all mythic, lawmaking violence, which we may call ‘executive,’ is pernicious. Pernicious, too, is the law-preserving administrative violence that serves it” (252). There are instances where divine justice might break into the social order.

⁵ In *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* Kimberle Crenshaw suggests this sort of collective intersectional resistance to the dominant social norms.

While I have drawn upon specific cases of gender-based violence as my primary examples of real-life testimonies of sexual violence, my purpose for this thesis at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism has been to offer an analysis of the cultural modes of production that the university relies on to maintain its structure and authority when collecting information on survivors of violence. In doing so, while I have risked appropriating these cases toward theoretical ends, it has also been my intention to explore the hazards of the harm that results from our attempt to make such experiences correspond to theory, philosophy, or sociology. Especially in the attempt to force the radical spaces of silence of those experiences to speak in the name of theory and philosophy. This only serves to reestablish the same violent operation of the university while dissipating spaces of resistance to its operation. The purpose of my project, then, is not to use these testimonies of violence as examples to theorize a general understanding of violence or to locate commonalities among testimonies to explain the trauma survivors experience (if this were possible). Instead I argue that the conditions for immediate action are possible when there is a sustained interruption of the structures the university uses to protect itself against testimonies of violence. Some of these structures are compensating survivors of violence so that they no longer resist the operation of the university, offering the survivor some sort of compensation, or simply ignoring the survivor. Each of these mechanisms serves to protect the boundaries of the institution while absorbing the possibility for collective action. Thus, this project is not an inquiry into how to reform institutions, or a desire for the institution to acknowledge testimony, or a suggestion for the university to invite survivors back into its existing order.⁶ Consequently, I will suggest spaces of sustained interruption where the

⁶ Lee Edelman suggests in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) that the desire to reinvent the violated back into the existing function of an institution only removes the radical negativity and desire for the end of the symbolic by the violated (102).

discursive protocols universities use are dismantled. I have chosen the space of the university as the site for this project because of its lack of response to survivors as well as its record of using testimonies of violence in the production of knowledge. I see this function as a site of exchange where violence becomes a symbol that no longer signifies the visceral realities of the harm a survivor experiences.⁷

In choosing the site of the university I am aware that there are forms of sexual violence that occur in a variety of spaces with different social and economic conditions that effect a survivor's experience of violence. I am also aware that by considering the testimonies of university students, I take their stories up while leaving other stories unrepresented. However, as I will suggest throughout this thesis, the problem of sexual violence is *not* that it is not spoken enough about. After Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality*, I call this assumption the logic of the repressive hypothesis. It is the assumption that revealing more stories about sexual violence will result in the emancipation of the subject that is violated. I will suggest that this logic is a function to maintain the authority of universities. The university requires authority to take up the history of the oppressed and offer them liberation on *its* terms. For these reasons, I will not attempt to represent as many stories as possible or to speak in the place of survivors that do not have the position, authority, racial background, class, or privilege to testify. Those that remain silent and refuse the symbolic order force the very order to confront its own death. I will suggest that this is the basis for a collective micropolitical community that acts to end the state of violence regardless of whether a survivor testifies or not.

⁷ Baudrillard describes this in *Symbolic Exchange* as the endless exchange of signs and the advent of the hyperreal which is more real than concrete relationships. In later chapters I apply this notion of exchange to suggest the resistance in testimonies is absorbed through an overabundance of representation.

Overview and Theoretical Background

The primary theoretical influences on my efforts to break into the symbolic order of the university can be traced through Derrida's writings on the impossibility of appropriating discourse, particularly in *The Ear of the Other* (1985), *The Gift of Death* (1999), *Specters of Marx* (1994) and *On the Name* (1995). Derrida's analysis of the paradoxical relation between expression and the inexpressible is central to my understanding of survivor testimony. When a survivor takes up the risk to testify to what Marie Morin labels as "a community of witnesses," that community must act beyond responsibility for the safety of the survivor (1). However, as Derrida suggests, those who listen to a given testimony inevitably privilege what is present and obvious in the testimony—the testimony's truth content—over the survivor's demands for justice that exceed the limits of their expression ("From Restricted" 270). The reduction of the demand for action to a mere understanding or recognition of the testimony is inevitable because the community of witnesses has established modes of collecting information, understanding discourse, and absorbing dissent. Therefore, I want to move away from considering survivor testimony as a counter position to established institutional structures that requires acknowledgement or recognition. Instead I argue that testimony communicates an experience of violence that cannot be integrated into any counter position to the institutional order and demands immediate action against that very order. That is to say, the testimony breaks with the classical dialectic of position/counter position in the university because it places a demand on the community that they act against the structures that support their class position, authority, and role in the community. Georges Bataille describes the other side of production as an "unproductive expenditure" or excess that cannot be captured through the logic of a position/counter position, positive/negative, pleasure/pain binaries of the principle of conservation (118), each of which

necessarily determines “human” behaviour in a preestablished system of knowledge. However, Bataille suggests that cultural modes are shaped by excess rather than this principle of conservation.⁸ This is also the case when a survivor testifies. An excess of signification develops surrounding the testimony in media, artforms, and discourse. Is the testimony true or false, right or wrong, passive or active, male or female, good or evil? This excess signifies the pleasure “subjects” take in consuming mediums depicting violence,⁹ which merely serves to reproduce the same symbolic and political order. The task is to break with this overabundance of signification to determine how to act for the survivor without thought, to impulsively break with the system of signs that undermine the survivor’s resistance through the excess.

Derrida writes on the excess that governs testimony through his description of the secret: “one can stop and examine a secret, make it say things, make out that there is something there when there is not”; further, “one can try in this way to secure for oneself a phantasmatic power over others” (*On the Name* 30). Here Derrida articulates the possibility that testimony could be absorbed by the established discourse of a community without any of the members attending to the ways the testimony interrupts the symbolic order. In university settings the overabundance of signification and its excess risks re-traumatizing survivors, forcing them to relive the scene of their violence with each new sign used to represent their experience. For instance, in 2021 Western University sent a mass email to the student body with a survey designed to collect

⁸ In *Visions of Excess* Bataille describes the principle of conservation as “the use of the minimum necessary for the conservation of life and the continuation of individuals’ productive activity in a given society; it is therefore a question simply of the fundamental condition of productive activity” (118).

⁹ There is a recent trend in television and film following the MeToo Movement to depict scenes of sexual violence to a mass audience. It is unclear whether the scenes are interjecting against the realities of sexual violence or if, in their overabundance and repetition of violence, the viewer is supposed to derive some sort of aesthetic pleasure in the representation of the violence rather than act to put an end to it. For instance, *Blonde* (2022) represents the repeated sexual violence Marilyn Munroe experiences as if this offers some sort of interjection against the current state of violence. *Anatomy of Scandal* (2022) depicts the violence the protagonist experienced repeatedly throughout each episode of the series through flashbacks.

information on the “legal services available to victims and survivors of sexual violence” (“Policy”). The survey absorbs the resistance in testimony because a survivor must testify through its pre-established questions. The survivor can only fill in the questions from a scale of 1-5 rating their experiences with gender-based violence support. The survey suggests that the university has less of an interest in implementing concrete change than in controlling potential avenues of resistance to its operations. The survey, then, is one instance where the university controls a survivor’s desire for justice, while feigning its neutrality and authority to arbitrate over the survivor’s damages.

My first chapter will argue a collective space of immediate action occurs through the destruction of the subject/other dichotomy that governs responses to violence. Under this dichotomy, when responding to violence, it is the responsibility of the subject to take up the case of the other and invite them into the existing structure of the state, what I argue is a form of secondary violence.¹⁰ Though Butler might shift the subject away from Heidegger’s binary between the authentic self and the inauthenticity of the self in *Being and Time* (1920) toward a subject that determines itself against the backdrop of various discursive, historical, and social limits (“Giving an Account of Oneself” 20), I argue this shift cannot end the state of violence in the immediate. When the subject positions themselves in relation to these traditions, practices, and knowledge structures the subject might very well become responsible, but it is always on the terms of the *current order*. Thus, I argue it is necessary to violate this “ethical” sense of responsibility and thereby end the current state of violence that depends on the liberal ethical order. Although Butler does suggest that this site of the subject is shaped and formed by the

¹⁰ This is a response to Judith Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* where the other ought to be invited into the symbolic and political order so it has access to life.

demands of the “Other”¹¹ (20), I suggest that it is necessary to put to death the notion of the subject and the other. There is no need to designate the self against the backdrop of history, social forces, or structures before acting for the demands of a survivor. I follow Derrida when he suggests, through his reading of Soren Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* (1843), there is a “responsibility without responsibility” that must betray ethics itself to break with the laws, institutions, and property relationships of the existing order through the death of the subject (*The Gift of Death* 59). It is at this point the demands of the survivor for the end of violence become the demands of a collective force of resistance.

Chapter One will also respond Miranda Fricker’s work on “institutional silencing” (289) and to Oliver Kelly’s understanding of testimony as “a demand for recognition” (78). These theoretical projects situate survivor testimony as a silenced minority within an oppressive institution. I move away from the silence/oppressive binary because I think it does not capture the ways institutions, especially universities, attempt to appropriate the discourse and nullify the resistance in the discourse. Following Foucault, I do not think there is a silencing of discourse when considering abuse nor is there an absence of those who collect information on abuse. Instead, there is a proliferation of ways of talking about abuse but only in order to indicate where it is acceptable to speak on abuse in institutional settings. Fricker argues that “practices of testimony involve attempts at conveying knowledge to others, but what if those others do not, cannot, or will not, hear? At this point perhaps, the speaker is silenced” (289). But she does not consider the apparatuses that absorb testimony and limit its potential to destroy the structures of power that are in place.

¹¹ Here Butler refers to *Totality and Infinity*, in which Emmanuel Levinas describes the Other as that which demands that the subject not kill them.

Instead of the subject/other dichotomy I argue in Chapter Two that there are networks of actors that move as one body of resistance to the specific structures that commit violence. In *The Writing of the Disaster* Maurice Blanchot claims that the “disaster” destroys the site of the subject and requires a new relationship to unfold beyond the binary of self/other and subject/object. This relationship is a collective micropolitical network where each actor in the network acts for one another to end the violence of the systems that are already destroying them in a local environment.¹² As Blanchot suggests, the demands of the “disaster”¹³ completely overwhelm and destroy the subject’s attempts to formulate itself against the outside through its collection of knowledge, the classical Hegelian dialectic of recognition through which the subject forms an identity by differentiating itself from the other. I argue that the point at which it is no longer necessary for a subject to form itself so it can respond to the other interrupts the subject’s formation through the production of knowledge, the work of mourning¹⁴, and symbolic exchange. I describe these processes in detail in Chapter Two, each of which works to produce the knowing subject with the other exterior to it.

I then argue in Chapter three, relying on Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* and Walter Benjamin’s angel of history from the “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” that the space where the subject dies is a point where action occurs.¹⁵ Derrida suggests this possibility through the haunting of the specter. The specter is an unnamable, ghostly presence that cannot be

¹² The Book of Ruth exemplifies this small scale micropolitical force: “Don't force me to leave you; don't make me go home. Where you go, I go; and where you live, I'll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god; where you die, I'll die, and that's where I'll be buried, so help me GOD—not even death itself is going to come between us!” (1:16-17)

¹³ The “disaster” is not simply the outside to the interior of the subject for Blanchot. It is a force that destroys the notion of the subject because it is so inaccessible as the force of the disaster that breaks open the subject and wounds them irreparably.

¹⁴ See Derrida’s *The Work of Mourning* and Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia.” I take up the work of mourning at greater length in Chapter Three.

¹⁵ Benjamin describes this space in the *Theses*: “the strait gate through which the messiah may enter” (264). I see this as the opening for action against the violence of the university.

absorbed into language, hermeneutics, or psychoanalysis. Because it cannot be captured by the production of knowledge and remains outside any system of mourning, it demands a form of justice that goes beyond the laws and juridical norms of institutions. The specter refuses to cease haunting the liberal tendency to compensate and absorb its demands until violence itself ends. I suggest the wounds survivors witness are one such haunting of the specter demanding immediate retribution.

My focus on the specific demand of a survivor for resistance to structures of violence throughout the thesis is also influenced by Jean Luc Nancy's *Listening*, which suggests that the philosophic tradition is incapable of listening because of its privileging of understanding (12). I argue that it is through this privilege of understanding that philosophy forms the subject against the other. Thus, to listen to testimony, in the sense that Nancy deploys, means not simply absorbing information but radical action in conjunction with the survivor's demands. I would add that in the context of universities in particular listening coincides with a notion of understanding that occurs when, as Hans-Georg Gadamer describes, the "subject" merges her experiences, traditions, and background with the "object" (279). What is inaccessible is made accessible through the formation of the subject and its collection of knowledge about the other. Gadamer describes transforming what is inaccessible in language within the control of the subject: "in deciphering and interpreting a miracle takes place: the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity" (163). When the subject learns a new truth about the testimony of violence, they listen to understand the sign, and thus separate themselves from the call for action against institutional violence. Nancy asks, "what secret is at stake when one truly *listens* . . . What secret is yielded—hence also made public—when we listen to a voice, an instrument, or a sound just for itself? (15).

Chapter 1

The Repressive Hypothesis

Recent testimonies question how communities respond to sexual violence. The common link between each of these testimonies is a discussion of the secondary violence communities commit when survivors testify to experiences of sexual violence. When a community understands sexual violence through a discourse that is repetitive and applied to every testimony that a community encounters, the specific call for justice is absorbed by the apparatuses of the community. The repetition of the discourse on sexual violence establishes who is allowed to speak, where it is acceptable to speak, and how one should speak on sexual violence. When each of these parameters repeats in response to a survivor's testimony, they absorb and reconfigure the violence of the testimony so that it no longer confronts the established structures of the community. The violence of sexual abuse becomes merely one instance of violence amongst others and the visceral harm that the survivor experienced is nullified because it no longer has the potential to disrupt the normal time flow of institutions. For instance, Megan Brown's statement that "so many people wrote me off as a crazy athlete obsessed with her coach" suggests that it is not so much that the University of Guelph silenced or repressed her testimony as it is that the public could only understand the harm in her testimony in terms of whether she was rational or irrational. The binary not only limits the possibility of her experiences interrupting the institutional order at Guelph University but shifts Brown's resistance to the university into a discussion of whether she falls within an acceptable parameter of normality.

Meghan Simard similarly describes the typical response to her testimony: "all of the reasons [sexual harassment prevention coordinator] provided laid the blame at my feet. I had failed to be the 'perfect rape victim,' and so I had no chances of securing a conviction" (Simard).

The discourse surrounding Simard's testimony becomes a matter of questioning her agency—her ability to avoid sexual violence—and not a matter of the harm overwhelming the regular functioning of Queen's University. And in *Know My Name*, Chanel Miller describes how the public, by attempting to understand her testimony, in turn resists hearing its truth: “[the] refusal is another harm in itself. I deny your truth, it is not real, it does not exist. This will tinker with your sanity. The truth I had known would be complicated beyond understanding” (50). Miller suggests that the attention public discourse gives to her testimony becomes a matter of whether her experience is true or false, such that the Stanford community then avoids putting an end to the structures that perpetuate Miller's experiences of sexual violence in the first place. Although these testimonies reflect different public responses depending on context, in each case the community attempts to shape discussion that denies the possibility of sustained and immediate action against the complicity of university administrators, stakeholders, students and officials.

Taking my cue from recent interest¹⁶ in categorizing the secondary violence communities commit against survivors, I understand it is vital that communities destroy their apparatuses for knowing testimony to avoid absorbing it, using it, or appropriating it for an end beyond the testimony itself. In *On the Name* Derrida claims, “one can stop and examine a secret, make it say things, make out that there is something there when there is not” and “one can lie, cheat, and seduce by making use of it” (30). When a survivor testifies in a public space there is a possibility that administrators or community members could use the testimony to provide a moral lesson the public forces on the identity of the survivor or reduces to a coherent and tidy “narrative” about good and evil. Either case misses the possibility that the difference of testimony bears witness to

¹⁶ In *What We Don't Talk About: Sex and the Mess of Life* JoAnn Wypijewski suggests a shift from reducing sexual violence to harmful binaries such as truth/falsity, good/evil, and passive/active towards categorizing the specific historical and social structures that enable harm (can the survivor testify on their experiences, who loses in courts, the media, and so on).

an experience of violence that exceeds such ends and requires an immediate response. Speaking on this heterogeneity of testimony, Derrida claims that “one can try in this way to secure for oneself a phantasmatic power over others. That happens every day. But this very simulacrum bears witness to a possibility that exceeds it” (30). Despite the possibility of another person or community absorbing the survivor’s testimony and claiming to understand their experience, part of the testimony remains unknowable to the public, an experience of violence that another person cannot account for. In other words, no one else could possibly have undergone the same sort of violent experience and stand or speak in the place of the survivor. The act of testimony itself also signifies that there is no one who has the same history, experiences, and background who could thus suggest the meaning of the survivor’s experience of violence or teach the survivor how to heal from the violence. Instead, the testimony demands that one immediately sacrifice their position of authority, role in the institution, or personal interests for the demand of the survivor in the struggle to end the repetition of violence.

Miller’s memoir begins by locating herself outside the typical binaries that govern sexual violence¹⁷ which points to the interconnection between her and the community she resides in: “I am shy. In elementary school for a play about a safari, everyone else was an animal. I was grass. I’ve never asked a question in a large lecture hall. You can find me hidden in the corner of my exercise class” (11). Miller bears witness to the multiple by suggesting she is already in a collective and interconnected system. Her desire cannot be contained by a single event in the past, evident in her use of the metaphor of grass, suggesting that she already inhabits an interconnected space touching on the community through its dispersed interconnection. Derrida points to the multiplicity of a testimony: “one will never reconcile the value of testimony with

¹⁷ Good and evil, passive and active, true and false, etc.

that of knowledge or of certainty—it is impossible and ought not to be done (31). The value of testimony is not in the single, the unified, or the one of its experiences. This value exceeds single interpretation, the closing off of its movement outside the pastness of the event. While the utterance of testimony cannot in the first instance express its several parts, it still bears witness to the reality of the multiple. It is only in the certainty of knowledge of the survivor's testimony that the multiple is closed off. The survivor is no longer more than the interpretation they might be limited to. This is why testimony must be approached without the desire to produce knowledge or certainty. Instead, it must be approached with attention to the multiple meanings its unique utterance suggests within the micro locale it arrives within. This attention to the network of meaning in a testimony has the potential within itself for action beyond the self, an action that can be sustained against the state and the harm the state propagates through the secondary violence it commits.

Although Derrida stresses the importance of considering how the testimony of others are used in communities, he suggests that there is a double bind for those who bear the responsibility of acting immediately for testimony. For Derrida, when another speaks, shares a secret, or testifies, there is an expectation for the members of a community to respond from a framework of duty that exists in the community. This form of duty obliges a community to respond according to its normative boundaries and laws. As Derrida suggests, “we thus have here a rule . . . which commands action of such a sort that one not act simply by conformity to the normative rule but not even, by virtue of the said rule, out of respect for it” (*On the Name* 9). For example, a university's sexual violence prevention and support centers have a duty to listen to the testimony of survivors and absorb the information in accordance with the procedures and

guidelines of the university. Western University outlines this response in its “Manual of Administrative Policies and Procedures”¹⁸ under the subsection titled “Confidentiality”:

The University will limit sharing of information to those within the University who have a need to know the information for the purposes of implementing the Policy, including providing support, accommodation and interim measures, and the investigation and decision-making processes. (1)

According to this policy, administrators must determine whether the testimony of sexual violence deserves to be reported to other authorities such as the police or whether it is necessary to take further action against the perpetrator. The duty of the administrator is to respond to testimony by determining if the survivor speaks the truth. Based on the administrator’s evaluation of the truth the administrator decides if the survivor deserves legal protection. If the survivor is deserving of legal protection, the administrator sends the survivor to file a report with the police. The procedural function allows the administrator to respond through a higher standard that is supposed to generate justice and support for the survivor.

However, Derrida questions whether this appeal to duty is the most responsible response to testimony: “there would be a concept and a problem [of duty] that is to say, something determinable by a knowing and that lies before you, there before you (*problema*), *in front of you*; from which comes the necessity to approach from the front” (*On the Name* 10). Derrida suggests that the notion of duty asks of the person who respects duty to face a problem directly, without hesitation, and with absolute certainty through the application of procedures. This certainty requires the one who responds to avoid hesitating, deliberating for too long, or thinking about the multiple spaces the survivor inhabits outside the event of violence. Instead, the administrator

¹⁸ This manual can be found in the University Secretariat section of the official University of Western website: https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp152.pdf.

who responds must face the problem head on and assume that he or she knows everything in the testimony in order to apply the procedures and laws of the community. This certainty leads those that listen to take in the language and speech of the other “*in one’s own name and before the other*” (10) in order to reach a verdict on the testimony. This sense of duty, Derrida thus suggests, is often closer to irresponsibility because it applies the law indiscriminately to the name of the other, in the other’s place. This application of the law violently separates the collective space, designating the subject against its other: “nothing would seem more violent or naïve than to call for more frontality, more thesis or more thematization, to suppose that one can find a standard here” (11). This otherwise ‘responsible’ response to testimony destroys the possibility for understanding the greater context to the violence the survivor experiences because it fixes the position of the survivor attempting to end their movement in the locale. In short, it leaves little space for *not* understanding the testimony but also absorbs the demands of the testimony into the state apparatus so that the testimony will not rupture the standard procedures of the institution.

Instead of offering a solution to the problem of responding out of duty, Derrida suggests that members of a discursive community often do *not* respond to the testimony by remaining passive and silent before the demand of the survivor. Of the responsibility to not respond, to avoid using or appropriating a person’s testimony, Derrida claims, “I would avoid errors (errors of politeness, moral errors, etc.) by not responding, by responding elliptically, by responding obliquely. I would have said to myself: it would be better, it is fairer, it is more decent, and more moral, not to respond” (*On the Name* 21). Each of these reasons for non-response to testimony suggests that by remaining silent it is possible to avoid appropriating and using the testimony of the speaker for an end beyond the testimony itself. To remain silent and to hesitate before the testimony of the other could be a way to consider the intricacies and singularities of the speaker’s

expression by avoiding the violence of appropriation. However, non-response also contains an inherent violence: “the first injury or injustice [of non-response]: seeming not to take sufficiently seriously the persons and texts offered, to evince toward them an inadmissible ingratitude and a culpable indifference” (21). A survivor’s testimony calls for those in a community to break their politeness, to rupture with the current order to not remain complicit in the current state of violence. Derrida suggests the desire to respond out of duty to survivors and the desire to act responsibly by not responding places those that listen in a community in a paradoxical situation: their response risks committing violence against the one who testifies; yet if they do not respond they risk the violence of indifference. This paradox suggests the reasons liberal responses to violence fail to adequately address the immediate need for sustained action against the present order.

For Derrida this double bind confronts the limits of language and of the impossible itself. To the question “so, what are we to do?” Derrida responds: “it is impossible to respond to the question by which we precisely ask ourselves whether it is necessary to respond or not to respond whether it is necessary, possible, or impossible” (*On the Name* 22). Derrida’s indecision, his hesitation to conclude that there is *one* possible response that avoids violence, suggests that there should be a reimagination of liberal response. A response to violence no longer requires deliberation, consideration, or hesitation. Instead a response ought to be immediate and collective because the survivor is not the “other” to the community waiting to be invited into the community. The survivor is already within the network wounded in real time. The response, then, must be an incision within the symbolic order where the greater community acts, not to repair the wounds of the survivor, but demands the end of the instruments of the university that promote violence. This collective opening, what Derrida calls an “overture,” allows the

movement “to surrender to the other, and this is the impossible, would amount to giving oneself over in going toward the other, to coming toward the other but without crossing the threshold, and to respecting, to loving even the invisibility that keeps the other inaccessible” (74). The very inaccessibility of the secret, the testimony, the unique speech of the other calls for the new community to move towards the other without possessing the other and to approach the other without taking up their singular name. This impossibility arrives through the listener’s careful consideration of the inaccessible in the testimony of the other. When survivors give voice to their experience of violence, the inaccessibility of that violence calls for the community not only to bear witness by recognizing the limits of their own understanding and how the testimony will never be adequately positioned in a total system of knowledge, but also to fight, without compromise or deliberation against the structures of harm the survivor desires to end until they can no longer harm anyone anymore. The impossible, then, is to adopt the singularity of the survivor and fight for their aims in order to radically rupture any form of knowledge production that reaffirms the dominant social order through the absorption of violence.

The dominant mode of response in the university academy, which absorbs action against the university and ensures the community remains inert and passive, is to create an archeology of violence. This means the members of the academy assume they can speak in the name of the oppressed and emancipate them through the language of the university. In “Cogito and the History of Madness” Derrida argues that in *Madness and Civilization* Foucault not only misinterprets Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* but uses the misinterpretation of the cogito to speak in the place of the “mad”: “in writing a history of madness, Foucault has attempted—and this is his greatest merit, but also the very infeasibility of his book—to write a history of madness itself” (34). Derrida suggests that Foucault’s attempt to speak for those that

are oppressed by reason through a history of madness is impossible. Foucault describes this history as an “archeology of silence,” as if to account for the way that reason has dominated and oppressed madness in history. However, in doing so Foucault commits the very act of violence he is trying to avoid, using the language, discourse, and reasoning of the academy to uncover the history of exclusion of the mad. Doing so, as Derrida points out, commits the secondary violence of positioning the scholar or archive on the side of reason while the mad are the object of study: “to attempt to write the history of the decision, division, difference runs the risk of construing the division as an event or a structure subsequent to the unity of an original presence, thereby confirming metaphysics in its fundamental operation” (40). In writing a history of madness, of reason’s oppression of madness, and assuming that writing the history of madness is a form of resistance against dominant modes of oppression, Foucault is not any closer to acting against the systems that violate the “mad.” I would like to suggest that the common mode of response to testimonies of sexual violence is to follow Foucault and write this history of exclusion in order to integrate the resistance of the violated back into the dominant social order. This history of the oppressed, for Foucault, or any scholar that seeks to write the history of violence, provides the grounds to speak the truth of reason to the darkness of oppression by taking up the voice of the silent and oppressed. As a result, the very notion of oppression that the scholar attempts to free becomes a further source of violation because the scholar must speak from a position of certainty and rational discourse which cannot be rectified with a survivor’s testimony or experiences.

If there is a possibility to speak on the violence that occurs against those that testify to experiences of sexual violence, this way is not from a metaphysical ground of certainty that perceives the darkness of repression and speaks the light of truth. My project, then, is not an attempt to create an archeology or a history of the oppressed for how those who experience

sexual violence have been silenced. This discourse of the academy cannot generate a genuine rupture in predetermined structures of knowledge but simply repeats the problem of violence against those that experience sexual violence. If those that experience sexual violence are the silent, the ones in the dark, the unknown, then the responsibility of uncovering the truth and applying it to those that experience violence is in the hands of the media establishment, theorists in the academy, sexual prevention structures in the institution, or authorities in positions of power. Further, the survivor's healing is on the terms of the very institution that seeks to know the extent of their wounds and appropriate them. The notion that the theorist, the historian, the journalist, the official or the philosopher, must seek the darkness of hidden oppression and uncover the light of truth places those that perceive oppression in a position of knowledge and those that experience the violence in a position without knowledge. The binary between the darkness of oppression and the light of reason perpetually violates the voice of those who experience violence because it does not destroy the structures of knowledge that promote that very violence. If these institutional binaries could be identified for how they absorb the unique testimony of those that experience violence, then it would be possible to consider ways of opening interpretations of sexual violence to consider the radical difference of sexual violence testimony and the ways it might rupture with attempts to appropriate and thus absorb the violence.

The Repressive Hypothesis

While for my project Derrida's critique of Foucault's archiving of madness suggests the impossibility for an archeology of the oppressed, in the *History of Sexuality: Volume 1* Foucault's description of the repressive hypothesis offers a critique of sexual repression and the

production of truth from the repression as a form of control rather than a site of liberation.

Foucault describes the repression of sex in the seventeenth century as “the beginning of an age of repression emblematic of what we call the bourgeois societies, an age in which we still have not completely left behind. Calling sex by its name thereafter became more difficult and costly” (17).

The repression of speaking on sex directly is not a stage in a historical development with identifiable periods that contain a beginning and end. Instead, the repressive hypothesis might be best understood as a function of discourse from the seventeenth century that has contaminated how we continue to respond to contemporary discussions of sex. In other words, it is through the indeterminacy of a history of sexuality, Foucault suggests, that repression became the dominant mode of the discourse on sex: “as if to gain mastery over [sexuality] in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present” (17).

Foucault does not necessarily describe a causal reason for why this repression occurs, but we might infer that the ordering of sex around repression establishes a feedback loop of power. If power organizes the discourse around sexuality through repression, power requires a new subset of discursive formulations to describe sex without directly naming it: “this almost certainly constituted a whole restrictive economy one that was incorporated into that politics of language and speech” (18). The restrictive economy of sex and its violences produces the drive to knowledge through an entirely new discourse on sex, one that uses prohibitions, normalizations, and repetitions to determine the possibility of encountering and speaking on sex. It is on this basis, through the creation of the repressive hypothesis, that sustained action against the institution falters. Instead of acting, members consider how they might take the side of the oppressed and apply the truth of the survivor’s experience to open the repressive hypothesis and

end the so-called silence surrounding the violence. However, this structure of repression and the production of truth only serves the purpose of reaffirming the authority of the institution and its right to offer compensation to survivors.

If the repression of sex generates its opposite function, a proliferation of knowledge and discourses about sex and its practices and identities, the feedback loop suggests that any history of sexuality cannot tolerate secrets. If sex is shrouded, restricted, and repressed, then it is necessary to free sex from its bonds and speak it into existence. In other words, the secret is not really a secret because it is already provided a protocol for how it can be revealed, its content already inscribed in discourse, and its difference subordinated to the discursive function of the institution. This means that the secret, the truth of sex and sexual violence, are known as if beforehand. This revelation is thought to be the truth or essence that might finally eliminate the so-called repressive economy. The logic of the feedback loop suggests that if there is a silence around the mysteries of violence in sex, then the way to liberate sex from its violences is to proliferate testimonies of violence. This structure endlessly produces the necessity to speak on violence but also determines the singular event of testimony before it is uttered, written, or testified to. This means that each testimony before it is raised becomes a generic testimony that could stand in the place of all testimonies because it is already assumed to reveal the truth about repression. The feedback loop of repression and production is a closed system that requires survivors to speak in a generic way, to have a specific identity, and to process their accounts of violence through the proper channels within the institutions to which they belong.

Indeed, Foucault writes that the repression of sex from direct utterance produces an incitement endlessly to confess and testify about the truth of the subject's sexuality: "at the level of discourses and their domains, however, practically the opposite phenomenon occurred. There

was a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex-specific discourses, different from one another” (*History* 18). For Foucault, the incitement to discourse organizes and concentrates the agencies of power and determines the possibility of bodies and pleasures. In other words, subjects are incited to describe and thus organize their desire around power through confession. This concentration of power specifically creates new ways of testifying that did not exist before: “all the insinuations of the flesh: thoughts, desires, voluptuous imaginings, delectations, combined movements of the body and the soul, had to enter, in detail, into the process of confession and guidance” (19). Sex, then, is no longer secret or silent but proliferates in the realm of the institution. By requiring the testimonies of sex, the institution generates new ways of confessing so that it can accept its subjects as subjects of discourse and so reincorporate them within its concentration and organization of power. This function sustains and perpetuates power while annulling any form of anger or retribution that a collective force for justice might attempt against it. Addressing the pastoral in the Catholic Church as generating “effects of mastery and detachment,” Foucault states that it is “also an effect of spiritual reconversion, of turning back to God, a physical effect of blissful suffering from feeling in one’s body the pangs of temptation” (23). If one confesses the truth about sex, then they are offered redemption on the terms of the institution through a feedback loop that prescribes the discourse on sex and requires its proliferation as a discourse to cohere its authority.

The endless incitement to speak, to continue confessing one’s sexuality, does not generate a truth about the reality of sex; rather, it proliferates a discourse that moves further from the possibility of a disruption in the present repetition of the discourse. In terms of the topic of this thesis, to be acknowledged as a survivor of sexual violence one must confess in the established channels of the institution in order to be “heard.” However, the established channels

already limit the testimony to a certain position that paradoxically, in the very disavowal of institutional structures, is used to promote the institution further. For example, at Western University in the fall of 2021 there was a mass protest featuring thousands of students along with several testimonies of sexual violence and allegations against Western University's complicity in the violence by enabling traditions of violence during orientation week ("Walkout in Support of Sexual Violence Survivors"). Unsurprisingly, the walkout had the support of the Western administration, despite its greater commitment to holding the university accountable and demanding it change its organization of power. In response to the testimonies, a gender-based task force was appointed and responded to the protests by claiming, "we are hopeful with the collaboration of the wider community, the administrations steps will lead to a significant change in Western's culture." It seems that the protest and disavowal of the university's complicity in the violence reaffirmed the university's very structure and authority. The immediate revelation of the truth of sexual violence by several survivors, in turn, generated a doubling down and production of the university structure: "Western announced its action plan and task force, which includes mandating in person consent and violence prevention training for students, along with hiring additional security staff" ("Walkout in Support of Sexual Violence Survivors"). The power of the testimonies, the disruptive potential in its force for change, was absorbed completely through and as the disavowal of the institution. This disavowal allowed the institution to reaffirm its authority by managing and ordering the present around the affirmation of its authority to reform itself in relation to the violence.

Bearing the full force of a testimony of violence requires a destruction of the force for knowledge¹⁹ that exists in the logic of repression. The state of emergency is continually appropriated, absorbed, and placated by the repressive structure. The repressive structure suggests that there is nothing new in testimony and that it is only another form of truth that will reveal the essence of repression. In “Theses on the Philosophy of History” Walter Benjamin writes: “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency” (257). In this sense, the state of emergency is lost and the urgency of responding to the violence is no longer necessary. To destroy this repetition of repression that determines the possibility of revolt occurring at the level of testimony, it is necessary to incite a real state of emergency. This is a state of urgency where the institution cannot absorb back into itself the accounts of its violences or reaffirm its structure that promotes the violence. Benjamin’s angel of history suggests how a rupturing with past violence is genuinely possible: “[the angel’s] face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees a single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage . . . the angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed” (257). Benjamin’s angel of history does not compromise though it is held down by the weight of past injustices. The angel of history can rise at any moment because of the contingency of the present and make whole what was lost. This is the urgency that must be returned to collective organization around testimonies of violence. The collective, like the angel of history, is already weighed down by the catastrophe of the violated body and does

¹⁹ In *Unclaimed Experience* Cathy Caruth describes the force for knowledge as part of the therapeutic process. The therapist gathers new knowledge out of the analysand’s testimony of violence. This concept will be explored further in the next chapter.

not deliberate about whether it should act. There is no premeditation or thought that the angel of history would like to take up the demand of the violated body in a sustained action against the present order; it is already acting as if its own body has been struck by the violence of the past. This distinguishes Benjamin's position from the archeology of oppression. The archive of oppression merely plays with the abundance of signification surrounding violence and is not concerned with interceding against the excess of signification. This intercession signals the impossibility of an entire discourse in the academy.

The other structure of secondary violence sustained within the logic of the repressive hypothesis occurs where members of an institution assume a survivor can know the full details of the event of violence they experienced. This assumption places "victims" in the position of knowing and, therefore, provides them with the epistemic position of power to convey their truth to the ignorance of the community in order to combat hierarchies of power that repress sexual violence. This possibility might be viewed as the inverse of the other side of the repressive hypothesis where the scholar is in the position of authority to reveal the truth of violence to the institution. Either side of the binary, whether it is the testifier in a position of epistemic authority or the scholar, however, produces the same operation within the university. The survivor is abstracted from the networks of power they inhabit and become divorced from the intimate spaces they share with the members of their community. This separation is palpable in instances where there are cultural debates about whether a survivor speaks the truth or not. Francois Lyotard writes from the perspective of this separation in the abstraction of the "victim" from their intimate, local relations: "either you are the victim of a wrong, or you are not. If you are not, you are deceived (or lying) in testifying that you are. If you are, since you can bear witness to this wrong, it is not a wrong, and you are deceived in testifying that you are the victim of a

wrong” (5). The expectation that the one who experiences violence should speak, name, or refer to how they have been wronged simultaneously places them in a position to be accused of falsely testifying against the institutional boundaries. As Lyotard suggests, the one who testifies is in an impossible situation because of the juridical understanding of damage. The term “damage” has come to symbolize the notion that the testifier loses the “means to prove the damage,” because to feel the need to testify to a wrong means there were no witnesses who experienced the event alongside the survivor (5). As a consequence, the inability to prove the damage, loss, or violence alongside the incitement to speak on sexual violence leads to the “impossibility of bringing [the loss] to the knowledge of others, and in particular to the knowledge of the tribunal” (5). The impossible position in which the repressive hypothesis places the survivor denies the possibility of the coming community²⁰ because it becomes difficult for the survivor to escape the logic of this binary once they have been forced to speak truth to oppression. Chanel Miller gives a first-hand account of the difficulty of the bind: “victims are often, automatically, accused of lying. But when a perpetrator is exposed for lying, the stigma doesn’t stick. Why is it that we are wary of victims making false accusations?” (224).

Again, the logic of repression governs this double bind whereby the survivor is asked to speak, yet speak falsely, because the hypothesis itself is an attempt to make sense of the incoherencies, ambiguities, and secret parts of their testimony. The survivor experiences greater violence because the structure of interpretation demanded by the repressive hypothesis projects the survivor as a one-dimensional, knowing subject that has the necessary agency to combat repression itself. The rigidity of this interpretation abstracts the survivor from their concrete

²⁰ Giorgio Agamben describes this community in *The Coming Community* where “humans could, that is, not be-thus in this or that particular biography, but be only *the* thus, their singular exteriority and their face, then they would for the first time enter into a community without presuppositions and without subjects, into communication without the incommunicable” (64).

movements in the network of the greater system and thus denies the secret²¹ part of themselves that cannot be appropriated by systems of knowledge. In *The Gift of Death* Derrida articulates the notion of the secret as incompatible with experience and, therefore, knowledge: “the secret for me is what I can’t see, the secret for the other is what is revealed on to the other, which alone she can see” (91). The secret refuses to be captured by the production of signification to explain the violence the survivor experiences because the survivor already moves beyond the economy of interpretation that wishes to subdue it and to make the experience work for some end that could end repression. However, the very notion of the secret challenges the possibility of using testimony for an end because “by disavowing the secret, philosophy would have come to inhabit the misunderstanding of what there is to know, namely that the secret is incommensurable with knowing, with knowledge and with objectivity” (92). This very incommensurability of the secret and its constant movement outside the violence of the repressive hypothesis suggests that attempts to determine whether the survivor is telling the truth distract from enacting the death of the current order and only serves as blockage in survivor’s movements of resistance.

Despite the incomprehensible gap between the secret and knowledge, the repressive hypothesis persists as a model for attaining the “truth” of power and sexuality. In 2002 The Boston Globe published an article titled “Church Allowed Abuse by Priest for Years” that led to the criminal prosecution of five Catholic priests. The article names members of the Catholic Church hierarchy, especially Cardinal Bernard Law, who knew that a priest named Father John Geoghan sexually abused children. The article claims that in response the Church relocated Geoghan to several churches over three decades, thus eliminating any evidence of wrongdoing

²¹ In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari suggest the secret is a collective microcosm that is always in flux, moving beyond the perception of the state apparatus in its resistance to it: “to render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think . . . to reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I . . . We have been aided, inspired, multiplied” (3).

by the church hierarchy by actively maintaining silence around the children's testimonies. As the Globe Spotlight Team, the group of journalists tasked with uncovering the truth of the sexual abuse, writes, "Law knew about Geoghan's problems in 1984, Law's first year in Boston, yet approved his transfer to St. Julia's Parish in Weston" (Carroll et al). What is particularly troubling, however, is how the article emphasizes the Church's act of repression rather than focusing on the specific networks of violence that were enacted against the children. The initial violence the children faced is coupled with a secondary violence—the violence of closing off resistances to the specific local actors in the network that played a part in normalizing the violence of the Church. For instance, by ignoring the harmful impact of the article itself and expressing the "evil" of the priests, the Globe acts as the sole authority to speak on behalf of the children and seems more interested in justifying why it *ought* to write on the sexual violence than allowing for the violence the children experienced to disrupt knowledge structures and predetermined modes of understanding violence. The very name Spotlight Team suggests that the task of this media establishment is to enlighten the darkness of repression, to uncover truths hidden by structures of power and to continue the same operations of power through the repressive hypothesis.

In "Silence and Institutional Prejudice" Miranda Fricker claims that institutions do not act adequately upon testimonies of violence because they are unable to hear or understand their truth: "practices of testimony involve attempts at conveying knowledge to others, but what if those others do not, cannot, or will not hear? . . . A first formulation might be: When a speaker *should* be heard, but is not heard, he is silenced" (290). Fricker assumes that, through the dominant mode of the repressive hypothesis that is the norm for academia, the subject who experiences violence can speak with certainty of their experiences and communicate the truth or

essence of their experiences to an entire community. In other words, there is an implicit expectation that those who are harmed should name that harm in order to receive justice and acknowledgement on the terms of the existing institution. As a consequence, it is those who are in a position of power that need to change their epistemic position in order to “hear” the one who experiences harm: “if you are the one doing the crushing, then not only are you not in a position to know what it is like to be crushed, but also—and this is a separate point—your general picture of the social world . . . will be an unhelpful partial perspective, the perspective of the powerful” (288). By arguing that those in power simply need to change their epistemic position, she assumes violence would end if only those who do not have knowledge would gain liberation through the work of the philosopher scholar that imparts knowledge to them. Fricker, thus relying on a form of Plato’s philosopher ruler, limits the potential for radical action to an epistemological problem. Instead of understanding testimony merely as an epistemic dilemma, as we shall see in the next chapter, we need to shift from knowing testimony to destroying the structures that limit action such as the repressive hypothesis and the production of signification surrounding the event of violence. This break with institutional violence might offer a rupture with the present order of placating violence and the end of those who seek to absorb and mitigate the harsh realities of violence to concretize their status as a theoretician or philosopher with the authority to speak in the place of the “oppressed.”

Tarana Burke, the founder of the slogan #MeToo, advocates for seriously maintaining the lived and visceral harm within sexual violence without opting to explain it through the structure of repression and truth procurement. Burke’s movement entered the establishment media in 2017 where the phrase became viral as a focal point for women in the Hollywood industry who claimed they were violated by Harvey Weinstein. She writes: “we’re here to help each individual

find the right point of entry for their unique healing journey. But we're also galvanizing a broad base of survivors and working to disrupt the systems that allow sexual violence to proliferate" (Mosley). The grassroots emphasis of Burke's #MeToo is to offer support and solidarity that meets the singular needs of each individual who experiences sexual violence, while immediately disrupting the structures that proliferate sexual violence.

However, the current manifestation of the #MeToo Movement is much different from what Burke first imagined. In an interview with NPR, she claims that "we are socialized to respond to the vulnerability of white women, and it's a truth that is hard for some people to look in the face, and they feel uncomfortable when I say things like that" (Mosley). Burke suggests that the way the expectation to speak on violence proliferates is that one must have a certain racial identity, a certain class background, or a certain position in society to reveal the truth about sexual violence. This might mean that the refusal to speak on sexual violence contains a disruption of its own because it would pre-empt the further proliferation of institutional discourse and practice on violence as evidence for maintaining existing structures of "support." Writing on the expectation for women to come forward on social media and other public spaces to reveal the truth about the evils of sexual violence, Burke states: "I thought, God, these people are going to cut and bleed all over the internet, which is the very worst place to be exposed and vulnerable in this moment" (Mosley). Burke suggests that the proliferation of media does not result in any change. Instead, the sense of injustice and retaliation is directed inward rather than outward and blocks the flow of justice against the structures of the state that caused the violence.²²

²² In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Frantz Fanon suggests how anger against the colonizer can become an internalized violence that divides the colonized amongst themselves and causes infighting rather than immediate action against the colonizer: "So one of the ways the colonized subject releases his muscular tension is through the very real collective self-destruction of these internecine feuds. Such behavior represents a death wish in the face of danger, a suicidal conduct which reinforces the colonist's existence and domination" (18).

Meghan Simard describes how she was expected to proliferate the details of the sexual violence she experienced to nurses at the Kingston Hospital, the Queen's University Sexual Harassment Prevention Coordinator, and a detective from the Kingston Police. In a 2021 article for *CBC First Person* Simard recounts that "at one point, [the harassment coordinator] interrupted me to ask for more detail about the sexual positions in which I was raped. Despite demanding every sordid detail, she didn't take any notes." The coordinator's desire to know, to understand every detail of the sexual violence that Simard experienced, describes the pressure survivors feel to describe and speak on the details of the sexual violence they experienced. It is not entirely clear in this situation why the coordinator thought it was necessary to obtain the exact details since she is not required to file the sexual violence report. As Simard states, "the meetings with the human rights office and the Kingston Police were more traumatizing than the rape itself", forcing her to relive the event over and over again, resulting in the police and the coordinator refusing to believe Simard did not consent to the perpetrator. Chanel Miller similarly describes the experience of agreeing to testify in court: "sitting in the driveway, I didn't know that this little yes would reopen my body, would rub the cuts raw, would pry my legs open to the public" (35). By agreeing to prosecute the perpetrator, Miller had to describe each detail of the sexual violence she experienced, then have her testimony analyzed and dissected repeatedly by the media establishment. Miller writes that "everything I had recollected, details I had fumbled to provide into that little black recorder, had been typed into transcripts. Reporters must have sifted through them, using my words to construct their own narrative for the public to pore over" (50). The media establishment and its organization of information incited Miller to explain the entirety of her experiences of violence yet absorb and shift this testimony to construct a particular narrative of that experience. This narrative becomes the primary way that the people in Miller's

community come to interpret her and obstruct her movement in the collective space of Queen's University.

Breaking the Repressive Hypothesis

If the repressive hypothesis and the deployment of the incitement to discourse are what determine response to testimony, then how would it be possible to act immediately without compromising the violated and uncounted body within the institution? And further, to what extent would it be possible to avoid a repetition of violence by displacing the survivor's unique experiences through expectations, assumptions, and interpretations of their testimony? These questions are not meant to explain what testimony means for the survivor. As Gayatri Spivak points out within a postcolonial context, "in the constitution of that Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect . . . in the face of the possibility that the intellectual is complicit in the persistent constitution of the Other as the Self's shadow" (24). For Spivak the risk of writing on violence is haunted by the possibility of further epistemic violence against those who experience sexual violence, but also of articulating a whole and constituted self capable of situating those who experience sexual violence as the negative, inverse, or shadow of the constituted self. This risk of epistemic violence is why it is necessary to respond to survivor testimony not by naming what that violence means for the survivor or determining the most effective way of representing sexual violence. Rather my project attempts to break with the production of the sign around violence and thus with the constitution of the subject.

The context of violence, then, is possible to determine when a survivor uncounted or violated by the current political order disrupts its normal operations. In *The Gift of Death* Derrida describes this injunction into the dominant social order by the uncounted:

I pronounce your name, you sense yourself being called by me, you say 'here I am' and by your response you commit yourself not to speak of us, of this exchange of words, where we give our word, to no one else, you commit to respond to me and me alone . . .
(122)

The demand of the uncounted calls for an immediate response. If the survivor is already an actor in the network that I reside in, then I do not need to hesitate or deliberate. I am already there, touched by their voice and their wounds. Derrida's "here, I am" alludes to the story of 1 Samuel. In Chapter 3 of 1 Samuel, God has remained silent for many years to the nation of Israel before finally addressing Samuel in the night by calling his name repeatedly. Samuel does not recognize the voice of God but instead thinks that it is the voice of the prophet Eli. In the story Eli represents the customs and juridical practices of the institution Samuel inhabits. Thus, by the end of the story Samuel realizes that he must not respond to the high priest Eli, the standards and norms of the community, but instead break with these norms and respond immediately to the particular voice of God. Towards the end of the story Samuel states: "speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3.10). Samuel must put to death the customs of mediation separating him from God (he can only speak to God through Eli) in order to act for God. God, then, arrives within the very standards and practices of the institution Samuel is apart of but requires a fidelity beyond these norms through immediate action. This immediate action by Samuel presents the potential rupturing effect of Walter Benjamin's messiah in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "this does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous

empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the messiah may enter” (264).

The voice of God suggests the collective possibility for a communal injunction against the repressive hypothesis that seeks to reaffirm its structure and mitigate resistance to its violences. In *Cruel Optimism* Lauren Berlant explores how John Ashbery’s poem, “Ignorance of the Law is No Excuse,” concretizes what this future locale of shared intimacy might look like when it refuses to shy away from the irreparable nature of violence:

He came up to me.
 It was all as it had been,
 except for the weight of the present,
 that scuttled the pact we made with heaven.
 In truth there was no cause for rejoicing,
 nor need to turn around, either.
 We were lost just by standing,
 listening to the hum of wires overhead.

Ashbery’s speaker moves beyond the subject/other distinction to represent a new relationship that is attuned to the demand of the present. The present is not divorced from the structures that limit the speaker and the collective the speaker inhabits. This present bears the weight of the past and is already touching various networks in the local environment (the wires overhead, the pact with heaven). Thus, this poem offers a vibrant representation of the micropolitical²³ intimacy

²³ In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Deleuze and Guattari claim: “since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. Here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closest as well as farthest away” (3). This suggests that the scene of writing itself is a micropolitical space where collectives form through the agglomeration of shared intimacies. The micropolitical organization of the collective is possible by sharing in the weight of the present and refusing to absorb the networks of resistance into institutional structures.

possible out of the death of the subject/other dichotomy. It is a network lost in the weight of the present, which moves beyond the impulse to ascribe meaning and structure to violence through an archeology of violence. The micropolitical instead considers the various agents²⁴ that touch the small-scale locale and suggests possibilities for moving within it while resisting the reconciliation or reparation of any wound.

Berlant describes the collective that forms in Ashbery's poem by also pointing to the possibility and movement in the micropolitical event of seeing together²⁵:

The event of live intimacy there is in this poem, though, happens outside of the home and the municipality, in an unzoned locale. The event of the poem is the thing that happens when he comes up to me and reminds me that I am not the subject of a hymn but of a hum. (33)

Berlant suggests that a collective encounter with the signification, testimony, or poetry of the other offers the possibility of sustained action immediately in the present. This action avoids matching the unique rhythms of the other's signification to a predetermined interpretative framework or structure of knowledge. It constitutes an "unzoned locale" where one loses the coherency of the self to open to a collective and shared path of resistance because of the very irreparable nature of the violence that a survivor bears witness to. This collectivity does not require anyone to speak a lesson, represent the violence, or help the wounded to heal from their

²⁴ In *We Have Never Been Modern* Bruno Latour explains the shift from subject/object to "actors" or "agents" within a micro locale. It is the task of the theorist, who refuses the history of oppression, to consider all these various actors to determine points of resistance and contacts in the locale.

²⁵ John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* offers a description of this sort of micropolitical locale: "we never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things" (9). There is a collective possibility to see together the relationships in the locale, the structures that wound certain members of the community as well as collective possibilities for action.

trauma. Instead of the certainty of understanding the other's experience, Berlant offers a temporal rupture within the repetition of the repressive apparatus by virtue of the collective.

Berlant suggests that action against anyone who might harm the survivor ought to be accompanied by greater vulnerability in the collective locale: "he and I together experience a hum not where 'we' were but all around, and that hum is temporizing, a hesitation in time that is not in time with the world of drives and driving; nor is it in a mapped space, but in a space that is lost" (33). To maintain the aporia of response, in one sense, is to maintain an embodied moment of live intimacy where not a subject but a community organizes around the wounds of the survivor. This temporalized space occurs by interpretation and interrupting the "hymn" or search for truth, or in Berlant's words, in the moment where we share collectively in the "hum" of acting in full force with the weight of the present against the violence of structuration. Much like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, the "hum" ruptures the present and imposes a potentiality to the present where those that were violated might genuinely achieve some sense of justice through the end of liberal responsibility. The next chapter will thus further explore the apparatuses universities deploy to maintain the circulation of power and the authority to collect information on testimonies – the "hymn" or network of power that the "hum" of resistance disrupts.

Chapter 2

The Production of Knowledge

In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida begins the chapter “Whom to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)” with a question: “Tremble. What does one do when one trembles? What is it that makes you tremble?” (54). The feeling of trembling—the goosebumps that rise across the skin and make me quiver—occur when I encounter a testimony. The radical otherness of the voice that calls me to respond, to stop what I am doing and listen, makes me tremble and fear that I will not be able to respond and that I will not listen in the most careful way. Derrida writes that “a secret always makes you tremble. Not simply quiver or shiver, which also happens sometimes, but tremble” (54). This secret might be when a survivor places their experiences before me for the first time in writing, film, or dialogue. I respond by trembling because I do not know the extent of that experience, or what violence will come of us in the future following our resistance. Derrida writes that “we tremble first of all because we don’t know from which direction the shock came, whence it was given; and we tremble from not knowing . . . I tremble before what exceeds my seeing and my knowing” (55). To tremble at the threshold of a survivor’s discourse that precedes me leads me to embrace the gaps that arise from not knowing—to sacrifice what I know before the other as a gift. This would be the call that exceeds any institutional, categorical, or juridical responsibility. It is also a personal call that exceeds the force of knowledge at work in the notion of listening. But how does this trembling before the call become one of sustained and immediate action?

I now return to Derrida’s notion of giving death to suggest a disruption of the economy of knowledge produced by the work of listening in hermeneutics, which I explored in the previous chapter, and by extension in this chapter, the hermeneutic and epistemic work of listening in psychoanalysis. Within this economy of knowledge, the listener is supposed to produce

knowledge, a lesson, or moral that they absorb and apply to their life or the life of the one who testifies. I argue this force for knowledge is evident in trauma theory through Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and a more recent contemporary response to Freud's text, Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). In both accounts, the survivor represses knowledge of the trauma, and it is the responsibility of an outside subject to guide the survivor to recognize the truth of their repressed experience. The return to the origin by an outside figure raises the question of who has the authority to enter the space of the testifier's experiences of violence and whether the return to the origin of the violence is possible. I will suggest that the subject who desires to return the survivor to the origin might give a gift of death instead, particularly the death of structures of knowledge, like those of hermeneutics and psychoanalysis, when their interpretive and epistemic theory and practice attempt to confront and understand the realities of sexual violence. I contend that this function of theory internalizes the resistances of the survivor and contains their desire for the end of the structures that violate them.

Edmond Jabès poem "At the Threshold of the Book"²⁶ explores the interruption of the hermeneutic and psychoanalytic tradition through a dialogue between two unnamed speakers. The first speaker asks, "What is going on behind this door?", to which second speaker answers, "A book is shedding its leaves." This enigmatic response appears to name a secret or repressed knowledge to be revealed as the poem unfolds. However, their exchange repeatedly refuses the knowledge that might emerge from exploring, understanding, and determining the knowledge that is supposed to be repressed in their experiences. For instance, the first speaker wonders, "what is your lot?", to which the second speaker responds, "to open the book" (17). This

²⁶ Edmond Jabès is a French poet of Egyptian descent. "At the Threshold of the Book" is a part of his collection of poetry titled *The Book of Questions*. In the poem he provides a dialogue between two unnamed speakers in the doorway of one of the speaker's home.

response resists any appropriation of the second speaker's experience, as if they have no knowledge to offer. The second speaker's "lot" is to open the book, in other words, to approach writing as a "threshold" of uncertainty that it is ever possible to know "the book." Accepting that the book is never closed but always becoming and open to interpretation suggests that the book is always a new beginning where the speakers do not exchange their knowledges or history of trauma. In fact, the speaker suggests that "my place is at the threshold" (17), an indeterminate space of silence where there is no signifier that could ensure the listener understands the violence of their experiences. Instead, by disrupting the economy of exchange, the "threshold" signifies the possibility of a new form of relationality where subject, object, and other dissolve into a collective moment of intimacy.

Despite his emphasis on text and reader, speaker and listener, Jabès suggests a radical form of communing outside the limitations of the subject and object relationship explored in hermeneutics or psychoanalysis in their attempt to determine how testimonies of violence are understood and used. This form of radical commune is where one resides at the threshold of understanding another's experience of violence, before relating to the experience, before infringing on the alterity of the speaker by closing it off through a final interpretation that determines the cause of the speaker's testimony, the meaning of the violence, or why the speaker suffers. Jabès' metaphor of the threshold leads to the central question of this chapter: what would it look like to give a gift of radical community by refraining from the expectation that anything might be gained from a testimony of violence? From this question, it might be possible to allow the unbearable reality of violence to disrupt a listener's habitual ways of understanding the violence and disrupt the economy of exchange that perpetuates current forms of violence.

Histories of Knowing

In the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud offers an account of knowledge exchange that relies on determining the cause and nature of experiences of violence in order to reaffirm the positions of the knowing subject and its violated other: “the patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it . . . he is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience” (12). The original event of violence, then, is so violent that the survivor *must* forget it to continue surviving in the present. This means that if the survivor were to confront directly the truth about their past experiences (even if this were possible), the realization might cause irreparable damage to their consciousness. It is through the protection of forgetting the origin of the event of violence that some aspect of the trauma repeats itself in the reenactment of the traumatic event through images, symbols, dreams, memories, or flashbacks in the survivor’s experiences. Freud characterizes this recurrence as repetition compulsion, which requires the analyst to inhabit the space where the analysand is aware of suffering but cannot remember why. The analyst’s job is to return the analysand to the origin of trauma by helping them relive the destructive experience in order to produce an awareness of trauma in the present: “it has been the physician’s endeavour . . . to force as much as possible into the channel of memory and to allow as little as possible to emerge as repetition” (13). In other words, the analyst’s task is to limit the repetition of violence in the survivor’s life so that there might be new possibilities for the survivor to live in the present.

In order to overcome the compulsion to relive the violence in some way, then, the survivor requires treatment from an outside subject who can determine the origin of the violence for them: “[the victim] is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the

past”.²⁷ While the analyst can distinguish between the past and present in the analysand, the structure of repression limits this knowledge for the analysand. The analysand thus remains passive before the analyst’s effort to loosen the repression: “it seems probable that the compulsion can only express itself after the work of the treatment has gone halfway to meet it and has loosened the repression” (*Beyond* 14). In other words, it is the analyst’s interpretation of the origin of violence that produces knowledge of the survivor’s experience. Repression invites the analyst to interpret the cause of the survivor’s actions in the present through the creation of an origin in the survivor’s past experiences. This origin is a site of knowledge that reveals the reason the survivor suffers and why they are unable to move beyond the mere repetition of the traumatic event in their life: “what appears in reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past. If this can successfully be achieved, the analysand’s sense of conviction is won, together with the therapeutic success that is dependent on it” (13).

The phrase “gone halfway to meet *it*,” however, suggests that the force for knowledge addresses the structure of repression rather than the specificity of the experience of violence the analysand bears witness to. Rather than confront the systems of violence that harmed the analysand, the analyst seeks the truth hidden in the mechanical repression that rules over the analysand’s life. Freud’s conception of therapy appears to give the power of healing to the one who perceives, not experiences, the repression: “he (subject/analyst) must get him (survivor) to re-experience some portion of his forgotten life, but must see to it, on the other hand, that the patient retains some degree of aloofness” (*Beyond* 13). That the survivor remains passive against the analyst’s push for knowledge, albeit necessary to uncover the truth of the survivor’s experience, is thus to perpetrate the secondary violence of a different kind of repression that

²⁷ See Freud’s clinical paper on “Repeating, Remembering, and Working Through” where he provides further details on this process.

attends the force for knowledge. Unable to know the extent of the violence they experienced, the survivor is also unable to determine the possibility of healing, which relies on the analyst's ability to interpret the analysand's trauma, not on their demands, unique testimony, or awareness of their own lived experiences of harm.

Although the survivor's recognition of the traumatic event is a beginning point in the treatment of the trauma, it generates a discourse around how listening must operate in relation to the survivor's account of their violence. Listening is the analyst's desire to return to the original event and heal the survivor when, in fact, this return might be impossible. It is only the survivor who has witnessed the event and there is no one who could take their place, look over their experiences, or understand the extent of the wounds that they suffer from. Freud explicitly describes this gap of knowledge when he claims that Tancred from *Gerusalemme Liberata* is emblematic of the wounded figure because he kills his lover Clorinda without knowing why he kills her twice: "[Tancred] slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda . . . is heard complaining he has wounded his beloved once again" (*Beyond* 16). Freud's emphasis is not necessarily on the real impact of violence on either Tancred or for that matter Clorinda. Instead, Tancred's violence exemplifies Freud's theory of repetition compulsion: "there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle" (16). Freud's emphasis on how violence is a component of the repetition compulsion cannot consider the unique voice of Clorinda who suffers from Tancred's repeated actions. Hence, the real and lived experience of the violence that Clorinda faces becomes abstract. It is no longer a cry that might disrupt the desire to theorize and organize violence but becomes a function of exchange. Her loss, a negative expenditure, produces the

positive horizon for theorizing and the authority for speaking on violence in the psychoanalytic tradition.

Freud overwrites the visceral and disruptive form of Clorinda's cry when he claims that she is heard "complaining" (16) after Tancred unknowingly slashes her tree form. By delineating the possibility of her cry as one of complaint, Freud does not encounter the violent heaviness of being materially slashed by a sword. The difference between the way Freud describes the testimony and Clorinda's cry of pain does not suggest a gap in Clorinda's knowledge of her suffering but in the knowledge of the interpreter who reads her testimony. Those who listen to her account—the interpreter, the analyst, the listener, the reader—might attempt to interpret the violence Clorinda experiences by producing significance from her experience, as Freud does. But the gap suggests that there is always a *failure* in attempting to signify the violence that Clorinda experiences. There are no signifiers that could fill the gap between the interpreter and the speaker, the testifier and the analyst, because the experience of violence is solely experienced by Clorinda. This means that it is not necessary to guide Clorinda to the reason or origin behind her wounds, but to listen to her testimony in a way that does not ignore, use, or appropriate her account to develop a theoretical project for why Tancred might repeat the scenes of his violence. In other words, the real of violence, the impacts of its harm, are superseded by an abstract project of theorization that does not move closer to the knowledge of the harm that Clorinda experiences. In fact, theorizing violence merely provides justification for the analyst to interpret and understand the violence that survivors experience.

For instance, in *Unclaimed Experience* Cathy Caruth emphasizes the knowledge that could be derived from a survivor's testimony of violence: "the trauma of the accident . . . remains at the same time in some sense absolutely opaque, both to the one who leaves and also

to the theoretician, linked to the survivor in his attempt to bring the experience to light” (23). The central opacity of the repressed material in the survivor’s experience of violence, contrasted with the theoretician’s attempts “to bring the experience to light,” suggests, through the structure of repression, that there is still an outside subject necessary to reveal the “light” or “truth” of the experience. The understanding that trauma is initially opaque to the listener and survivor is necessary for Caruth because it is through the unknown parts of the violence that the analyst might “generate the force for knowledge” (23). The repression of the violence, in turn, generates a drive for knowledge that makes sense of the violence and designates a shared reality about it between the listener and speaker. The gap between the analyst and the survivor does not leave a space of indeterminable significance but a space that can be used to productively generate knowledge about histories, stories, and testimonies of “trauma”: “it is because he precisely speaks from this impossible space, and asks a question which he does not fully own, that he can also enter her story, that he makes the answer to her story speak more than it can possibly tell” (42).

Although the desire for a shared space of multiple traumas appears as though it might offer new possibilities for healing, it reinscribes the structure of repression and the force for knowledge that is evident in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Caruth’s reading of Freud’s repetition compulsion reinforces the notion that the survivor will inevitably repeat the original event of trauma: “indeed, [Freud’s examples of repetition compulsion] suggest that the shape of individual lives, the history of the traumatized individual, is nothing other than the determined repetition of the event of destruction” (*Unclaimed* 65). Caruth reduces the history of the traumatized individual to the events of their wounding and there is little acknowledgement that the survivor might persist outside the events of the violence through their activities, dreams, and

fantasies. In one sense, the psychoanalytic return to the event of destruction pins the survivor in a constant reference back to their violation, thereby ensuring that the survivor's healing will remain possible through the authority of an outside "subject," which nullifies the survivor's desire for the end of the state of violence raised in the irreparability of the testimony.

The desire to generate knowledge out of the structure of repression in the history of psychoanalysis, which I traced in Freud and Caruth, shares a similar structure to the production of knowledge in the hermeneutic tradition. It is through a combination of these interwoven discourses that provides itself the authority and right to "heal" the violence it perpetuates against survivors. This is not the form of hierarchical power that signifies an obvious force of domination but rather an indiscernible web of normalization and coercion, not unlike Foucault's repressive hypothesis, that positions the survivor at a single interpretative point where knowledge about violence is produced. This web of normalization requires the survivor to return to the scene of their wounds in order to heal them, but in turn limits the possibility for action against the current state of violence. Hermeneutics and psychoanalysis would ground the survivor only in reference to the violence they experienced, as if requiring them to relive that scene repeatedly without considering the need to interject against the present order of violence. For instance, in Chapter IV of *Truth and Method*, Hans Georg Gadamer, similarly to Caruth, argues for listening as a generative and productive force for knowledge that predetermines and normalizes the position of a speaker as an object of inquiry for a listener. For Gadamer, dialogue is essential between speaker and listener because it ensures that the listener (therapist, subject, knower) will bridge a gap in their knowledge to understand the speaker (analysand, object, survivor). When a listener actively poses questions to a speaker, the speaker's voice is absorbed by the horizon of the listener: "*understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly*

existing by themselves . . . in a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on” (317). The fusing of the speaker’s horizon with the listener’s normalizes the power of knowledge creation. In fact, Gadamer writes that when horizons fuse between the listener and the speaker, “it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not our own particularity but also that of the other” (316). For Gadamer, this higher universality is where the language of the speaker is no longer unfamiliar, alien, or extraneous to the listener. Instead, the experiences of the speaker become the point for the listener’s use to generate knowledge about the other. Therefore, when a listener penetrates the unknown depths of the speaker, they produce new knowledge about the other. However, this sense of a universal whole that forms from the speaker’s experience is not neutral. It becomes the central dominating point of interpretation that always determines the position of the speaker. Especially in the event that the speaker describes their experiences of violence, the “higher universality” guides how the listener encounters the survivor and limits the speaker’s radical resistance to the violation they have experienced. In this sense listening to testimony is not a space of action but one where the survivor remains trapped in the listener’s interpretation of the past event of violence.

For Gadamer, the listener’s engagement with the testimony of the speaker creates a new community, but he does not admit to the possibility that this community limits the speaker’s mobility and blocks their desire for resistance: “in a successful conversation, they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are bound to one another in a new community” (387). Here, “the truth of the object” is not neutral though it seems to exist equally between the speaker and the listener in Gadamer’s account of meaning creation. The “truth of the object” must arrive through the listener’s interpretation, and especially when the object is an event of violence, that truth will always remain in the control of the listener. This necessarily follows

because the listener cannot experience the event themselves and therefore must seek out the event of violence to fill in the gaps of their understanding. For Gadamer, the higher community is possible when the listener does not “forget all [their] fore-meanings concerning the content and all [their] own ideas. All that is asked is that [they] remain open to the meaning of the other person or text” (281). Though Gadamer is aware of the possibility that a listener might overwhelm a testimony with the structures of their background and experiences, he positions listening as a rational activity that might determine the possible knowledge that emerges in dialogue. But this very process is already undermined because the listener must determine the meaning of the speaker’s experiences and, in doing so, posit truth in the place of the missing information. It is at this point that Gadamer describes a similar structure to that of the repressive structure that Caruth and Freud discuss: from the unknown gaps in a listener’s knowledge it is possible to produce knowledge about the speaker. This suggests that the purpose of listening, in the liberal sense, is for the survivor to internalize the violence they witnessed and therefore seek individual healing rather than collective action against those who committed the violence. This internalization through the force of knowledge production in hermeneutics and psychoanalysis displaces collective spaces of resistance that demands an end to violence.

Chanel Miller articulates the violence of having her experience of violence determined beforehand, and thus of being understood only with reference to the experience itself: “I stopped when I saw the words **Rape Victim** in bold at the top of the sheet. A fish leapt out of the water. I paused. No, I do not consent to be being a rape victim. If I signed on the line, would I become one?” (18). Miller’s testimony challenges us to consider her not merely as a “traumatized individual” that is trapped by the violence she experienced, but as a particular actor that contains various projects and dreams that radically overflow the destruction and harm of the event she

experienced. For example, rather than remain a traumatized individual trapped in a cycle of negativity, Miller decides to leave California to study printmaking at the Rhode Island School of Design to ensure that she does not remain trapped by the repetition of the past violence she experienced. Rather than repeat the scene of her own wounds by remaining static, inert, or individualized, she designates her subjectivity as a collective project itself—a project where the creation of new art forms is the possibility for her future to release her from the weight of the past: “in Palo Alto, I was beginning to feel acutely that I was fitting into old patterns of myself who I was or who I thought I would be. I wanted a place where I could create, a corner of the world where I could disappear . . . I would leave my job to enroll in a printmaking workshop” (128-129). This sustained act of creation of a self that shares in a new collective contains the potential to overwhelm and disrupt the repetition of any force for knowledge, like the therapeutic work of psychoanalysis, because it oversteps the boundaries signified by the authority of the analyst. In other words, Miller does not simply submit to theorization and therapy in one locale; she shifts her desire to remain in motion, to flee the scene of her violence and the courtroom where her subjectivity becomes static and concrete through the apparatuses of therapy and the state. Miller’s line of flight²⁸ from stasis into the unknown possibility of a new future where she does not have to be dragged down by remaining a subject of any force for knowledge offers a new network for exploring movement outside the hermeneutic and analytic discourse that seeks the production of knowledge from violence. It also designates the refusal to internalize the scene of violence by projecting her energy into new creative projects.

Imperceptibility and Testimony

²⁸ In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari suggest a line of flight is the linking up of various multiplicities in a new and contingent network of relationships: multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities” (9).

Derrida emphasizes the impossibility of accounting for violence through a shared history of trauma by claiming that testimony is reserved solely for the testifier even when it becomes public. In *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, his response to Blanchot's testimony *In the Instant of My Death* of standing before a firing squad during World War Two, Derrida suggests that although one might speak on violence, there remains something secret about it:

[the limit of writing] enjoins testimony to remain [*demeurer*] secret, even where it makes manifest and public. I can only testify, in the strict sense of the word, from the instant when no one can, in my place testify to what I do. What I testify to is, at that very instant, my secret; it remains reserved for me. (Blanchot and Derrida, *Instant/Demeure* 30)

The testimony is altered by the contemporary movement of the survivor in the present. The survivor takes up new forms, reappears in different guises, and emerges in contemporary experience other to the event of violence. However, to attain compensation, the survivor must become one dimensional to be recognized by the state or by the psychoanalytic process detailed by Freud and Caruth. This is the position of the victim where the lines of flight they inhabit are inhibited by an exterior force for knowledge. If testimony always contains within itself the secret of the multiple when it is spoken, then this notion of the secret poses a challenge to the force for knowledge that Caruth examines in *Unclaimed Experience*. Caruth's history of trauma suggests that there is a sharing of trauma that might unfold through dialogue between traumatized individuals. It is when the individuals miss each other's traumas that some sort of shared history occurs. In Alain Resnais' 1959 film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, a Japanese architect whose family died in Hiroshima and a French woman from Nevers in Japan to make a film about the aftermath of Hiroshima, engage in a 24-hour conversation in which they share their histories of trauma. In her reading the film, Caruth writes: "the possibility of history arises, indeed, within this

movement of [*Hiroshima Mon Amour*], as the interruption of understanding in a brutal shock of sight that ineluctably connects the history of Nevers with that of Hiroshima” (*Unclaimed* 44). It is important to note that the “interruption of understanding” is momentary. It occurs only in order for a new understanding to emerge, one that connects Nevers across geographies and time to Hiroshima in a shared history of violence. The trauma of these distinct and irreplicable events becomes a history of trauma precisely when two subjects can offer their traumas together.

For Derrida, however, testimony necessarily implies the impossibility of a shared history of trauma between individuals because the past has already disappeared and the survivor’s position already shifts into new territories through instantaneous movement. Thus, Derrida introduces contingency and temporality into the actions of the survivor when they testify:

Consequently, [Blanchot/narrator] cannot analyze what he himself felt, this other himself, at that moment. An odd experience, but at the same time very banal. Every one of us can say at every instant: I don’t remember what I felt; I can’t describe what I felt at that moment; it’s impossible, and I can’t analyze it in any case. (75)

The instant shatters not only a shared history of trauma but the logic of the compensatory institution. The survivor, despite their testimony, remains imperceptible to the institution because they are always on the move, inhabiting multiple placeholders for their identity. The survivor might strategically use the placeholder of the “victim” momentarily to receive some compensation, but then entirely shift to resist the absorption of their testimony in a mass demonstration against the state that perpetuates violence. These movements across temporalities cannot capture the essence of the survivor nor determine their position in the order of the institution. Thus, the imperceptibility of testimony, the part that cannot be offered to the

compensatory state because of the impossibility of returning to the past, destroys the causal structure of repression that determines whatever meaning might be produced from the survivor's experience. This signifies the end of the liberation/repression function.

Moreover, the notion of imperceptibility raises the question of how to engage with an absence of testimony on a particular event of violence, as in narratives that do not enter the media or are lost through the erasure of time. Derrida considers this as the paradox of the non-visible: "there are no final secrets in philosophy, ethics, or politics. The manifest is given priority over the secret; universal generality is superior to individual singularity; no irreducible secret can be legally justified" (*Gift of Death* 64). Imperception is a force that might disrupt the pattern of institutions absorbing violence because it shifts through a greater network of support in its constant movement and struggle against the channels of the institution. This network of support, in its shared resistance to the institution, never ceases its struggle because it remains imperceptible to the established channels of the institution. It does not believe in the authority of the institution to hold a tribunal over their damages in the first place. It thus shatters these channels by speaking in places it is not supposed to.²⁹ As Spivak argues, the subaltern cannot speak in these established channels, and thus must speak where they are not permitted, position their maimed body where it is not supposed to be seen, and force its wounds to be seen in all their terror. Instead, the subaltern speaks in opposition to the subject who believes it is their task to adopt the case of the imperceptible by speaking in their name through established channels (like the general strike, the formal letter, boycott). Each of these reaffirm the legitimacy of the liberal order as counter positions.

Writing New Relationships to Violence

²⁹ Baudrillard's analysis of graffiti in *Symbolic Exchange* is a prescient example of both imperceptibility as well as "speaking" in spaces that disrupt established channels of communication.

In *Simulacra and Simulation* Jean Baudrillard describes how the excessive signification of violence and trauma, for instance through the language of scandal, has neutralized the disruptive force of testimony: “forgetting extermination is part of extermination, because it is also the extermination of memory, of history, of the social, etc.” (49). Here Baudrillard overdetermines the word “extermination” by suggesting how social structures, by overdetermining certain events of violence (like extermination), in turn “exterminate” the harm of the violence itself. An excess of meaning surrounding visible events of violence, rather than target their hermeneutic or psychoanalytic truth, instead create an endless loop that mediates their harsh reality. In other words, violence itself is exterminated out of the necessity to find some new meaning in its discovery, greater significance in its unveiling, and fresh knowledge in its observation. Through this excess signification violence is no longer disruptive or disturbing as the violation of another person, but a simulated depository of forgetfulness: “artificial memory will be the restaging of extermination—but late, much too late for it to be able to make real waves and profoundly disturb something, and especially, through a medium that is itself cold, radiating forgetfulness” (49). For Baudrillard, then, the problem is not articulating violence or developing a way of speaking about it; the problem becomes how to act against the forgetfulness that overdetermines the causal relationship between violence and its survivors. Baudrillard suggests that the obsessive desire to return to the original event drives the theorist, psychoanalyst, or interpreter to over-signify³⁰ the event itself. Hence Baudrillard claims the event did not happen because, in the writing of the theorist who studies it, it only exists as a simulated reproduction. This would suggest the impossibility of returning to the event. Therefore, it is the task of the

³⁰ Here Baudrillard is following Bataille in *The Accursed Share* by suggesting what drives modern societies is not the principle of conservation as economists, anthropologists, or cultural theorists would suggest but the notion of excess.

theorist to articulate the system of signification that governs the representation of an event of violence while maintaining that the survivor's relationship to the event can never be captured in the symbolic exchange.

Baudrillard also suggests that the overabundance of signification generates a lack of response to those who are violated because they are confronted by too many simulations of violence.³¹ This is a form of hyperstimulation where listeners no longer feel the wounds of the violated because there is too much information, too many screens, too many stories that condition the listener to accept the exemplary nature of the violence as a normal procedure (Benjamin's state of emergency as the norm). For instance, there are countless images of refugee boats full of indiscernible figures crossing the Mediterranean from Africa to seek refugee status in Europe spread across the news. It is no secret that these bodies often disappear due to intense weather or are, in some cases, shot by coast guards. But it is obvious that the overproduction of these images does not change the situation or inform the viewer enough to act against the Western European social hierarchy. Paradoxically, the viewer, overstimulated by the saturation of violent images across the media, sees the violated bodies precisely by *not* seeing them, and consequently becomes passive and inert before their proliferation. The wounded body doesn't threaten the viewer's position in the dominant social order or cause them to act because they have already seen, heard, and understood the wounded body beforehand: "even the type of sociohistorical dimension that still remained forgotten in the form of guilt, of shameful latency, of the not-said, no longer exists, because now everyone knows, everyone has trembled and

³¹ The overabundance of signification is an essential part of Baudrillard's critique of Marxism in *Symbolic Exchange*. Instead of considering the proletariat as a force for revolution, Baudrillard sees them as a force for inertia. They are overstimulated and do not desire knowledge about the "real" that theorists provide.

bawled in the face of extermination—a sure sign that ‘that’ will never occur again” (*Simulacra* 49).

This hypersimulation constitutes what Bataille describes as an economy of knowledge, one that creates the conditions for certain bodies to be maimed and killed for the sake of the production of knowledge. For Bataille, in modern cultures knowledge is formed through sacrifice: “man has, in a sense, revealed and founded human truth by sacrificing; in sacrifice he destroyed the animal in himself, allowing himself and the animal to survive only as a noncorporeal truth which Hegel describes” (“Hegel” 18). The primitive function of sacrifice has been absorbed into the dominant social order. It is no longer a sacrifice of the self as animal, but it is those who wish to become selves that sacrifice and maim bodies so that they can achieve social rights and accumulate knowledge, power, and status. In turn this sacrifice promotes the proliferation of images, narratives, screens, and depictions of violence. In other words, the overdetermination and hyperstimulation of violence satisfies the Hegelian desire to sacrifice in order to have knowledge of the self. The stable self is maintained not through the negativity of its own sacrifice but by controlling, sustaining, and representing the death of the other: “now it was essential for Hegel to *gain consciousness* of Negativity as such, to capture its horror—here the horror of death—by upholding and looking death right in the face” (24). The utter terror and anguish of negative events such as loss, death, and violence are no longer a piercing pain that destroys subjectivity and demands a new subject to form in its place. Instead, the terror of the event is mitigated and absorbed as a necessary part of the construction of the self against another without status, rights, or property.

One expression of this economy of knowledge is William Wordsworth’s description of loss in “Tintern Abbey”: “Not for this / Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts / Have

followed; for such loss, I would believe, / Abundant recompense” (ll. 85-88). The speaker raises the negativity of loss only to reassert their control over the loss of their youth by exchanging the loss for what they have gained from the loss. From the utter destruction of loss comes a stable identity that is not in a space of terror before the loss because the speaker no longer ‘faints’ or ‘murmurs.’ Therefore, the negative is no longer an utter terror that is inescapable but is instead a counter movement that grants the subject the knowledge that comes with power and control over life. Bataille sees the symptom of mastering the absolute destruction of loss not merely as a Hegelian notion, but necessary for the formation of the “subject” in general: “it is all of humanity which everyone always sought, obliquely, to seize what death both gave and took away from humanity” (“Hegel” 21). The economy of exchange, then, is a drive to master and limit the destruction of loss which threatens the notion of the knowing subject who controls the narrative of trauma and its histories.

Bataille suggests through his critique of the economy of knowledge that the negative is never truly the negative because it is always put to work to achieve truth. The desire to acquire knowledge through loss provides the subject with sovereignty over life itself: “sovereignty in Hegel’s attitude proceeds from a movement which *discourse* reveals, and which, in the sage’s spirit is never separated from its revelation” (“Hegel” 27). Knowledge, therefore, structures and orders the philosopher’s relationship to the negative because it relies on revealing a truth that is hidden within loss. This revelation turns on the assumption that there is a subject who can know something about loss, that loss has an essence that is perceptible, and that loss can be placed within a finite discourse. These assumptions about loss contaminate how listening functions. Listening to loss becomes a reflective activity that mirrors back the listener’s sense of control over the other despite the utter destruction of meaning, stability, and knowledge signified by the

survivor's loss. For example, in her memoir Chanel Miller delivers an incredibly powerful victim impact statement in court detailing the indescribable pain she experienced following the perpetrator's violence against her while at Stanford. Instead of listening for the singularity of the Miller's testimony and responding to the unspeakable loss in a moment of collective resistance before the law and the institution, the perpetrator stands up and claims he is "so sorry for every moment and span of time . . . my mind, my heart, my body agonize over the suffering and pain I have caused" (272). The perpetrator's response makes it clear that the possibility for listening to Miller's impact statement is governed by an economy of knowledge. The perpetrator's movement away from the destruction he has caused to Miller, to the way the violence has impacted *himself* suggests that he listens to Miller's testimony only to reaffirm knowledge about his own position to the loss. His repetition of the pronoun "my" suggests this possession and control of loss. This response raises the question of how a sustained interruption of the economy of knowledge might be possible. If the answer does not lie in reproduction of the violence, in writing or theorizing further on its effects because these function to reinstate the self against the one who suffers, then, as we shall see in my final chapter, a sustained action must arrive through a destruction of the knowing self that allows for the potentiality of the violated body to expand beyond the horizon of the subject's knowledge.

By returning the absolute terror and destruction back to loss, Bataille reclaims the negative away from the Hegelian self-reflective principle that generates the knowing subject: "the privileged manifestation of Negativity is death, but death, in fact reveals nothing. In theory it is his natural animal being whose death reveals man to himself, but the revelation never takes place" ("Hegel" 19). If one were to take the negative seriously, as Bataille does, then there is no longer anything revealed in loss, there is no subject that could understand what the loss means,

and there is certainly no possibility of controlling or manipulating what is irreversible in loss into a positive structure for the subject. For Bataille, to truly experience the revelation of loss would be the total annihilation of the subject's knowledge and understanding. Bataille writes that loss is "the richest and most agonizing experience, which does not limit itself to dismemberment, but which on the contrary opens itself, like a theatre curtain, onto a realm beyond this world, where the rising light of the day, transfigures all things and destroys their limited meaning" (21). Testimony does not reveal the truth of the subject out of repression, but radically opens the subject to its vulnerability and lack of control over loss. This results in the destruction of the subject's limited understanding of the other as a someone that could be placed into a history of trauma or a prescribed pathway of healing from the event of violence.

In "From Restricted to a General Economy" Derrida pushes Bataille's notion of the negative further by claiming that the negative in loss denies the possibility of a system or theory that could make sense of the loss:

The point at which destruction, suppression, death and sacrifice constitute so irreversible an expenditure, so radical a negativity—here we would have to say an expenditure and a negativity without reserve—that they can no longer be determined as negativity in a process or a system. (259)

For Derrida, Bataille does not realize the full consequences of his reading of Hegel's economy of knowledge. Derrida suggests that the negative is so negative that it destroys the movement of knowledge and thus the logic of the state where the victim offers their damages (counter position) to be recognized. In other words, the violence the survivor witnessed cannot be contained by the negative or inverse of the system that it occurred in. Therefore, the negative becomes so resistant that it exceeds the limits of the logic of system attention outside the

protocols of the institution. However, for Derrida this processing of violence is no longer possible because loss temporally destroys the repetition of the existing structures of knowledge. This vulnerability that makes knowledge fail to cohere at the site of violence suggests that there is nothing in loss that could be restored, recovered, or returned in the form of knowledge or understanding: “it can no longer be called negative precisely because it has no reserved underside, because it can no longer collaborate with the continuous linking up of meaning, concept, time, and truth in discourse, because it can no longer labor” (260). Loss no longer labors for the production of the subject.

The narrator of Ben Lerner’s experimental novel *10:04* (2014)³² describes the end of the economy of knowledge through his blurring of the fictional and the autobiographical, thereby writing a collective moment of imperceptibility. What emerges from the blurring of these boundaries is the destabilizing of the self-reflecting narrator who knows the actions, ambitions, and thoughts of other characters while remaining coherent to himself. The narrator becomes a site of ontological confusion where there is no signifier that could confirm the stability of the narrator’s identity against the mystery of the other characters. The confusion of ontology, of the imaginary and the real, allows for Lerner to provide a gift of death as a response to the testimony of the characters he describes:

Then voluble from the alcohol, I told [Alex] about Noor and Mrs. Meacham and she told me a story about her mother she made me swear I’d never include in anything, no matter how disguised, no matter how thoroughly I failed to describe faces or changed names.

(143)

³² *10:04* merges the narrator with Ben Lerner’s biographical details as an author. The novel raises questions about aesthetic representation, fiction, and testimony. Much like Derrida’s close reading of Blanchot’s *The Instant of My Death*, Lerner suggests the impossibility of capturing the essence of an event through writing or recollection.

The gift of death is not the mere absence of Alex's testimony. Her testimony is very present in the narrator's offering of the testimony, yet it is also deferred because of the narrator's refusal to speak the testimony into existence that would suggest the liberal compensatory function. The sacrifice is in the narrator's refusal to write the testimony into a language that others could absorb and understand. His sacrifice is to maintain the secret of the testimony and address the testimony with careful fidelity by not attempting to take up the narrative and understand it through description. However, he is still capable of responding in the most oblique way by maintaining his absolute fidelity to Alex's testimony. There is a wound here that cannot be shared, empathized with, understood, or put to work to produce knowledge. It is at the limits of the narrator's writing, of writing a language that does not yet exist, that he offers himself as a gift of death. He sacrifices what he knows—narration, truth, plot, etc.—to remain faithful to the testifier above all else and to respond by putting to death his ability to narrate and to determine meaning.

In *The Writing of The Disaster* Blanchot describes the gift of death not simply as a scene of writing, but as an embodied and sustained action where the other's violated body pierces through any economy of knowledge by demanding immediate action. In other words, Blanchot inscribes the very impossibility for the subject to recognize themselves through the suffering or loss that the other testifies: "the disaster is the unknown name for that in thought itself which dissuades us from thinking of it, leaving us, by its proximity, alone" (23). For Blanchot, the disaster is an unnamable tremor that does not merely overwhelm subjectivity. The disaster radically destroys the subject's pretensions to knowledge, history, events, and meaning creation because it cannot, paradoxically, be thought. It is an overwhelming "sense" of loss that does not yet have a structure to it. However, it is not merely something that is experienced in isolation or independent of others. The disaster is brought into play, into its disruptive interruption of

subjectivity, by virtue of the other: “if the other is not my enemy, then how can he become the one who wrests me from my identity, whose proximity wounds, exhausts, and hounds me, tormenting me so that I am bereft of my selfhood” (45). The other bears witness to the disaster through their proximity to the subject, thereby making present the destruction of the subject. It is when the possibility of subjectivity becomes destroyed in the other’s demand for justice that responsibility arises and the theorist no longer theorizes but acts: “this torment, this lassitude which leaves me destitute becomes my responsibility?” (45). This responsibility might be a refusal to allow the aftermath of the other’s testimony to form into a coherent narrative, to disavow the possibility of knowing what their loss means, and to destroy any possibility of coming to terms with the other’s loss. If this is the case, the loss might compel the listener to “turn to some language that has never been written—a language never inscribed . . . in order that the incomprehensible word be understood in its disastrous heaviness . . . without understanding it or bearing it” (52-53). On this basis sustained action against the dominant social apparatus is possible. The listener no longer deliberates then acts; instead they act now as one imperceptible force for goodness in a conjoined network of resistance with the survivor.

Chapter 3

The Gift of Death

The Death of Production

The basis for a sustained interruption of the social apparatus that absorbs testimony in order to reconstitute its boundaries is possible by practicing the death of the production of representation. Each representation of a survivor's testimony becomes a production that channels energy away from action against the institution itself towards a debate over the truth content of the representation, whether the representation was moral, or if the representation adequately depicted reality. Each of these serves as a distraction from the overproduction of the image. Baudrillard writes that "the revolution will never rediscover death unless it demands it immediately. Its impasse is to be hooked on the end of political economy as a progressive expiry, whereas the demand for the end of the political economy is posed right now" (*Symbolic Exchange* 657). Baudrillard suggests that the revolution itself is an overproduction. It is written about, spoken about, but it continues to be deferred because of its endless production. The revolution, then, becomes a counter image against the institution's representations of the violence it enacts against its members. By capturing the violence of an event through representation, the institution controls the death³³ it enacts against its members. Thus, it is necessary to practice the death of the production of representation itself, which stabilizes the existing social and political order: "if political economy is the most rigorous attempt to put an end to death, it is clear that only death can put an end to political economy" (658).

³³ In some cases, this might be the physical death of certain members. But this can also take the form of "social death" as theorized by Orlando Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death*. experiences violence so they must socially/symbolically die for it through the various services that retraumatize them.

In *The Gift of Death* Derrida claims: “if I put to death or grant death to what I hate, it is not a sacrifice. I must sacrifice what I love. I must come to hate what I love, in the same moment, at the instant of granting death. I must hate and betray my own, that is to say offer them the gift of death by means of the sacrifice” (65). The gift of death is one such practice that would put an end to the production of the image. If I give death to my authority to speak, know, and hold property in the political and social order I reside in, I enact the death of the political economy. For Derrida, the gift comes into play not through public justification, apology, or reconciliation, but through a secret fidelity of death to the private subject: “tyrannically, jealously, it refuses to present itself before the violence that consists of asking for accounts and justifications, summonses to appear before the law of men. It declines autobiography that is always auto justification, *égodicée*” (62). To decline justification suggests the end of the subject who takes up the demand of the other and thus destroy the predetermined relations of the social order that seek to compensate for its own violences.

In *Know My Name* Chanel Miller concretizes the practice of giving death to the political and social order through a local, intimate connection with her grandmother: “when I listened to her, I understood: You have to hold out to see how your life unfolds, because it is most likely beyond what you can imagine. It is not of if you will survive, but what beautiful things await you when you do. I had to believe her, because she was living proof” (166). Giving the gift of death is a temporal disruption of listening itself. It provides those that testify depth and movement that is otherwise impossible in the traditional practice of listening in order to *know*. Rather than close off the excess of the testifier’s experience and its inaccessibility, the gift of death unfolds continually “beyond what you can imagine.” It therefore does not demand justification, responsibility, or evidence from the testifier because these demands end immediate action for the

survivor. Miller believes the testifier without evidence, without knowing, without demanding anything. The gift of death is where there is no longer a distance between the subject and the other. It is a radical vulnerability where self and other are destroyed so that the listener moves with the testifier in a collective force for sustained action against the erasure of violence and its normalization.

The gift is thus a sustained interruption of public retribution which always seeks to restore the current political or symbolic order by offering justice on its own terms rather than the terms of those who are violated. Contrary to the current symbolic order, for instance, the gift of death seeks the end of the order to interrupt the discursive protocols that displace a testimony's call for a sustained change against the order. As a rupture with these discursive protocols, the gift contains two dimensions. The first dimension is the gift's temporality, which is best characterized through Benjamin's notion of messianic time³⁴ and its break with everyday time flow. The other dimension of the gift is its radical negativity where the separation between the subject and its other is destroyed for a new relationship to emerge, which is represented best in Benjamin's account of the coming historian in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History." This is the sustained interruption of the subject's desire for a home or security in the future, which compromises the possibility for action against the present political and symbolic order.³⁵ It is in these two dimensions that the full weight of the violence a survivor experiences might break the current political and symbolic order by sustaining the testimony's disastrous heaviness without compromise.

³⁴ In "The Theses on the Philosophy of History" Benjamin characterizes Messianic time as the possibility for a disruption of normal time flow where violence is put to an end.

³⁵ In *The Gift of Death* Derrida describes the dearest and most at home by returning to the Greek term *oikos*, which broadly suggests the hearth, the economy, family property, and the home (88).

Derrida returns a sense of destruction to the notion of the gift by recovering the concept of death from the philosophical and existential tradition as an event through which the individual subject determines their existential and ontological being. In these traditions, broadly based on Hegel's dialectic of recognition from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) the subject is brought into being by recognizing death as the negation of its subjectivity and overcoming its negation. By transcending the negativity of death, the subject develops a foundation to develop its purpose and meaning as a subject. Derrida breaks with this understanding of death by returning to critique Heidegger's notion of death in *Being and Time* (1920). Derrida suggests that Heidegger's use of death attempts to control and limit death in order to maintain the structure of the subject: "it (Dasein, the subject) gives itself death as a simple annihilation, a passage to nonbeing, which amounts to ascribing the gift of death as being-towards-death within the horizon of the question of being" (*Gift of Death* 47). For Derrida, Heidegger's positioning of death, in his use of "being-towards-death," is merely the opposite of the subject. This suggests, for Heidegger, that death must be contained and controlled within the boundary of the being and non-being binary. When death is simply a matter of non-being it loses its sense of absolute destruction and its threat to the stability of the binary and the subject. Thus, the impulse to situate death as a counter force to subjectivity is the desire to control and limit the incomprehensible destruction that death signifies. When death is limited to the horizon of being, it is possible to assemble a symbolic or political order that controls death by maintaining its peripheral status and otherness. This order continues to be maintained *against* death as the opposite of the subject. The symbolic, then, is the deferral of death and the attempt of the subject to further ground itself against death. Baudrillard makes this point succinctly in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*: "little by little, *the dead cease to exist*. They are thrown out of the group's circulation. They are no longer beings

with a full role to play, worthy partners in exchange, and we make this obvious by exiling them further and further from the group of the living” (339). Thus, the absolute threat of death always haunts the symbolic chain by which the subject stabilizes itself in order to evade the absolute loss of structure that death signifies.

Alongside his critique of Heidegger’s purported attempts to limit the destruction of death, Derrida claims that Heidegger forgets another side of death that does not confirm the subject within the totalizing horizon of being. This other side of death is where the subject destroys their attempts to ground their being and sacrifices their subjectivity for the other: “what is most ancient would be the other, the possibility of dying of the other or for the other. Such a death is not given in the first instance as annihilation. It institutes responsibility as a *putting-oneself-to-death* or *offering-one’s-death*, that is, *one’s life*” (*Gift of Death* 48). By raising this forgotten side of death, Derrida suggests that death can no longer be used for the grounding of the subject, its social relations, its capacity for exchange, or the establishment of property because one can sacrifice these structures for the other that does not have access to these structures. Through this sense of sacrifice, death cannot be contained by any symbolic or political order and, therefore, signifies the end of exchange itself which seeks to reinscribe the subject into the political order. For Derrida, the sacrifice of the subject’s access to symbolic structures is necessary because they are one of the reasons why the subject might ignore and betray the demands of others who die for the subject’s benefit in the political and symbolic order:

By preferring my work, simply by giving my time and attention, by preferring my activity as a citizen or as a professorial and professional philosopher, writing and speaking here in a public language, French in my case, I am perhaps fulfilling my duty. But I am sacrificing and betraying at every moment all my other obligations: my

obligations to the others who I know or don't know, the billions of my fellows . . . my fellows who are dying by starvation or sickness. (69)

Derrida's challenge to the current symbolic order demands that death be reinscribed as a movement with the other by giving death to the notion of the subject. This sense of a rupturing force against the symbolic and the subject is the point where the other's testimony to the violence they experience from the state will result in sustained action against the state itself.

For the gift of death to emerge as a rupturing force of goodness within the symbolic order, it must arrive through the interruption of the debt economy. It is possible that the gift, in the hands of the subject, could become a matter of debt and obligation rather than sacrifice for the other. The threat of the debt economy is where the rupturing goodness of the gift becomes a matter of forcing the absolute difference of the other into a relationship of debt to the subject with property, life, and structure: "[the gift] breaks with exchange, symmetry, or reciprocity. It is true that absolute subjectivity has brought with it calculation and limitless raising of the stakes within an economy of sacrifice" (102). Debt not only reinscribes the relationship of the subject and the other but also ensures the subject possesses property, capital, and the means of exchange when the gift is understood as a form of reciprocation. This expectation of return by the subject grounds the subject against loss, death, and the other so that the subject can persist as a subject.

As Jacques Lacan writes on the challenge of the gift in *Seminar XIX ...Or Worse* (2011), "it's that my offering is perhaps not at all what I'm offering you, but rather the fact of my offering. It is on this basis that we get things wrong . . . When I offer something, it's in the hope that you will reciprocate" (75). The hope of reciprocation is the desire for a stable identity that might be returned by the receiver. Therefore, the gift is often given to confirm the identity the giver imagines; when the other responds by giving back what the subject offered, the subject can

confirm that identity in the exchange. For Lacan, the unconscious desire for reciprocation that underlies the intention of the gift suggests the “impossible aspect of offering, the impossibility of it being a gift” (75). Both Derrida and Lacan are aware of the difficulty of the gift; however, Derrida maintains regardless that the gift has revolutionary potential where it ruptures with the identification of the subject against the debt of the other in an economy of exchange. The gift itself must destroy the notion of the subject if it is to have any chance of destroying the economy of exchange and allow for the singular demand of the other to break with the repetition of the subject through debt obligation.

Thus, it is by returning to the absolute destruction of the subject that the gift of death temporarily breaks with the repetition of the economy: “on what condition does goodness exist beyond all calculation? On the condition that goodness forget itself, that the movement be a movement of the gift that renounces itself, hence a movement of infinite love” (*Gift of Death* 50-51). For the gift to break the economy that governs the relation between the self and other, the subject must offer themselves as a gift to destroy the unconscious assumption that the offering will return subjectivity and meaning by placing the other in debt. This is a recognition that whatever the imagined relationship between the giver and the other might be, it must be destroyed so that the absolute other can be seen and heard in the singularity outside of the relationship between debt and obligation: “responsibility demands irreplaceable singularity. Yet only death or the apprehension of death can give this irreplaceability” (51). By giving my own death, destroying who I might think I am, the reasons I might have arrived where I am, the repetitions of my life, I would make a singular sacrifice of what is most dear to me in order that I might genuinely approach and bear the violence that the other experiences and testifies to. This sacrifice is where the other no longer exists as part of a relation to me as an identity in this or that

generality but is a singular actor in a network of shared resistance to exchange. Irreplaceability is where it is no longer possible for a relationship to repeat with the other because the self cannot identify itself through the other's loss or the apparatuses in the work of mourning one might use to control or mitigate the realities of the violence the other bears witness to.

Since the economy of exchange seeks to control and mitigate the destructive effect of the gift in order to secure the permanence of the symbolic order in the future, the gift of death must remain a temporal movement without thought of the future: “without calculating, without investing, without any perspective of recouping the loss; hence, it seems, beyond recompense or retribution, beyond economy, without any hope of remuneration” (*Gift of Death* 95). The gift of death, then, is the irrational longing for the end of economy and for a form of redemption where there are no longer debts, obligations, or contracts that condition the other's future and their subordination to the subject. The irrational longing, from the perspective of reason, for the end of the economy suggests that the gift is neither a single act nor a final event of giving because the economy unrelentingly seeks to reinstate itself through the affirmation of the symbolic and political order that protects it. In fact, this means that the subject cannot give enough of itself: “there is thus a structural disproportion or dissymmetry between the finite and responsible mortal on the one hand and the goodness of the infinite gift on the other” (51). This dissymmetry between the finite subject and the infinite gift does not result in a paradoxical bind. Rather the dissymmetry suggests that one must remain vigilant in giving themselves to a particular testimony that requires justice. The boundlessness of the gift, its destruction of the static and stable subject that accrues debts and obligations of others, arrives because the subject “never will be up to the level of this infinite goodness nor up to the frameless immensity of the gift that must in general define the gift as such” (51). Since the subject is never equal to the task, they must

continue to give themselves, repeatedly disrupting the economy that seeks to appropriate the other and absorb the violent and destructive force of testimonies so that the future will be secured once again.

The stakes of the gift of death are not simply relinquishing subjectivity before the other or giving up one's knowledge but also radically sacrificing the structures that hold the subject together in the economy. Derrida uses the Greek term *oikonomia* to describe the stakes of the sacrifice: "the sacrifice of economy, that without there is no free responsibility or decision, is indeed in this case the sacrifice of the *oikonomia*, namely of the law of the home, of the hearth, of what is one's own or proper, of the private, of the love and affection of one's kin" (*Gift of Death* 95). Not only must the notion of the subject be destroyed, but also what is dearest to the subject: the relationships of property, ownership, meaning, and mastery centered and sustained by the home. The home protects the notion of subjectivity from the destructive force of sacrifice and its movement of radical goodness because the subject can maintain an abstract sense of security and protection without allowing testimonies of violence to break the home and shatter it. As Derrida notes, the home or the hearth is a protection that transforms the response of the gift into further rules and regulations that sustain the established order: "justice risks being reduced once again to juridical-moral rules, norms, or representations, within in an inevitable totalizing horizon (movement of adequate restitution, expiation or reappropriation)" (34). The gift, then, is the end of what is most dear to the subject so that a new relationship can unfold from elsewhere, outside the home, and open the subject to the possibility of radical goodness for any demand of justice without compromise.

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) Lee Edelman suggests, through his notion of queerness, that the gift of death can be sustained only through the end of the current

symbolic and political order maintained through the logic of reproductive futurism. Edelman describes this logic as the moment the present is compromised for the future so that the subject does not put an end to the imaginary ordering of heterosexual reproduction: “this conservatism of the ego compels the subject, whether liberal or conservative politically, to endorse as the meaning of politics itself the reproductive futurism that perpetuates as reality a fantasy frame intended to secure the survival of the social through the Imaginary form of the child” (14). Edelman suggests that it is not only through the subject’s attempts to limit death, but also through its reliance on the fantasy of the “child” that it cannot give itself to death immediately and fight for the demands of the other who requires the death of the violence of the current symbolic order. As an example of reproductive futurism, Edelman points to the anti-abortion movement and its commitment to protecting the subject’s imaginary “child” through various slogans that defer action. One slogan Edelman cites is from a billboard that displays an enlarged image of a child in a womb with the following slogan beneath it: “It’s not a choice; it’s a child” (14). As the sign suggests, the subject ought to defer an action in the present against the current order because the future of the child would be at risk and the social relationships that are supposed to provide the conditions necessary for the “child” to arrive would be broken.

Therefore, the imagined form of the “child” must not only be protected by the subject’s property, social relations, and position in the economy, but the subject must also strengthen these structures to ensure the safety of the “child.” By continually deferring action against the *oikos* and seeking its increase, reproductive futurism absorbs testimonies of violence that threaten the continuance and permanence of the current order. Edelman’s understanding of the concept of “queerness” is one such instance of testimony where there is a desire for the destruction of the symbolic order that sustains heteronormativity and the social relationships that limit and violate

the demand of queer bodies for a different order to emerge beyond the fantasy of the “child.” As Edelman states, “conservatives acknowledge this radical potential, which is also to say, this radical threat, of queerness more fully than liberals” (14). Thus, the image of the “child” whether it is of the anti-abortion movement or an aesthetic representation on a billboard, in a novel, or news story that maintains the present order, limits the possibility of the subject offering itself as a gift of death.

The gift of death cannot arrive solely as an immediate rupture with the present because it would not account for the protection of the ego that occurs through reproductive futurism. Therefore, the gift must arrive heterogeneously as the dual interruption of the present political order and the imaginary expectation that the present order *ought* to be protected. The dual interruption of the gift addresses Edelman’s concern that the present will be deferred for the “child” of the future. This heterogeneity also signals a sustained rejection of the form of the gift that would invite the violated and uncounted body to return to the current symbolic and political order to ensure they are counted.³⁶ Instead, for the gift to be a gift, it arrives through the temporal destruction of the symbolic order that persists in its violence against the uncounted. For Edelman, the symbolic order is the “repetition of the logic responsible for causing . . . death” (102). To reintroduce the violated into the order would not only violate them further but also reestablish the logic of the symbolic order to once again wound those who do not fit the order. This leads Edelman to insist on a collective queerness that interjects within the current order immediately and without compromise: “what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us is this willingness to insist intransitively—to insist that the future stop here”

³⁶ Edelman suggests that in *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* Judith Butler maintains the current political and social order to invite Antigone back into the established political fold without destroying it or questioning its symbolic hold.

(31). The potential for the destruction of the subject and the structuring force of the *oikos* lies with allowing the negative excess that cannot be controlled, dominated, or absorbed by the current symbolic order to overwhelm and break with it: “our queerness has nothing to offer the Symbolic that lives by denying that nothingness except an insistence on the haunting excess that nothingness entails, an insistence on the negativity that pierces the fantasy screen of futurity, shattering narrative temporality” (31).

Conformism and The Demand of Testimony

Judith Butler’s reading of Antigone from *Oedipus* suggests Antigone’s act of resistance is an enactment of the established norms and boundaries of the existing symbolic order that violates her: “her act is never fully her act, and though she uses language to claim her deed, to assert her ‘manly’ and defiant autonomy, she can perform the act only through embodying the norms of the power she opposes” (10). Though Antigone is not a counted body in the political order as a woman, she appropriates the speech protocols of the existing order to be counted in that very order. Butler supports this claim by suggesting that “Antigone comes, then, to act in ways that are called ‘manly’ not only because she is in defiance of the law but also because she assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law” (10). Butler’s claim that Antigone resists the law by appropriating its protocols and boundaries, does not result in resistance to that order. Rather, the use of the existing order merely serves to strengthen that order. This is because the so-called resistance Butler promotes demands that the order recognize the violence it commits against periphery identities so that these identities might be able to join the order *on its terms*. Butler explicitly states this interpretation of Antigone and her resistance to the symbolic order when she claims that “Antigone refuses to obey any law that refuses public recognition of

her loss, and in this way prefigures the situation that those with publicly ungrievable losses—from AIDS for instance—know too well. To what sort of living death have they been condemned?”

(24). Not only does Butler suggest those that are violated by the existing order should demand recognition by that order, but she also claims that the recognition will ensure that the unrecognized will gain rights. This interpretation of testimony assumes that those who demand justice require justice on the terms of the state. However, as Edelman suggests there are bodies that not only reject the justice of the liberal state but desire its end by imagining and acting its death.

Though the gift of death is a temporal interruption of the economy and of the subject's love for the *oikos*, there is a perpetual risk of the gift's reincorporation into the political and symbolic through the work of mourning. Freud theorizes the work of mourning as the gradual process where the ego's attachment to “the loved object no longer exists” and the loved object “proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to the object” (244). In the work of mourning the newly destroyed object *compels* the ego to withdraw itself from loss by discovering a new structure of meaning to provide stability to the ego. Freud suggests that reattachment is inevitable and that the subject will return itself from the ruins of its subjectivity once it has given the gift of its own death. If Freud's understanding of mourning is taken seriously, then the gift is not possible to sustain because each time the subject might put themselves to death this site of death compels them to fill the lack of the self with a new self. Although this new object might take the form of literal objects³⁷ to provide some sense of stability and subjectivity, it could also take the form of a signifier that centers the social relations,

³⁷ The way that objects compel the subject is covered by Baudrillard in *System of Objects*, where he suggests the so-called “subject” does not choose objects of consumption but is constituted and compelled by an assemblage of objects (15).

economy, and work of the dead subject in such a way that soon separates them from the collective force for goodness. In fact, Freud claims that mourning is “regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one such as one’s country, liberty, ideal, and so on” (243). This moment of incorporation absorbs the rupturing effect and force for revolution in the gift of death as it becomes lost in the inevitable exchange for a new object that returns the same social arrangements that violate and exclude those that testify on violence.

Freud claims that the work of mourning continues to operate because of an inherent economic logic that sustains it: “it is an appropriate comparison to call, too, to call the mood of mourning a ‘painful’ one. We shall probably see the justification for this when we are in a position to give a characterization of the economics of pain” (244). The logic underlying the work of mourning is that a painful expenditure must occur so that something productive or meaningful can be returned to the subject. The economic logic that seeks the incorporation of the gift of death is most evident in the Book of Job (*Iyov*) of the *Tanakh*. Job gives the gift of death to Yahweh after he has suffered disease, the loss of all his possessions, and the death of his family: “I have heard of you by the hearing ear, and now my eye has seen You. Therefore, I despise my life and will be consoled on dust and ashes” (42.5-6). Job’s metaphor of consoling himself through dust and ashes refuses the work of mourning by denying that something of value could compensate for the irreparable nature of his losses. Job’s refusal to exchange or sacrifice his loss, the refusal of the Hegelian dialectic outlined in Chapter Two, is the gift of death. Job offers Yahweh the gift by destroying any knowledge that could be derived from his loss, any subjectivity, or any wisdom. Job’s sustained act of death following his suffering is the act that allows him to genuinely hear with his “hearing ear” and “see” Yahweh. The speaker’s choice of

the infinitive form of the word “hearing,” as opposed to the past indicative form “heard,” indicates that Job can immediately approach the slightest part of Yahweh that would otherwise be impossible if he remained entrenched as a knowing subject in his previous property and social relations as a patriarch.

However, it is evident at the limit of the discourse of the gift that Job slips into the work of mourning by the conclusion of the text: “the Lord favored Job . . . and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had had before . . . Now the Lord blessed Job’s end more than his beginning and he had fourteen thousand flocks and six thousand camels and a thousand yoke of cattle and a thousand she donkeys” (42.9-12). Due to Job’s fidelity to the demand of the other and the painful vulnerability he experiences by destroying his subjectivity, he is compelled to attach himself to a new object through the economic logic of mourning. The instance in which he might see and hear the demand of the absolute other (Yahweh), he forgets to maintain his past loss and the previous symbolic and political order returns by its twofold increase. Not only does Job replace his lost cattle, home, and family, he also replaces the wounded self with a new self that is no longer in communion with Yahweh in its refusal of mourning. Job’s restoration from symbolic death to powerful patriarch suggests the gift of death is constantly threatened internally by the desire to restore order and conserve the political boundaries that provide stability for the subject. Thus, the dead subject does not remain dead but becomes an example of the fact that destroying existing social relations might inevitably result in their perpetuation. Freud, for example, suggests that the dead subject profits by completing the work of mourning and becoming liberated once again: “the fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (245). The constitution of the liberated ego, the reaffirmation of the subject against its other, is the betrayal of the demand of the other by

conserving the political and symbolic order. In fact, the Book of Job concludes with Job as a liberated subject, in control of his property and with the authority to distribute his vast wealth amongst his children: “nowhere in the land were women as beautiful as Job’s daughters to be found, and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers” (42.15). The moment he could give himself death in order to commune with the voice of Yahweh, he is restored to the symbolic order more powerful and wealthy than before. This compromise is an ever-present possibility that absorbs the violence of the gift of death because it is safer, more comfortable, and easier to return to the structure of the self rather than the painful demand of Yahweh that requires justice and action now. The final passage of the Book of Job concludes, not with praise for the way Job compromised, but with the slightest condemnation by the narrator for his complacency: “then Job died, being old and sated with ways” (42.17).

Although a listener might fail to maintain the gift of death because of the work of mourning, in *Specters of Marx* Derrida suggests that regardless of the compromise and failure of the subject there is a demand for justice that is impossible to incorporate: “haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not *dated*, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day according to the instituted order of the calendar” (3). Derrida suggests that the specter cannot be maintained within the current political order because it remains elsewhere haunting any attempt to pin it to the present or the past. In other words, the specter is a point where “time remains out of joint” (2). Thus, the specter cannot be incorporated into the capital work week, in the daily affairs of institutions, or the subject’s deferral of action for an imaginary future. These accounts of time cannot contain the specter within the present order and chain of events because each attempt at a unifying project such as the subject, a universal reading of history and time, or a unifying system results in the proliferation of the specter: “untimely, it does not come to, it

does not happen to, it does not befall, one day, Europe . . . had begun to suffer from a certain evil, to let itself be *inhabited* in its inside, that is, haunted by a foreign guest” (3). The specter is not the inverse of the longing for a stable meaning or unity because it is on the move haunting the logic of incorporation from within. It always haunts the interior of a work of mourning, and thus in its untimeliness refuses any possibility of exchange and replacement. It is tireless in its longing for justice and is never satisfied by whatever a subject or institution might offer it to ensure it does not become too violent or demand too much.

For Derrida, the existing symbolic order attempts to limit the specter and maintain the current political order by either compensating the specter just enough to absorb the violence or by altogether banishing the specter into the periphery. This leaves those who benefit from the existing order to either mourn the loss or violently oppose any threat the specter might hold against the current order:

One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge . . . Here is—or rather there is, over there an unnamable thing...but this thing that looks at us, that concerns us, comes to defy semantics, as much as ontology, psychoanalysis as much as philosophy. (5)

Despite the subject’s compromise and its failure to destroy its *oikos* to fight for the demands of survivors, there is this “thing” that remains outside the symbolic and political structures through its imperceptibility. Though ontology, social theory, hermeneutics, or psychoanalysis might seek to substantialize a part of the specter, the specter is elsewhere. The specter is neither a being or a non-being, a presence or an absence, a subject or its other. It operates in spaces it is not supposed to be because it cannot be in any one space. It is the displacement of the work of mourning itself

that haunts the possibility of ascribing to this work a single meaning or function in the symbolic. This displacement suggests that regardless of the new objects of compensation the subject might offer to the other, the specter unconditionally breaks with the restoration of the symbolic. There is this ghostly thing, no matter how often the subject ignores it, silences it, or incorporates it, that persists in its ghostly defiance of any attempt to placate the original violence it has witnessed. Therefore, for Derrida, the specter “is the impatient and nostalgic waiting for a redemption, namely once again, for a spirit” (170-171). Derrida’s use of the term specter to designate the demand for justice beyond liberal justice suggests that the moment the subject restores itself back into the symbolic and betrays the movement of the collective resistance, the excess uncompromisingly demands justice and haunts the failure of the gift and is never satisfied by whatever material, social, or ethical compensation is offered. This means that there is never enough justice, enough listening, enough action that would satisfy the haunting of the specter.

One reason the specter continues to haunt the symbolic regardless of the subject’s reincorporation is because language itself fails to adequately articulate the violence the specter bears witness to: “one cannot speak of generations of skulls or spirits except on the condition of language—and the voice, in any case of that which marks the name and takes its place” (Derrida 9). No matter what sign might be applied to the event of violence the specter bears witness to, there is never a direct correspondence between the sign and the violence.³⁸ There is a remainder outside the sign that cannot adequately attach to the demand of justice by the specter and its longing for redemption. The repeated description of the wound is the attempt to silence the haunting of the specter and localize it, to order it so that it no longer returns to haunt the comfort of the subject and the economy: “spirit is everywhere, since it comes from everywhere, it

³⁸ In *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* Lacan also suggests the impossibility of a relationship between the signifier and the referent: “the signifier misses the referent” (20).

proliferates a priori, it puts in place, while depriving them of any place, a mob of specters to which one can no longer assign a point of view: they invade all space” (169). For Derrida, the specter’s haunting of the symbolic is where a genuine rupture with the current state of violence is possible: “expectation, promise, commitment to the event of what is coming, imminence, urgency, demand for salvation and for justice beyond law, pledge given to the other inasmuch as he or she is not present, presently present or living” (210).

The haunting of the specter is evident in Chanel Miller’s account of how the Stanford University administration offered to incorporate the site of the violence she experienced by replacing the dumpsters she was assaulted behind with a memorial garden and plaque. Miller details how she grudgingly agreed and offered a short testimony for the plaque that details the irreparable nature of her wounds and her unconditional support for other survivors: “You made me a victim . . . I had to force myself to learn my real name, my identity. To relearn that this is not all that I am . . . I am a human being who has been irreversibly hurt, my life has been put on hold for over a year, waiting to figure out if I was worth something” (354). Miller’s use of the term “irreversible” suggests that there is nothing in the medium of language, no symbol, or power, that could incorporate the experience of her wounds and compensate for it. This suggests the force and rupture of the specter, that there is nothing that could satisfy its desire for justice. The specter refuses all compensation and any attempts by the political and symbolic order to close the wound. However, Miller claims that Stanford ultimately rejected her proposed testimony for the plaque by claiming, “the space was meant to be inspirational, and it was not okay to target or condemn a single individual” (356). Instead of Miller’s testimony the administration suggests that the plaque should have the following quote: “I’m right here, I’m okay, everything is okay, I’m right here” (356). This slogan is evidence of how the Stanford

administration attempted to placate the violence of Miller's testimony by situating the violence she experienced in a safe place where it will not require the destruction of the current order of Stanford itself. Therefore, "everything is okay" only if Chanel Miller's demands for justice become no longer a matter of transformation and action but a deferral of action and the end of the specter's longing for redemption. For the Stanford administration, the spirit of the remainder must remain dead, and thus in a space where it can no longer operate in its relentless haunting of the living through the violence it bears witness to.

Instead of acquiescing to the exchange offered by the administration, Miller maintains the force and rupture of the remainder in an imagined act of creation that haunts the work of mourning and incorporation:

I thought more about anger, about the art piece I would create. A more fitting tribute: A piece called *Construction*; each victim would be given a nail for everyday she has lived with what happened to her. There's a haphazard pile of wood in the center of campus. Victims can come as they please, hammering nails into the wood. All day long people hear the banging, all the drilling and the incessant interruption. (355)

Miller's imagined artwork is an anti-economy that refuses to be closed off and mourned. The imagined artwork becomes the voice of the specter. It is everywhere through the act of being written and it is incessant in its refusal to be a function of the university. This is because the artwork is an interruption of the space of the university and forces a suspension of the normal operation and functioning of the university. One would have to walk around the haphazard obstacle of the wood and hear the sound of the nails entering the wood echoing across the campus. It demands that subjects bear witness without choosing to listen, without the possibility of compromise. The remainder cannot be accepted into the exchange of language, objects,

eulogies, or the memorial because it is an excess that breaks with institutions that seek their restoration out of the violence. The only response to this haunting is the repeated return to the gift of death that destroys the substantiation of the symbolic order, which is the attempt to subordinate the demand for justice within its fold.

The Force of the Gift as Messianic Time

The reason the specter cannot be incorporated is because it does not bear witness to violence in normal capital time. The specter bears witness to what Walter Benjamin calls messianic time—a time outside normal time flow that longs unconditionally for redemption and the return of the messiah. This suggests that the gift is capable of approaching the slightest part of the unapproachable (Yahweh, the absolute other, the violated other) but that it also radically opens the possibility for an intercession of messianic time on normal, everyday work time best represented by the typical work week. As we saw in Chapter 1, in the “Theses on the Philosophy of History” Benjamin imagines this interruption of the incorporation of the violence the state commits through the angel of history: “this is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees a single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it at the front of his feet” (257). For Benjamin, although the state commits violence and constantly attempts to establish its necessity by apologizing, repairing, or accepting some of those it violates back into its structures, there is an angel of history that sees the state and its current order as violent itself. The single catastrophe is that even if the state might recognize some forms of violence it commits, it can never recognize itself as *the* violence. However, the knowledge that the state is violent with all its protocols and structures of mourning, which is a sort of anti-knowledge, is that the state is what must be destroyed for the

dead to be made whole again. For Benjamin, this anti-knowledge only arrives through the angel of history that sees it *all* and from time to time breaks open the normal flow of time that supports and sustains the state and its subjects: “the angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed” (257).

Benjamin’s messianic time resists a Christian theological reading of the Messiah because of the fundamental compromise at the core of Christian theology. For instance, in the story of the rich man in the gospel of Matthew, Christ arrives as the Messiah but does not sustain an interruption of normal time flow. In the story, a young rich man questions Christ, “teacher what must I do to get eternal life?” (19.16). In response Christ proffers the gift of death only to compromise it and save the subject from its destruction: “if you want to be perfect, go, sell all your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (19.21). In this version of the Messiah, there is the slightest trace of the gift of death in the demand that the rich man sell all his possessions. However, by selling his possessions the rich man is supposed to give the capital back to the poor in exchange for attaining the kingdom of heaven. In this action, the gift is not sustained because the existing social order continues through the rich man’s reattachment to the kingdom of heaven out of the ruins of his past self. The violated and uncouned in the symbolic order might briefly receive charity, but this gift does not fundamentally allow for the Messiah to break into the symbolic order and smash it. Thus, Christ cannot adequately represent Benjamin’s Messiah because the normal time flow of exchange is not interrupted. Messianic time is the injunction against the present but also a rejection of any futurity where the subject would profit from it.

Therefore, it is necessary that the subject breaks with any form of futurity that would suggest the wrongs of the past will inevitably be restored in the future. The logic of futurity is

where the subject might suffer now, but in the future the subject will receive entrance into the kingdom and restore itself. The difference of Benjamin's messianic time is an intercession against the compromise of futurity itself through a sustained destruction of the present. This means it is impossible to predict whether past wounds will be restored or whether time will move towards greater freedom and liberation for *all*. Benjamin warns against the assumption of progress or liberation by suggesting it is a storm that propels the angel of history into the future, much like Edelman's imaginary child:

A storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in the angel's wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.

This storm is what we call progress. (257-258)

Though Benjamin does not suggest that the storm of progress is composed of the structures of repression and revelation, the work of mourning, and the exchange of knowledge, I would suggest that each of these structures is represented by the storm of progress and is emblematic of the compromise the subject enacts in the present. For example, if the structure of repression and revelation operates in terms of sexual violence, it is assumed that if the state recognizes the violence, the violence will end and some form of healing will take place for the survivor. However, as Meghan Simard and Chanel Miller claim, the recognition of violence is often a secondary violence because it does not address its own complicity in the violence or destroy its harmful structures. Thus, the recognition serves to defer messianic time—an interruption and destruction of the institutions that violate the demands of survivors. Similarly, under the structure of the work of mourning, the state or institution offers an object or an idea as compensation for a survivor. In Miller's case, this is the garden that is supposed to compensate for the violence she

experienced. This exchange might appear as progress or change, but it does not account for the initial problem that the institution's continuance rests on violating the absolute other so that its members have life.

Consequently, Benjamin suggests, "in every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from conformism that is about to overpower it . . . only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy" (255). Though the work of mourning, knowledge exchange, and repression and revelation appear as progress, change, and transformation, they do not destroy the existing symbolic order to allow the dead to break open the symbolic and speak. These structures serve the function of absorbing the voices of the dead, of their longing for redemption, and deny the possibility of messianic time breaking into the repetition of the structures of power. The awareness of Benjamin's coming historian, that the current exchange of knowledge cannot account for the violated, maintains the power of resistance by allowing the specter to roam the symbolic. The coming historian does not compromise the violence of the past and destroys their subjectivity, property, and position temporarily in each institution that they work in because they are aware that there is never enough justice, never enough goodness that can account for the demands of the specter. This historian of the history violence, then, is one that would give the gift of death without any expectation but that the current order they are under will be redeemed with a messianic sense of justice that ruptures with liberal redemption which works to restore the existing economic and political order. With the historian, Benjamin reinvigorates the revolutionary potential of testimony and its interruption of normal time flow, the symbolic order, and the existing structures that appropriate violence and make it work for its continued renewal.

As Benjamin suggests, “this enemy has not yet ceased to be victorious” (255). Through the historian’s attention to the specter and the voices of the dead, however, this reality might shift.

Despite the existing threat of conformism and the attempt to end the resistance of a survivor’s testimony through an institution's apparatuses of control, Benjamin suggests the historian to come can prepare the conditions for the messiah to tear apart repetition: “for every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter” (264). The absorption of violence might defer the present, but it is simultaneously the possibility for a sustained interruption of the current order. It is by virtue of the gift of death that the messiah might burst the gridlock of time and ultimately account for the demands of survivors. It is on this basis, through a vigilant adherence to messianic time, alongside the continual action of the gift of death, that one might not only imagine but also enact the destruction of the subject and the political structures that maintain the boundaries of the self and the other. These sustained actions culminate in a collective movement where it is no longer an “I,” a “subject,” or an institution that sees and hears an “other” but a collective force of interruption that responds to any testimony of violence: though we do not understand who you are, we see you, we hear you, and we enact the death of the symbolic regardless.

Miller concludes her memoir by returning to the scene of her abuse. This return is not one that substantializes the production of the sign. Her return is the end of production because she maintains the irreparability of violence and the specific micropolitical actions possible in the spaces that we share together: “I invite you to sit in that garden . . . Ninety feet away from where you sit there is a spot where [Miller’s abuser’s] knees hit the dirt, where the Swedes tackled him to the ground . . . Mark that spot because in my mind I’ve erected a monument” (360). The immediate action of the men who saved her cannot be theorized. Their actions are small scale

and do not require the hermeneutic, psychoanalytical, or philosophical subject. They act as one force in the locale and respond immediately to the threat at hand. By interceding against the symbolic authority of Miller's abuser by wrestling him to the ground, they put to death representation and the production of the sign because they are already in a communal network with Miller, being touched by the violence she faces and touching her in their immediate rejection of the violence as one force for goodness.

Thus, the coming historian acts immediately in the presence of violence without thought: "the place to be remembered is not where I was assaulted, but where [the perpetrator] fell, where I was saved, where two [Swedish men] declared stop, not here, not now, not ever" (360). The historian remembers the history of oppression but does not use it to build theory or understand violence. The historian remembers against all odds and radically breaks into the present to respond immediately as if they themselves are being wounded by the violence that others experience. It is in this instant that the coming historian becomes a force of transformation against mediation, the production of the sign, and the work of mourning: "when they held him down, they freed me. Without them there would've never been a chance for me to speak my words in the first place, no hearing, no trial no statement, no book. Because of them, I am here now" (360).

Coda

In *Fatal Strategies* Baudrillard writes, “a strategy of intelligent subversion would also be to avoid aiming directly at power, but rather to force it into occupying this obscene position of absolute obviousness” (106). I argued throughout this paper that power requires the sacrifice of a “victim” to normalize its status as power. Therefore, power must violate its “victim” across mediums of representation by endlessly reproducing violence to legitimize the existing political economic order. Without these excess proliferations of the “victim” power would not be able to “redeem” its victim and substantialize its authority where it otherwise has none. I must be clear, then, that this thesis was not the attempt to “make power appear as repressive” (106). Instead, I deployed a notion of excess I traced through Georges Bataille, Jacques Derrida, and Jean Baudrillard to suggest that the liberal theorist, reporter, and arbitrator are more concerned with the representation of violence than how the continued reproduction of violence might protect the existing political and symbolic order. This endless fascination with the spectacle of violence and its repetition requires the deployment of theory against itself. As I argued in Chapter Three there is a necessity for a new theorist that does not write the history of violence, reproduce its details, or legitimize the authority for theory to speak on violence. The coming theorist, Benjamin’s historian who immediately acts against the present order, must show that an excess of violence is how an institution substantializes its mastery over the “victim” through the “victim’s” perpetual state of sacrifice. Thus, my purpose was not to build a theoretical machine to understand violence and consider its effects on “victims”. I, instead, traced the discursive structures of power that normalize its authority to speak, write, and know testimonies of violence. In doing so, I suggested that power neither has the authority to speak in the name of the violated nor can it assimilate the survivor into its order. Baudrillard writes that this use of theory is a “fatal

strategy” against repression because it is a “defensive simulation, which is to rob power of its own secret (precisely that it doesn’t exist) and so to leave it defenseless before its own enormity” (106).

Deploying a defensive simulation against theories of repression and knowledge production is a deliberate choice. These theories of repression not only serve as the counter position to power, which always reinstates power as ever more powerful and expansive through its disavowal, but also prefer the endless spectacle of reproducing the scene of violence and redescribing the same forms of knowledge. Baudrillard claims, “if our perversion lies in this, that we never desire the real event, but its spectacle, never things, but their sign, and the secret derision of their sign, it means that we don’t really want things to change, the change must also seduce us” (102). The theorization of change and of revolution is a mere simulated reproduction of revolution rather than immediate action. Thus, the theorists of repression must relive the horror of sexual violence by endlessly writing it and establishing the impossibility of a revolution through their deferral of action. This thesis refused the reproduction of violence for this very reason to seriously consider the demands of survivor testimony by suggesting the end of violence must arrive by putting to death the fascination and pleasure in the reproduction of violence. In this play of excess theory against repressive theory, it is possible for micropolitical engagements with testimony to emerge. These engagements depend on the end of the production of knowledge and the death of the economy of the sign where the realities of violence are exchanged for an endless desire to speak in the survivor’s name beyond the specific locale of the survivor.

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*, translated by Michael Hardt, University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Ashbery, John. "The Ignorance of the Law is No Excuse." *The New York Review of Books*, March 25, 2004.
- Bataille, Georges. "Hegel, Death, and Sacrifice." *Yale French Studies*, translated by Jonathon Strauss, No. 78, Yale University Press, pp. 9-28.
- Bataille, Georges. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, translated by Robert Hurley, vol. 1, 1988, Zone Books.
- Bataille, Georges. *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, translated by Allan Stoekl, University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Fatal Strategies*, translated by Philippe Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski, Semiotext(e), 2008.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, translated by Iain Hamilton Grant, Sage, 2017.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *System of Objects*, translated by James Benedict, Verso Books, 1996.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, 1968, pp. 253-264.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*, British Broadcast Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*, Duke University Press, 2011.
- Blanchot, Maurice and Jacques Derrida. *The Instant of My Death/Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford University Press, 2000.

- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Writing of the Disaster*, translated by Ann Smock, University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Blonde*. Directed by Andrew Dominik, performances by Ana de Armas, Adrien Brody, Xavier Samuel, Sara Paxton, Netflix, 2022.
- Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Butler, Judith. "Giving an Account of Oneself." *Diacritics*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2001, pp. 22-40.
- Caputo, John. *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Carroll, Matt, Sacha Pfeiffer, and Michael Rezendes. "Church Allowed Sexual Abuse by Priest for Years." *The Boston Globe*, 6 Feb. 2002. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/special-reports/2002/01/06/church-allowed-abuse-priest-for-years/cSHfGkTlrAT25qKGvBuDNM/story.html>. Accessed 18 Aug. 2022.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*, The New Press, 2017.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Derrida, Jacques. "From Restricted to a General Economy a Hegelianism Without Reserve." *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1978, pp. 251-77.
- Derrida, Jacques. *On the Name*, translated by David Wood, John Leavey, and Ian Mcleod, Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, The Work of Mourning and New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, Routledge Press 1994.

- Derrida, Jacques. *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, translated by Christie McDonald, University of Nebraska Press, 1985.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Gift of Death*, translated by David Wood, 2nd edition, University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Work of Mourning*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Descartes, Rene. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Harper Touch Classics, 2013.
- Doyle, Michael. "She Was a Running Prodigy. He Was the Most Powerful Man in Track. How Her Promising Career Unravelling." *The Globe and Mail*, 8 Feb. 2020.
<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-athlete-breaks-silence-about-sexual-misconduct-of-university-of-guelph/>. Accessed 3 Nov. 2021.
- Durham, Meenakshi Gigi. *MeToo: The Impact of Rape Culture in the Media*, Polity Press, 2021.
- Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, edited by Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathon Goldberg, Michael Moon, and Eve Sedgwick, Duke University Press, 2004.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2021.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, 1990.
- Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Routledge, 2001.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, translated by James Strachey, W.W Norton & Company, 1961.

- Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia," [1917], volume 14, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, 23 volumes, translated by James Strachey, The Hogarth Press, 1966, pp. 237-58.
- Fricker, Miranda. "Silence and Institutional Prejudice." *Out from the Shadows*, edited by Sharon Crasnow and Anita Superson, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 287-304.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, Bloomsbury Publishing, 1975.
- "Gender-Based Violence Data Report." *Western Student Experience*, May 2021, https://studentexperience.uwo.ca/student_experience/research.html. Accessed 1 March 2022.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V Miller, Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh, State University of New York Press, 2010.
- Holy Bible, New International Version*. Biblica, 2011, <https://www.biblegateway.com>. Accessed 26 September 2022.
- Jabès, Edmond. "At the Threshold of the Book." *The Book of Questions*, translated by Rosmarie Waldrop, Wesleyan University Press, 1991, pp. 13-19.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. *Fear and Trembling*, translated by Alastair Hannay, Penguin Books, 1986.
- Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*, translated by Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Lacan, Jacques. *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge: Encore*, translated by Bruce Fink, edited By Jacques-Alain Miller, W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.

- Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar XIX ...Or Worse*, translated by A.R Price, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, Polity Press, 2011.
- Lerner, Ben. *10:04*. McClelland and Stewart, 2014.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Duquesne, 1969.
- Levine, Judith and Erica Meiners. *The Feminist and the Sex Offender: Confronting Sexual Harm, Ending State Violence*. Verso, 2020.
- Lyotard, Jean-Francoise. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, translated by Georges Van den Abbeele, Manchester University Press, 1988.
- Miller, Chanel. *Know My Name: A Memoir*, Viking, 2019.
- Morin, Marie. "The Self the Other and the Many: Derrida on Testimony." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2007, pp. 165-178.
- Mosley, Tonya. "Me Too Founder Says Black Girls Trauma Shouldn't Be Ignored." *NPR*, Sept. 29, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/29/1041362145/me-too-founder-tarana-burke-says-black-girls-trauma-shouldnt-be-ignored>. Accessed 11 July 2022.
- Nancy, Jean Luc. *Listening*, translated by Charlotte Mandell, Fordham University Press, 2007.
- Oliver, Kelly. "Witnessing and Testimony." *Parallax*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2004, pp. 78-87.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Harvard University Press, 1985.
- "Policy on Gender Based and Sexual Violence." Western University, 1 May 2020, *Manual of Administrative Policy and Procedures*, <https://www.uwo.ca/health//student>, Accessed 30 September 2021.

- “Reporting Gender Based Violence.” *Western Health and Wellness*, May 2020,
https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/report.html. Accessed 1
 February 2022.
- Richards, George W. *The Heidelberg Catechism*, Publication and Sunday School Board of the
 Reformed Church in the United States, 1913.
- Simard, Meghan. “I Was Raped at University. Here’s Why I Never Reported It.” *CBC First
 Person*, Sept. 25 2021, [https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/first-person-campus-sex-assault-
 1.6189141](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/first-person-campus-sex-assault-1.6189141). Accessed 22 January 2022.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?.” *Marxism and the Interpretation of
 Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Laurence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press,
 1988, pp. 217-313.
- The Anatomy of Scandal*, directed by S.J. Clarkson, performed by Sienna Miller, Rupert Friend,
 Michelle Dockery, Naomi Scott, David E. Kelley Productions, 2022.
- The Complete Tanakh*, translated by Rabbi A.J. Rosenberg, Judaic Press, 1993.
- “Thousands of Western Students University Students Walk Out to Support Survivors of Sexual
 Violence.” *CBC*, 17 September 2021, [https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/western-
 students-walkout-1.6179573](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/western-students-walkout-1.6179573). Accessed 30 September 2021.
- Wolfson, Eliot. “Assaulting the Border: Kabbalistic Traces in the Margins of Derrida.” *Journal
 of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 70, no. 3, 2002, pp. 475-514.
- Wordsworth, William. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, volume 5, edited by Ernest
 de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, Clarendon Press, 1959.
- Wypijewski, JoAnn. *What We Don’t Talk About: Sex and the Mess of Life*, Verso, 2020.

Curriculum Vitae

- Name:** Mitch de Lange
- Post-Secondary Degrees:** Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada
2017-2021
Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and Philosophy
- The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada
2021-2023
Masters of Arts in Theory and Criticism
- Honours and Awards:** SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarships (CGS-M)
2021-2022
- Nancy Potvin Memorial Award
2019-2021
- John A. Watts Award
2019-2020
- Related Work Experience:** Program Assistant, Operations and Anti-Fraud Investigations Unit,
Ministry of Municipal Affairs
B.C Government, Vancouver, Canada
2023-Present
- Teaching Assistant, Introduction to Literary Studies;
Posthumanism Theory
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada
2021-2023
- English Literature Undergraduate President, Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
2019-2021