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**Playing the survivor:  
How (and if) women recover from spousal abuse**

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## **Abstract**

Although spousal abuse is a much-studied field, survivors' long term processes and prospects remain poorly understood. Survivors, researchers, therapists and activists struggle to understand traumatic experiences and respond to them. The process of testimony and witnessing which many turn to in order to make sense and use of trauma can seem both necessary and impossible. The way we perceive and recount traumatic histories, in our efforts to educate, change, or heal may, in fact, perpetuate and compound our personal and social losses. This project uses arts-based inquiry, collaborative feminist group interviews, and autoethnographic methods to provide a postmodern, performative exploration of the post-abuse process. It offers a multi-vocal, vulnerable, playful narrative that is accessible and evocative while challenging and complicating our common-sense perceptions of the aftermath of abuse. It also presents a highly original and well-theorized negotiation of the ethical, methodological, and epistemological problems which confront studies of loss. Through genre-bending conversations with theorists, therapists, professors, family members, survivors, social service providers, her readers, and her dog, the author provides a rigorous and engaging journey into the post-abuse process. The text deconstructs the dominant recovery framework and proposes a generative, oddly hopeful reframing of the post-abuse process using metaphors of haunting and death.

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(If, when you go to a show, you like to know what to expect, and carefully read your program before the house lights go down, you may want to turn to page 149.

If, however, you enjoy wandering and wondering through stories as they unfold, stumbling into surprises and puzzles, and discovering how (or if) it all works out in the end, turn the page. The room is already going dark and the curtain is about to rise).

**Act I** – *In which our story begins.*

**Scene One: 2001**

*Sophie enters and speaks directly to you.*

Sophie: I am 29 years old, washing dishes in a rented run-down three-bedroom row house in a small Canadian town. One daughter is at junior kindergarten; the other is drooling beside me in an exersaucer. The phone rings. I dry my hands.

Hello?

-Is Joel there? (It's a woman, around my age).

He's away on business until next week. Can I take a message?

-Who's this? (That's rude.)

This is his wife. (*Pause*) Can I help you?

-Are you serious? You can't be.

I put one hand on the counter. I am using my best reasonable voice.

I have been for ten years. He lives here. We have two children.

-Oh my God.

Can I help you? (Now I am irritated).

-I'm his fiancé.

The room is very still. Even the baby is quiet.

I'm afraid you must be mistaken. Would you like to leave a message?

-Oh my God.

She hangs up. The winter sun is kissing the geraniums in the kitchen window. I call my husband. I can't reach him. I can never reach him when he goes away, no matter how many times I ask him to make sure his cell phone works. I continue washing the dishes.

Later, he calls. He sighs. He meant to tell me. There's a mentally unbalanced woman named Angel who works at one of the companies he's been visiting. She's delusional, stalking him, and he's going to have to speak to her boss about it. He's been putting it off because he feels bad for her and doesn't want her to get the sack. I believe him.

Three days later, she calls again. I am boiling pasta; the kids are watching a *Maisy* movie.

Hello?

-I am so sorry. (She is in tears). I am sorry to call, I won't do it again, I just wanted to say I am so sorry, I had no idea.

Can I help you? (I am impervious, the matron of a psych ward).

-You don't understand.

I understand perfectly. I'm sorry, you seem very distressed.

-Oh, my God, you don't believe me.

What I believe or don't believe is not your concern. I understand you believe it.

-He bought me a ring, he sends me money. He said he was divorced. I'm so sorry.

I don't remember the rest of the conversation. I am cold, barely polite. I treat her as if she is crazy. She *is* crazy, almost hysterical. I eventually hang up. My hands are shaking. He never bought *me* a ring. It's not true, I decide. So it isn't.

*Scene Two: 2004*

Sophie: I am in a group working on a community festival for International Women's Day. I have written and directed a play based on the group's priorities and experiences. It is a stupendously successful show, offering a gritty, funny look at small-town married life. It is particularly hilarious because I have cast my own husband as the bad partner, the passive-aggressive, dishonest, philandering, narcissistic bastard who dies on stage. He plays the role brilliantly. I am so grateful for his support. We're such a great couple.

We strike the set and go home, but something is wrong. An avalanche is coming from somewhere inside me. I can't sleep in his bed. Then I can't sleep on the couch. Then I can't even *look* at him. Please, he cries. Don't do this to the kids. Be careful, he yells. I'll give you fifty bucks, keep the girls, and kick your ass to the curb. I leave him.

I go to the shelter's outreach office, to ask if I've been abused. A stout, friendly woman, the kind who drinks diet soda all day and collects teddy bears, opens the bulletproof door. She gives me a highlighter and a legal size piece of paper, thickly printed on both sides with various abusive behaviors. It takes a long time to send each question out like a sonar ping into the abyss. She gives me her card, a handful of flyers, legal aid papers, housing referral forms, and a hard candy. Call anytime, she says. It makes no sense, even as I unfold the wads of memory, like nasty tissues left in coat pockets. The stories I cannot tell. I am afraid of making him angry, of not being believed, of my children reading awful things about their father.

I have written a play that has ruined or saved my life. When I have panic attacks, the man who will become my lover wraps me in a blanket, brings me clear sweet tea, and

plays with the girls. I am a disgusting imposter. I don't understand. If only, I think, if only I could talk to that woman again. If only she could tell me what was really going on in my life. More than anything, I need to apologize for not believing her, for being so rude. I am so sorry.

But Angel never calls, and I cannot find her.

***Scene Three: 2005***

Sophie: I have a Master's Degree in Canadian Studies, but have been a stay-at-home mom for eight years. In September the baby will start school. I have been earning a bit as a gardener and figure drawing model, but there is no work around here. I could probably get a job in the city, but the idea scares me and I don't want my freshly-traumatized kids to suddenly be in day-care full time. I need a better way to support my family. I visit a former professor and she suggests I apply for the department's new PhD program. The deadline is four days away. Why not? What am I interested in? Recovery from spousal abuse. I am accepted, and the scholarships pay way better than welfare.

I am good at school; my brain knows all the tricks. I have run out of money for therapy. Surely here, in the books, I will find the decoder ring, the knowledge that makes sense of this mess called my life.

*Sophie exits.*

**Act II** – *In which we ask books.*

**Scene One: Trauma**

*A hot pool the size of two parking spots, at the local community center. Sophie is sitting on the edge in a black lap suit. The rest of the cast rolls and lolls in the chlorine froth like poached fish.*

Sophie: Why didn't I DO anything about it sooner? Why didn't I LEAVE?

Kearney: You're committed. You want to save him, it's under control, it's not that bad, or it's at least partially your fault. Maybe its tradition or religion. You can't see any options. You rationalize it.<sup>1</sup>

Krystal: Surrender to what seems to be inevitable, inescapable, immediate danger, initiates an affective process of paralysis of initiative, followed by varying degrees of immobilization leading to automatic obedience.<sup>2</sup>

Swift: *(leaning back, eyes closed)* That's a prejudicial question, Sophie. Your choices are not the problem here.<sup>3</sup>

Sophie: But why am I still such a basket-case?

Herman: Ordinary, healthy people can become entrapped in prolonged abusive situations, but after your escape you are no longer ordinary or healthy.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret H. Kearney, "Enduring Love: A Grounded Formal Theory of Women's Experience of Domestic Violence," *Research in Nursing and Health* 24 (2001), 271.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Krystal, "Trauma and Aging: A Thirty Year Follow-Up," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 81.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn F. Swift, "Women and Violence: Breaking the Connection," *Work in Progress* 27 (1987), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 116.

Caruth: It's trauma, dear. A memory you cannot integrate into your experience, or a catastrophic knowledge you can't communicate to others.<sup>5</sup>

van der Kolk and van der Hart: You experience current stress as a return of the trauma. Your 'alarm bell' is over-sensitive.<sup>6</sup>

Krystal: It causes cognitive constriction, episodic 'freezing,' inability to act assertively or aggressively, passivity or blundering, 'surrender' patterns when under stress, dread or avoidance of memories, numbing, hypervigilance, and the inability to feel joy or articulate emotions.<sup>7</sup> (*Smiles and shrugs, spreading his hands*). You're perfectly normal.

Tutty: Also anxiety, nightmares, sleep and eating disorders.<sup>8</sup>

Herman: (*laying back to float*) Disconnection, alienation, shame, doubt, guilt, feelings of inferiority, oscillating intolerance to and outbursts of anger, self-isolation and clinging to others, suicidality, and depression.

Sophie: Fabulous.

Herman: (*wiggling her toes, continuing*) Protracted depression. Your identity is "contaminated with shame, self-loathing, and failure".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Cathy Caruth and Thomas Keenan, "The AIDS Crisis is Not Over: A Conversation With Gregg Bordowitz, Douglas Crimp and Laura Pinsky," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 256.

<sup>6</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 174.

<sup>7</sup> Krystal, "Trauma and Aging," 81.

<sup>8</sup> Leslie M. Tutty, "Identifying, Assessing, and Treating Male Perpetrators and Abused Women," in *Cruel But Not Unusual: Violence in Canadian Families*, ed. Ramona Allagia and Cathy Vine (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 375.

<sup>9</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 94.

Krystal: And despair, which, they've proven, can cause all sorts of physical ailments.

Only a vestige of the self-observing ego is preserved.<sup>10</sup>

Erikson: You've lost the illusions of safety that make life seem manageable. The laws of the natural world and human decency have been revealed as false. You lose faith in the good will of others, in reason and logic, and often, in God. The real problem is that, over time, inhumanity starts to seem normal.<sup>11</sup>

Kelly: Trauma also delays psychological maturation and memory integration.<sup>12</sup> So you're a little delayed. See, it produces a temporal paradox.

Sophie: (*mumbling*) This isn't Star Trek.

Kelly: No, listen. You've suffered a fundamental dislocation of time and space. It's fascinating.

Herman: Both the future and the past are eventually obliterated.<sup>13</sup>

Kelly: Durkheim called it anomie: "a state of hopelessness, disorientation, loss of belief and sense of purpose, and social isolation".<sup>14</sup>

Herman: (*sits up and shakes water out of her ears*) Honey. You've been entrapped by appeals to your most cherished values and your empathy for your abuser. Your history of affection for him. (*Sighs.*) It alters your personality. You get a kind of "atrophy in the psychological capacities that have been suppressed".<sup>15</sup> Do you have many friends?

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<sup>10</sup> Krystal, "Trauma and Aging," 81.

<sup>11</sup> Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 193-97.

<sup>12</sup> Patty Kelly, "Trauma Narratives in Canadian Fiction: A Chronotopic Analysis of Anne Michael's *Fugitive Pieces*" (Paper presented at *Making Sense of Health, Illness and Disease*, Oxford, 2006), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Kelly, "Trauma Narratives," 3.

<sup>15</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 87.

Sophie: Uh... no.

Herman: (*shaking her head*). Tsk. The over-development of a solitary inner life. (*Sighs again.*) It stinks, but there it is. All the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Ristock: I'll grant that PTSD does name some of what women experience as symptoms, and that "can help lessen the self-blame. But it is a limited psychological framework that ignores women's subjective experiences of violence" and the complexity of its effects.<sup>16</sup>

Young and Nadeau: Your response to oppression becomes a deficient personality trait or dysfunctional syndrome for the trauma industry to medicate and manage.<sup>17</sup>

Ranck: You can't ignore the historical and political context. PTSD misses "an encounter with the moral and social imperatives that emerge from the wound. Traumatization becomes a pathological condition to be treated rather than an experiential knowledge demanding legitimation".<sup>18</sup> It's individualized and depoliticized.

Ristock: Right. It's disempowering because your symptoms are seen as a betrayal of the body - external, outside of your control and involuntary.<sup>19</sup>

Herman: But "the essential insult of trauma" is helplessness.<sup>20</sup>

Edkins: That's right. Powerlessness and betrayal of trust.

Sophie: So how was I helpless?

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<sup>16</sup> Janice Ristock, *No More Secrets: Violence in Lesbian Relationships* (London: Routledge, 2002), 80.

<sup>17</sup> Alannah Earl Young and Denise Nadeau, "Decolonising the Body: Restoring Sacred Vitality," *Atlantis* 29, no. 2 (2005), 15.

<sup>18</sup> Jody Ranck, "Beyond Reconciliation: Memory and Alterity in Post-Genocide Rwanda," in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, ed. Roger Simon et al. (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 197.

<sup>19</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*, 80.

<sup>20</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 41.

Edkins: Someone you thought would protect you turned out to be dangerous.<sup>21</sup>

Sophie: But I'm smart and strong and middle class and he was just some poor wanna-be rock musician...

Herman: Through "disassociation, voluntary thought suppression, minimization, and sometimes outright denial", you learn to alter an unbearable reality.<sup>22</sup> It's Orwellian doublethink.

Sophie: But –

Miller and Stiver: The more hurt and violated you are made to feel, the more you leap to the belief that you are the bad one.<sup>23</sup>

Landenburger: You internalize his view that you are useless without him and you blame yourself.<sup>24</sup>

Krystal: High self-expectations and low self-esteem. It's classic.

Herman: Honey, all traumatized people "search for faults in their own behavior in an effort to make sense of what has happened to them".<sup>25</sup>

Sophie: But I really think –

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<sup>21</sup> Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 87.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver, *The Healing Connection: How Women Form Relationships in Therapy and Life* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997), 78.

<sup>24</sup> Karen Landenburger, "The Dynamics of Leaving and Recovering From an Abusive Relationship," *Journal of Obstetric, Gynaecologic, and Neonatal Nursing* 27, no. 6 (1998): 700-06.

<sup>25</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 103.

Gillis and Diamond: You were made to feel responsible for your own abuse and even to assist in covering up the abusive behavior.<sup>26</sup>

Miller and Stiver: Women often come to believe deep down that they are themselves unworthy because of the abuse they have suffered.<sup>27</sup>

Sophie: Maybe, but -

Kearney: You were just responding to “cultural and personal expectations for romance, service, and commitment.” You experienced “changed perceptions of self and reality” in your violent relationship.<sup>28</sup>

Sophie: But he never hit me.

Herman: Oh, so it’s all right, then?

Sophie: No, but –

Gillis and Diamond: He didn’t *have* to hit you. Any behavior or pattern of behavior used to coerce, dominate, or isolate your partner is abuse.<sup>29</sup>

Ristock: I hear what you’re saying. The “image of the victim as pure, innocent and helpless” looms so large in the dominant culture. There’s no room for your agency, strength, resiliency, or even anger.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, like anyone, you respond to the label “victim” with aversion.

Sophie: Yeah.

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<sup>26</sup> J. Roy Gillis and Shaindl Diamond, “Same-Sex Partner Abuse: Challenges to the Existing Paradigms of Intimate Violence Theory,” in *Cruel But Not Unusual: Violence in the Canadian Family*, ed. Ramona Allagia and Cathy Vine (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 130.

<sup>27</sup> Miller and Stiver, *The Healing Connection*, 78.

<sup>28</sup> Kearney, “Enduring Love,” 271.

<sup>29</sup> Gillis and Diamond, “Same-Sex Partner Abuse,” 128.

<sup>30</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*, 74.

Ristock: We blame victims because we don't want to believe it could happen to us. What is so complicated about it are "these contradictions of agency and passivity, strength and vulnerability".<sup>31</sup> Most women sit somewhere in the middle. But usually the "'victim' is constructed as always already in a state of oppression no matter what she does... victim and perpetrator become constructed as polar opposites: perpetrators choose to act violently and are never understood in a context; victims on the other hand are in a state of oppression and therefore cannot be held accountable for making choices".<sup>32</sup>

Sophie: But I *know* I made choices. Denying my agency just seems like a cheap way to absolve myself of all accountability. It's what *he* would do.

Swift: Of course you made choices, but they were determined by the sanctions and options you encountered – both internal and external.<sup>33</sup>

Sophie: (*a bit sullen*) But I had power.

Ristock: We assume that we will find power and control as "the core feature of an abusive relationship, and assume that we will find in that relationship a pattern of fear and intimidation that restricts the abused woman's movements and thoughts and traumatizes her." We over-simplify. "It is not that power and control, fear, and trauma are all wrong; it is just that... they assume too much about what is going on without telling us anything." Then we "end up seeing women who do not experience fear as having false consciousness or as perhaps not being true victims."<sup>34</sup>

Herman: But were you afraid?

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<sup>31</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*, 81.

<sup>32</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> Swift, "Women and Violence."

<sup>34</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*, 114, 137, 115.

Sophie: I don't know. Sometimes. (*sliding down into the pool*). This one time we got home from somewhere. He parked and I wanted to go right in so the babysitter could go home. It was late, and it's five bucks an hour, you know? But he kept going on about how he loved me so much but I was so judgmental and incapable of love and it hurt him so bad and – you know. There was nothing I could say, or it would just get worse. So I waited. Sat there, shivering, for, oh, an hour and a half, maybe? I could have said, look, this is crazy, and gone in. The door wasn't even locked. Was that fear? Was I just trying to be nice?

Ristock: Victims often express compassion for their abusers.<sup>35</sup>

Sophie: I must have had a reason.

van der Kolk and van der Hart: Feelings of physical or emotional paralysis are integral to traumatic experiences.<sup>36</sup>

Sophie: I just wanted it to stop. I think. (*shrugs*) I don't remember.

van der Kolk and van der Hart: "Severe or prolonged stress can suppress hippocampal functioning, creating context-free fearful associations, which are hard to locate in space and time. This results in amnesia for the specifics of traumatic experience but not the feelings associated with them".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*.

<sup>36</sup> van der Kolk and van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past."

<sup>37</sup> van der Kolk and van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past," 172.

Brison: You lose your memories and your ability to envision a future. Your basic cognitive and emotional capacities are gone, or radically altered. It's a total epistemological crisis.<sup>38</sup>

Sophie: So I forget things.

Brison: Right.

Sophie: Like I forgot I went to court. He hadn't paid the insurance or renewed the plates, but he lied and said he did. I didn't want to know so I deliberately didn't look. Then, of course, I got pulled over. I'd never been to court. I went and got an outfit from the second hand store – a moss green knit suit. Afterwards I threw it out and literally, totally forgot about it for three years. Even once I remembered, I forgot again. If a friend told me her memory did that, I'd say, whoa. Red flag. So maybe.... But I could just be forgetful, you know?

Laub: That's what happens. There was no unencumbered, unviolated, sane point of reference for insider witnesses. You could not bear witness to yourself.

Sophie: I guess.

Laub: This loss of the capacity to witness from the inside is "perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, because when your history is abolished, identity ceases to exist as well".<sup>39</sup>

Sophie: Great. I no longer exist (*blows out air to lie on the bottom of the pool*).

Laub: It's complicated.

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<sup>38</sup> Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 67.

O'Neil: Don't blame yourself. Memories of trauma both beg to be forgotten and cry out to be remembered.<sup>40</sup>

Caruth: You're carrying an impossible history.<sup>41</sup>

Herman: Where did she go?

Miller and Stiver: Sophie?

Sophie: *(listening, from the bottom of the pool, while her name is called. Holding her breath, gently, her heart beating in her ears. Thinking, I'm so tired. What if I stayed here? Surfacing, getting her goggles off the edge)* But where do memories go?

Levy: Your trust of memory and language has been so impaired by trauma that the very act you are trying to bring to justice renders you unable to do so.<sup>42</sup> It's a different empirical world.

van der Kolk and van der Hart: Trauma memories are generally unconscious, precise and somatic. They appear as behavioral reenactments, nightmares and flashbacks and are not easily expressed in language.<sup>43</sup>

Sophie: So, I'm what - repressed? Crazy? Stupid? *(fiddling with goggles)*

Naples: That's exactly what Mary Gilfus was worrying about. These guys treating trauma like an individual psychological response that is ultimately constructed and diagnosed as psychopathology.<sup>44</sup> You're not crazy, you're hurt.

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<sup>40</sup> Edward O'Neill, "Traumatic Postmodern Histories: Velvet Goldmine's Phantasmic Histories." *Camera Obscura* 19, no.3 (2004).

<sup>41</sup> Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Sophie Levy, "'This Dark Echo Calls Him Home': Writing Father-Daughter Incest Narratives in Canadian Immigrant Fiction," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2002), 874.

<sup>43</sup> van der Kolk and van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past."

<sup>44</sup> Nancy Naples, *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

Sophie: But couldn't you say the same thing about him? I'm sure he'd come up with some sob story to justify every shitty thing he ever did, or 'forgot'....

Mann: Bear in mind that "virtually all who provided testimony to the lived reality of abuse described an all-encompassing emotional sickness that threatens to entrap, to engulf, all participants".<sup>45</sup>

Sophie: You said ALL participants?

Mann: Er... right.

Sophie: So then, what? We're both sick?

Mann: But *he* has the control drive.

Sophie: He'd beg to differ.

Maggie: But, Sophie, lying is an act of violence. Did you lie?

Sophie: (*shrugs*) I don't know. Sometimes.

Maggie: On purpose to hurt or control?

Sophie: I don't think so, but -

Maggie: And did he?

Sophie: (*sitting down, quietly*) I don't know. Maybe. (*louder*) But why would he?

Mann: That depends on how you look at it. In the family violence model, the problem is damaged selves, male and female, trapped in mutual, often intergenerationally patterned, cycles of abuse and dependency, based on risky situations, histories, attitudes, and behaviors. In the violence against women model, it's about using violence, coercion and

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<sup>45</sup> Ruth M. Mann, *Who Owns Domestic Abuse? The Local Politics of a Social Problem* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 195.

intimidation to maintain male dominance.<sup>46</sup> They're competing myths. Take your pick.

They both go back to fear of powerlessness.

Gillis and Diamond: The abuse is fitted to your specific vulnerabilities.<sup>47</sup>

Martz and Saraurer: You don't need to be embarrassed, Sophie. Trying to please your partner is a common coping strategy.<sup>48</sup>

Sophie: You end up doing...

Maggie: It's okay. We know.

*Ruth and Dora appear at the pool side, dripping.*

Dora: Mom! MOM! You've GOT to go down the slide! It's AWESOME!

*They splash into the hot pool.*

Sophie: Hey, girls.

Dora: Come ON!

Sophie: *(a little snippy)* I HEARD you.

*Dora is a little crestfallen. Ruth slips into Sophie's lap.*

Ruth: Whatcha doing?

Sophie: Just thinking. Okay. *(takes a breath)* Okay. *(dumps Ruth off her lap)* Let's go.

Dora: YEAH!

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<sup>46</sup> Mann, *Who Owns Domestic Abuse?*, 10-11.

<sup>47</sup> Gillis and Diamond, "Same-Sex Partner Abuse," 113.

<sup>48</sup> Diane J. Forsdick Martz and Deborah Bryson Saraurer, "Domestic Violence and the Experiences of Rural Women in East Central Saskatchewan," in *Violence Against Women: New Canadian Perspectives*, ed. Katherine M.J. McKenna and June Larkin (Toronto: ON: Innana Publications, 2002).

***Scene Two: Haunting***

*An unfinished, long narrow space. At one end, a desk; at the other, an enormous heap of laundry. Sophie is sitting at the desk, writing. She stands, and pauses to write on a post-it: Is spousal abuse colonial? She crosses to the laundry. Turns on the radio and starts folding and sorting.*

Radio Host: Good evening. Tonight on Ideas: This Haunted Land. Sophie Tamas on memory, trauma, and the Canadian identity. Many Canadian cultural producers seem almost obsessed with trauma, as revealed through the trope of haunting.<sup>49</sup> This trope offers empowering stories of “loss, rupture, recovery, healing and wisdom” and is “at its core, political. It provokes (and insists upon) questions about ownership, entitlement, dispossession, and voice” while challenging false dualities of self and other, inside versus outside.<sup>50</sup> Haunting confronts us with our “buried or forgotten history and the necessity of being led somewhere, elsewhere”.<sup>51</sup>

The foundational trauma of our settler-invader society has produced a rich body of haunted Canadian literature. Tonight, Carleton University’s Sophie Tamas takes us through Canadian gothic and magic realist work, which represent the unspeakable by accessing the spiritual, mystical, or supernatural.<sup>52</sup> These works reckon with ghosts and call us to “change our way of seeing or apprehending experience”.<sup>53</sup> Tamas warns that

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<sup>49</sup> Marlene Goldman, and Joanne Saul, “Talking With Ghosts: Haunting in Canadian Cultural Production,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2006), 645.

<sup>50</sup> Goldman and Saul, “Talking With Ghosts,” 654.

<sup>51</sup> Goldman and Saul, “Talking With Ghosts,” 649.

<sup>52</sup> Jodey Castricano, “Learning to Talk With Ghosts: Canadian Gothic and the Poetics of Haunting in Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2006): 801-13.

<sup>53</sup> Jody Mason, “Searching for the Doorway: Dionne Brandt’s *Thirsty*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2006), 785.

they may also exploit and romanticize trauma, as an envied source of cultural depth, while containing past horrors and positioning the present as a happy ending.<sup>54</sup> Our ghost stories may be a melancholy, narcissistic attempt to forget the impossible.<sup>55</sup>

Sophie: *(on the radio)* We begin with Derrida. "There has never been," he says, "a scholar who really, and as a scholar, deals with ghosts. A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts - nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being....in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example, in the form of objectivity. Beyond this opposition, there is, for the scholar, only the hypothesis of a school of thought, theatrical fiction, literature, and speculation".<sup>56</sup>

*Sophie turns off the radio.*

Sophie: What a load of crap.

*Crosses back to the desk. A moth flies over her shoulder and lands. She picks up an empty glass and lowers it, upside down, over the moth. Sits, watching. Adds to the post-it note: Am I haunted? Carefully slides the glass onto a piece of paper, and exits, carrying the moth.*

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<sup>54</sup> Castricano, "Learning to Talk with Ghosts."

<sup>55</sup> Arthur W Frank, "Between the Story and the Ride: Illness and Remoralization," in *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*, ed. Carolyn Ellis, and Arthur P Bochner (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2002; Christine Bold, Ric Knowles, and Belinda Leach, "Feminist Memorializing and Cultural Counteremory: The Case of Marianne's Park," *Signs* 28, no. 1 (2002): 125-48.

<sup>56</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 11.

***Scene Three: Recovery***

*Maggie's office. Sophie sits cross-legged on a blue couch. Maggie sits opposite, in an office chair. The carpet is pale pink; the artwork is local; there is an enameled faux wood stove in the corner.*

Maggie: How are you doing?

Sophie: Oh, I don't know. Not too bad. (*shrugs, kneads a Kleenex*). Do you think I'm haunted?

Maggie: (*smiling*) That's a great question. What do you think?

Sophie: I don't know. I've been thinking about Angel. (*changes direction*) I was reading this thing about Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*. She said the ghosts which haunt the traumatized whisper, not for us to join them, but so that we get close enough for them to push us back out into the world.<sup>57</sup> (*Maggie waits*). Do you think I'm recovering?

*Maggie laughs.*

*Maggie becomes Brison.*

Brison: You've landed beyond the moral universe, beyond the realm of predictable events and comprehensible actions, and you don't know how to get back".<sup>58</sup>

Sophie: Exactly.

Brison: Trauma is like a nonsensical entry in the sequence of our lives. Whatever trajectory your life is on doesn't seem to *be* one of recovery. There's no discernable

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<sup>57</sup> Susan Gubar, "Empathic Identification in Anne Michael's *Fugitive Pieces*: Masculinity and Poetry After Auschwitz," *Signs* 28, no. 1 (2002): 249-75.

<sup>58</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, x.

pattern. I remember one therapist telling me it's precisely because you're doing so well that you're feeling so much worse.<sup>59</sup>

Sophie: That's no help.

Brison: You've got to wager or will yourself to believe that the future may hold pleasure as well as agony. There never was a coherent self, things never did make sense. What you need to do is "reestablish the illusory sense of the permanence of hope".<sup>60</sup>

Sophie: So, be delusional.

Brison: "Whoever was tortured, stays tortured".<sup>61</sup> You can, to some extent, piece your shattered assumptions of safety back together. (*winks*) They're illusions, but necessary illusions.

*Brison becomes Landenburger, with her arm around Didion.*

Didion: (*warily, to herself*) "Grief is a place none of us knows until we reach it..." nor can we know or imagine "the unending absence that follows, the void, the very opposite of meaning (*to Sophie, eyes flashing, getting louder*) The relentless succession of moments during which we will confront the experience of meaninglessness itself".<sup>62</sup>

Landenburger: (*to Didion, a bit sternly*) Joan.

Didion: (*putting a hand to her head*) Sorry. I cannot present a coherent face to the world.<sup>63</sup> (*Sits, facing the wall, sniffing, rocking slightly*).

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<sup>59</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, 111.

<sup>60</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, 116.

<sup>61</sup> Jean Amery, "Torture," in *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Langer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 131.

<sup>62</sup> Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 189.

<sup>63</sup> Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, 168.

Landenburger: (*to Sophie*) Recovery is “an overwhelming prospect with unclear chances of success”.<sup>64</sup> It can be a lifelong process.

Sophie: Great.

Landenburger: You’ve got to grieve the loss of the relationship, and your dreams for it. But if you grieve openly, people assume you miss the abuse. You might outwardly seem recovered but “the abuse is often an ever-present phenomenon” that affects your reactions to life and other people.<sup>65</sup> You might return –

Sophie: Fat chance.

Landenburger: Most women do. Or you might remain connected to him for years.

Sophie: Of course. It never ends, ‘cause there’s the kids.

Landenburger: Until you free yourself from guilt and from your partner, you cannot recover. You must learn how to trust yourself and others. Concrete outcomes, constant reinforcements. Put it in the past. *You* are what’s important, not your partner! Recognize and accept the abuse and give up self blame. You need balance. Spontaneity. (*pounding the arm of the chair*) Rely on and believe in yourself! You can do anything you want to!<sup>66</sup>

Sophie: Right.

Landenburger: If you can’t make sense of it, you’ll do it again.<sup>67</sup>

Sophie: Do what?

Landenburger: Get involved with an abusive partner. Ask for it.

Sophie: But I thought it wasn’t my fault?

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<sup>64</sup> Landenburger, "The Dynamics of Leaving and Recovering," 702.

<sup>65</sup> Landenburger, "The Dynamics of Leaving and Recovering," 704.

<sup>66</sup> Landenburger, "The Dynamics of Leaving and Recovering," 704-05.

<sup>67</sup> Landenburger, "The Dynamics of Leaving and Recovering," 704.

*Landenburger becomes Price.*

Price: It's not your fault. But like Hannah Arendt said: "the outrageous requires not only lamentation and denunciation, but also comprehension."<sup>68</sup>

Sophie: How'm I supposed to comprehend something meaningless?

Price: It takes intellectual courage, a determined willingness to bear the burden of events, to face the facts unflinchingly.

Sophie: (*incredulous*) So it's about courage and will. My lack of courage and will.

Price: Not denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining away the shock of experience.

Sophie: Right.

Price: Not submitting meekly as though everything could not have happened otherwise. Not identification, not moral relativism. But the "unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality".<sup>69</sup>

Sophie: (*sighs*) I'll get right on that.

Price: Understanding can be "intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually taxing. It is nevertheless both possible and necessary".<sup>70</sup>

Sophie: Okay. (*discouraged*). I just don't see it.

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<sup>68</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), viii.

<sup>69</sup> Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, viii.

<sup>70</sup> Price, *Feminist Frameworks*, 79.

Price: Women do survive. They emerge from experiences of violence and degradation strong and knowledgeable and whole.<sup>71</sup> Of course... (*leaning in, confiding*) “at base, the problem is men. Accordingly, the solution must rest with men”.<sup>72</sup> (*sitting back*)

Sophie: So women don't abuse?

Price: Well -

Sophie: If it's men that's got to change, how does that help *me*?

*Price becomes Orlie.*

Orlie: You can't change the past, but you can change its meaning for you.

Sophie: I'm supposed to understand it *and* change it?

Orlie: Not by recognizing its intrinsic worth, not by simply desiring or deciding not to be burdened by it, not by abstracting our own and others' interests in past actions, not by forgetting.<sup>73</sup>

Sophie: Then how?

Orlie: How what?

Sophie: How do I -

Orlie: You can act unpredictably, “upset expectations based on what you appear to be in order to reveal who you are becoming”.<sup>74</sup>

Sophie: How is *that* going to help?

*Orlie becomes Smith.*

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<sup>71</sup> Price, *Feminist Frameworks*, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Price, *Feminist Frameworks*, 95.

<sup>73</sup> Melissa Orlie, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 196.

<sup>74</sup> Orlie, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically*, 197.

Smith: To be honest, we don't really know what helps.<sup>75</sup>

Sophie: You don't *know*?

Smith: No. Just ask Landenburger. There hasn't been much focus on "the needs of women after they have left an abusive relationship and how they recover".<sup>76</sup>

Sophie: So you're making this shit *up*?

Smith: (*snorts*) Of course not. Here's what you should do (*ticking it off on her fingers*).

First, release your anger, bitterness, grief and guilt. Second, grow your independence, self-reliance, voice, and forgiveness. Otherwise you'll be stuck in the past, unable to rediscover yourself, find your purpose in life, feel self-compassion, or (*with a contented sigh*) the joys of self-reliance".<sup>77</sup>

*Sophie puts her head in her hands.*

Smith: You can choose to embark on your journey.<sup>78</sup> (*shrugs*) Or you can fail.

*Smith becomes Herman.*

Herman: Honey. (*pats Sophie's shoulder*). Is it okay if I touch you? Don't worry about them. To the extent that you recover, you'll do it on your own.<sup>79</sup>

Sophie: What's wrong with me?

Herman: That question gets "hopelessly muddled and ridden with moral judgment".<sup>80</sup>

Right?

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<sup>75</sup> Marilyn Smith, "Recovery From Intimate Partner Violence: A Difficult Journey," *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 24 (2003), 547.

<sup>76</sup> Landenburger, "The Dynamics of Leaving and Recovering," 700.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, "Recovery From Intimate Partner Violence," 568.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, "Recovery From Intimate Partner Violence," 568.

<sup>79</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 122.

<sup>80</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 158.

Sophie: (*nods, looking up*). They've all got these taxonomies and steps and stages and do this, do that.

Herman: There are stages, but they're not tidy and sequential. You need safety, you need to remember and mourn, and you need to reconnect with ordinary life. But "recovery is never complete".<sup>81</sup>

Sophie: Do you know how much I have spent on therapy? I have gone to the freaking food bank so I could pay for it. Do you know how *humiliating* that is?

Herman: That's a hard place.

Sophie: Hard? (*laughs*) None of it makes sense.

Herman: Survivors come to a point where all questions are reduced to one: why? Or the equally incomprehensible, why me? You have to examine the moral questions of responsibility and reconstruct a system of belief that makes sense of your undeserved suffering.<sup>82</sup>

Sophie: Systems of belief aren't things you just choose because they're handy or convenient. I have *lost* my faith. Gone. You can't just go the mall, you know, and pick up a flattering new one. It's not *like* that.

Herman: You find meaning by looking beyond yourself.<sup>83</sup>

Sophie: Being less self centered. (*flops back on couch*) Perfect.

Herman: Activism helps heal.

Sophie: A survivor mission.

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<sup>81</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 211.

<sup>82</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 178.

<sup>83</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207-08.

Herman: Right.

Sophie: Or is that just me working out my issues on other people?

*Herman becomes Brown.*

Brown: It could be. But you've got to deprivatize the issue. You've been turned into an agent of patriarchal oppression, telling yourself a powerful story of your own badness.

You're a failure, right? If only you'd tried harder, your distress would be under control.<sup>84</sup>

But the problem doesn't lie solely or even primarily in you. It's evidence of what's wrong with society and culture. It's a sign of survival in the face of oppression. Maybe even healthy protest against patriarchal norms.

Sophie: But I don't *want* to be a symptom.

Brown: You've got to connect with other women. You're not uniquely flawed.<sup>85</sup>

Sophie: I don't *like* people.

*Brown becomes Henderson.*

Henderson: You're scared, that's all. Groups offer mutual support. They're excellent for survivors. They counter the notion that you deserved your abuse, or are alone in it, and offer a forum for problem-solving.<sup>86</sup>

*Henderson becomes Kesby*

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<sup>84</sup> Laura Brown, *Subversive Dialogues: Theory in Feminist Therapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 25.

<sup>85</sup> Brown, *Subversive Dialogues*, 50.

<sup>86</sup> Angela D. Henderson, "Preparing Feminist Facilitators: Assisting Abused Women in Transitional Or Support-Group Settings," *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing & Mental Health Services* 36, no. 3 (1998): 25-26.

Kesby: It's a relational opportunity to disentangle the complex web of everyday life, deconstruct norms and conventions, reflect on everyday life, and rehearse performances of alternative realities.<sup>87</sup>

*Kesby becomes Tutty.*

Tutty: "Of five published studies, four reported statistically significant ... improvements in areas such as self -esteem, anger levels, attitudes toward marriage and the family, and depression. The results of two qualitative studies ... further support the utility of women's groups".<sup>88</sup>

*Tutty becomes Conquergood.*

Conquergood: It offers an arena where you can invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which permit you to formulate oppositional interpretations of your identities, interests, and needs!<sup>89</sup>

Sophie: I HATE groups! Okay? I have tried. I did the coloring, I did the affirmations and the worksheets. I ate the snacks. I've sat through groups where one of them was currently shackled up with another one's abuser. I have listened. I have *shared*. But I can't just say what I think, oh no, because then they look at me like I have three heads, because they don't understand the words I am using, or I am dumping my cynicism all over the nicey-nicey bullshit that gives them hope. I have no idea what it's like to be a twenty year old

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<sup>87</sup> Mike Kesby, "Retheorizing Empowerment-Through-Participation as a Performance in Space: Beyond Tyranny to Transformation," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, no. 4 (2005), 2055.

<sup>88</sup> Tutty, "Identifying, Assessing, and Treating," 386.

<sup>89</sup> Dwight Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics," in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*, ed. Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln (AltaMira, 2003), 365.

with four kids by four different men, all of whom are wards of the state, and be sitting in a survivor's group pregnant with number five. Or to hear the voices of your dead parents or let your cop husband beat the shit out of you, even though you're a black belt and could kick his ass, because you'll lose your job if you're charged with assault. I don't know how these people get through the day. And I am happy to listen to them. But if I open my mouth, if I don't be small and quiet, they all shut down. The whole tragically futile, pathetically hopeless charade of getting better together fails. Somehow, that's got to be my problem. Clearly, I am doing something wrong. Maybe I'm projecting, maybe I'm afraid, I don't know. It's supposed to help. Maybe it's helping. Maybe it's all in my head. Honestly, the most useful thing I ever got from a women's group, or therapy group, or mindfulness group, or whatever, was a pair of slippers.

*Conquergood becomes Maggie*

Maggie: There's a lot of feelings there.

Sophie: It probably just shows what a narcissistic, shitty human being I am. My bad.

Maggie: Well (*looks at watch, turning to Didion*). Joan? Joan. It's time to go. (*to Sophie, smiling, folding her hands*) We'll pick up here next week. Okay?

***Scene Four: Sex***

*A king size mattress on a low platform. Sophie sits down on the bed, naked. Shawn rolls over.*

Shawn: How was Maggie?

Sophie: *(pulls a nightshirt from under her pillow, turns it rights side out)* Eh. You know.

Shawn: *(lifts the covers, pulls her down to spoon)* That good?

Sophie: I'm reading this book by Bud Goodall.<sup>90</sup>

Shawn: *(stroking her belly)* Mmm?

Sophie: Somehow I'm supposed to give the reader chills AND goosebumps AND make them cry AND laugh AND make the world a better place AND not be self indulgent.

Shawn: *(stroking her hip)*: Mmmm.

Sophie: So far I'm thirty pages in, and it's all depressing. Me-me-me. *(sighs)* I'm going to lose the reader.

Shawn: Throw in a sex scene.

Sophie: *(laughs)* I can't do that.

Shawn: Always gets *my* attention.

Sophie: You're not on my committee.

Shawn: Just shake your bon bons *(jiggling her breast)*.

Sophie: *(laughs)* Yeah. Like that'll work.

Shawn: *(stroking her head)* You'll be fine. Who's my lion.

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<sup>90</sup> H.L. Goodall, *Writing Qualitative Inquiry: Self, Stories and Academic Life* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008).

Sophie: It's like David Mamet said. In the second act it all comes undone and you lose your way and fall into despair and then somehow the real goal of the quest is revealed.<sup>91</sup>

Shawn: (*Massaging her back*) Mmm.

Sophie: Except this isn't really a play. It's probably everything Mamet hates. It should be in the first act you set out with some high-minded goal. In the second act you realize you were arrogant and wrong but you somehow create the will to continue. Strength and will. To face your own character, turn despair into some higher resolve, whatever. D'you know Tolstoy said, if you don't undergo this revision sometime in your thirties, the rest of your life will be intellectually sterile?<sup>92</sup>

Shawn: (*stroking her arm*) Mmm. Despair. You should nail that.

Sophie: (*smacks him*) Bugger. (*sighs*) It's too manipulative and rational.

Shawn: Remember what Sarah said. Aim for defensible.

Sophie: I know, I know. So what have *you* been thinking about? Sir Thomas Moore?

Gilgamesh?

Shawn: No.

Sophie: The big bang?

Shawn: Warmer.

Sophie: (*nuzzling in*) Lemon meringue.

Shawn: Go hang.

Sophie: Wu-tang (*turns to kiss him*). Good night.

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<sup>91</sup> David Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 43.

<sup>92</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 39.

Shawn: That's it?

*Sophie giggles; sits up to put on nightshirt.*

Shawn: You will *definitely* lose your reader.

***Scene Five: Play***

*Dora (age 9) is sitting at Sophie's desk, reading the previous scene, on her laptop. Sophie enters from the bathroom, hands full of dirty laundry, naked.*

Sophie: *(startled)* Whatcha doing?

Dora: This is funny.

Sophie: You like it? *(puts laundry in the hamper)*

Dora: Yeah. I didn't realize you were writing a play. I thought you were just writing. Am I in it?

Sophie: Yeah.

Dora: It's funny. *(smiling; she follows Sophie into the bathroom)* What am I doing?

Sophie: Drooling. And splashing. It's not a big part.

*(Dora laughs).*

Dora: Drooling?

Sophie: You're a baby.

Dora: Oh. Can I be in it?

Sophie: *(turning on the shower)* It's not going to be performed.

Dora: Oh.

Sophie: But someday I'll write a play you can be in.

Dora: Okay. (*smiles, starts loading her toothbrush*) What's it for?

Sophie: My dissertation.

Dora: *That's* your dissertation?

Sophie: Yeah.

Dora: A *play*?

Sophie: Well, sort of. (*getting into the shower*) It's not supposed to be.

Dora: What's it supposed to be?

Sophie: About how or if women recover from spousal abuse.

Dora: Oh. (*starts brushing teeth*) I think they'll like it.

### ***Scene Six: Testimony***

*A lecture hall on campus.*

Sophie: Today we will be talking about testimony, the act of representing your experience. According to Eli Wiesel, testimony is the characteristic genre of our era.<sup>93</sup> Felman explains that testimony "seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be construed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference".<sup>94</sup> It is implicated in almost every form of writing and "has become a crucial mode of our relation to the events of our

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<sup>93</sup> Elie Wiesel, "The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration," in *Dimensions of the Holocaust: Lectures at Northwestern University* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1977), 9.

<sup>94</sup> Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 16.

times“.<sup>95</sup> Testimony appears in a range of discourses, but today we’ll look at three of its uses: as recovery, as social activism, and as remembrance.

Many therapists and some researchers see testimony as integral to personal healing from trauma. Traumatic experiences that you are unable or unwilling to narrate become distorted, pervasively invade and contaminate your daily life and may even be “incorporatively passed down to subsequent generations”.<sup>96</sup> As Sophie Levy argues, “the release of the voice ensures survival... escape is only possible... by repetition of events in language”.<sup>97</sup> Not telling a story perpetuates its tyranny<sup>98</sup> while telling in vivid emotional and bodily detail heals survivors, releases creative energy, converts traumatic memory into narrative memory, and reconnects us to others and to time.<sup>99</sup>

Some argue that testimony heals by enabling us to establish relational connections. Our losses are irredeemable, but we need not carry them in isolation.<sup>100</sup> Others suggest that testimony works by reconstituting an inner witness. This enables us to reintegrate and accept the othered aspects of ourselves, and, by extension, the otherness of others in the world.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Felman, "Education and Crisis," 16.

<sup>96</sup> Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," 64; Claudia Eppert, "Relearning Questions: Responding to the Ethical Address of Past and Present Others," in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, ed. Roger Simon et al. (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 219.

<sup>97</sup> Levy, "'This Dark Echo Calls Him Home'," 876.

<sup>98</sup> Laub, "Truth and Testimony," 64.

<sup>99</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*; Susan Brison, *Aftermath*.

<sup>100</sup> Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony."; Miller and Stiver, *The Healing Connection*; Kenneth J. Gergen and Mary M. Gergen, "Ethnographic Representation as Relationship," in *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*, ed. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2002).

<sup>101</sup> Krystal, "Trauma and Aging,"; Orlie, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically*.

In theory, we can do this work on the page as well as face to face. Testimonial or autoethnographic writing can get us to places where we can feel hope, stimulate recovery, lead us into tales we can't quite remember, or help us deal with what has happened.<sup>102</sup> The past becomes a scrapbook that can safely be opened.<sup>103</sup> Healing is sometimes even attributed to testimonial writing about other people.<sup>104</sup> My own doctoral work is a sort of test of these claims.

Many feminist researchers, therapists and activists agree with most of the preceding, but argue that the point is social change as well as personal healing. Trauma narratives enable us to empathize with the life stories of others, which can lead us to examine and act on social problems.<sup>105</sup> They reveal "the contingency of the social order and in some cases how it conceals its own impossibility. They question our settled assumptions about who we might be as humans and what we might be capable of".<sup>106</sup> They offer what Jan Patocka called "the solidarity of the shaken".<sup>107</sup> If "my pain or my silence or my anger or my perception is finally not mine alone... it delimits me in a

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<sup>102</sup> Carolyn Ellis, "Being Real: Moving Inward Toward Social Change," *Qualitative Studies in Education* 15, no. 4 (2002): 399-406; Douglas Flemons and Shelley Green, "Stories That Conform/Stories That Transform: A Conversation in Four Parts," in *Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*, ed. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P Bochner (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2002); Levy, "'This Dark Echo Calls Him Home'"; Robyn Read, "Witnessing the Workshop Process of Judith Thompson's *Capture Me*," in *The Masks of Judith Thompson*, ed. Ric Knowles (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2006).

<sup>103</sup> Levy, "This Dark Echo Calls Him Home," 871.

<sup>104</sup> Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, "Introduction: Inquiry and Participation in Search of a World Worthy of Human Aspiration," in *Handbook of Action Research*, ed. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Frank, "Between the Story and the Ride"; Ellis, "Being Real."

<sup>106</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 5.

<sup>107</sup> Jan Patocka, *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohak (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 134-135.

shared cultural situation which in turn enables and empowers me in certain unanticipated ways".<sup>108</sup> This opens up trauma as an opportunity for structural analysis and collective activism. As bell hooks describes,

moving from silence to speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is the act of speech, of 'talking back,' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject - the liberated voice.<sup>109</sup>

*(taking a sip of water)*

The third use of testimony is to support public remembrance. In this mode, testimony is entirely about its collective impact. It appears in two common forms. As a strategic, memorial pedagogy, it is used as a moral lesson, in the consolatory (if futile) hope of preventing future injustices. As a difficult return, it confronts us with the necessity and difficulty of living with irredeemable loss.<sup>110</sup> These public testimonies offer a counter-memory which confronts current norms and recognizes the oppressed and marginalized.<sup>111</sup> For example, Judith Thompson writes plays about trauma because

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<sup>108</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue Ellen Case (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 273.

<sup>109</sup> bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End, 1989), 9.

<sup>110</sup> Roger Simon et al., "Introduction: Between Hope and Despair: The Pedagogical Encounter of Historical Remembrance," in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, ed. Roger Simon et al. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

<sup>111</sup> Marlene Goldman, "A Dangerous Circuit: Loss and the Boundaries of Racialized Subjectivity in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Kerri Sakamoto's *the Electrical Field*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 48, no. 2 (2002): 362-88; Zuzana Pick, "Storytelling and Resistance: The Documentary Practice of Alanis Obomsawin," in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, ed. Kay Armatage et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Ann Haugo, "Negotiating Hybridity: Native Women's Performance as Cultural Persistence," *Women and Performance* 7, no. 14-15 (1995): 125-41.

“ultimately, as a culture, we can stop these things if we experience them, if we go through what other people have to go through”.<sup>112</sup>

So those are three ways that we use trauma testimony. There are a number of questions or problems about testimony which I’d like to explore. The first is, how do we testify.

Language is part of the social order, so when the social order falls, so does language. “What we *can* say no longer makes sense; what we *want* to say, we can’t. There are no words for it”.<sup>113</sup> Susan Brison attributes this to “emotional illiteracy that prevents most people from conveying any feeling that can’t be expressed in a Hallmark card”.<sup>114</sup> We find trauma unspeakable; according to Homi Bhabha, this is because it is located outside of memory and text in an enunciatory void.<sup>115</sup> Brison contends that we have the words; we just find them unpleasant. Nonetheless, there is “an imperative to speak, and a determination to find ways of speaking that remain true to the trauma”.<sup>116</sup>

This problem often leads away from the tidy specificity of positivist science and into the messier terrain of literary and artistic forms. Both the arts and social sciences

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<sup>112</sup> Eleanor Wachtel, “An Interview With Judith Thompson,” in *The Masks of Judith Thompson*, ed. Ric Knowles (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>113</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 8.

<sup>114</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, 12.

<sup>115</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt,” in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 60.

<sup>116</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 15.

seek shared cultural understanding through representation and interpretation.<sup>117</sup> But the arts may be much better suited to representing the emotional, embodied incoherence of catastrophe and pain.<sup>118</sup> Theodor Adorno argues that “it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it.... It is to works of art that has fallen the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics”.<sup>119</sup> So we see scholarship about trauma written as poetic, generative, or performative texts.<sup>120</sup>

*(Sophie loses her thread a little; clears her throat, shuffles her papers.)*

Any question so far? No? Okay.

The second problem with testimony has to do with the issue of making sense. We tend to believe there is an anterior, definitive, singular, constant, passive reality ‘out there,’ which is independent of our actions and perceptions, and that things have causes.<sup>121</sup> We assume our life stories are linear, directional, cumulative and coherent; that the past explains the present (not vice versa), that contradictions are resolvable, and that

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<sup>117</sup> Jim Mienczakowski, “The Theatre of Ethnography: The Reconstruction of Ethnography into Theatre With Emancipatory Potential,” in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2003); Susan Finley and J. Gary Knowles, “Researcher as Artist/Artist as Researcher,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (1995): 110-42; Pariss Garamone, “Tellingsmiths: The Work of Planting Trees, the Politics of Memory,” in *Wildfire: Art as Activism*, ed. Deborah Barndt (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2006); Anna Banks and Stephen Banks, *Fiction and Social Research: By Ice Or Fire* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1998); Richardson, *Fields of Play*; John Law, *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>118</sup> Kelly, “Trauma Narratives”; Naples, *Feminism and Method*; Levy, “‘This Dark Echo Calls Him Home.’”

<sup>119</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Commitment,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arat and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), 312, 316.

<sup>120</sup> Law, *After Method*.

<sup>121</sup> Law, *After Method*; Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005).

there is a knowable, persistent self, a unified agent, sitting at the center of our stories.<sup>122</sup>

Faced with inexplicable loss, we look for causes and reasons, justifications and explanations. Making trauma make sense is seen as a sign of recovery.<sup>123</sup>

The problem is that this modernist, teleological drive is part of the “way of seeing, the way of being, the way of organizing human society” which is in large part responsible for the brutal situations many survivors must heal from.<sup>124</sup> As Melissa Orlie argues, the irrationality of the rational is one of the twentieth century’s “gravest and most unnerving practical lessons”.<sup>125</sup> Making sense takes a lot of editing and ignoring. We try to erase the experiences that don’t fit.<sup>126</sup> Out there, it’s oppression, colonialism, or objectification. In here (*patting her chest*) it’s repression. Personally and socially, we are haunted by the return of the unassimilable (*stumbling on the word, smiling*) Bleah. That’s a hard one. Unassimilable otherness we repress in order to “make sense”.<sup>127</sup>

We may read morals into our stories, simplifying the characters into evil villains and innocent victims, and re-casting ourselves as survivors in a culturally familiar tale of ennobling suffering which rewards us with grit and wisdom. The promise of post-traumatic growth offers us “something for which to be grateful, something to redeem the

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<sup>122</sup> Maggie Maclure, “Telling Transitions: Boundary Work in Narratives of Becoming an Action Researcher,” *British Educational Research Journal* 22, no. 3 (1996): 273-86; Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research*.

<sup>123</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

<sup>124</sup> Heather Lash, “You Are My Sunshine: Refugee Participation in Performance,” in *Wildfire: Art as Activism*, ed. Deborah Barndt (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2006), 221.

<sup>125</sup> Orlie, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically*, 2.

<sup>126</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*; Eppert, “Relearning Questions.”

<sup>127</sup> Monique Tschofen, “Repetition, Compulsion and Representation in Atom Egoyan's Films,” in *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, ed. William Beard and Jerry White (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2002).

unmitigated awfulness”.<sup>128</sup> Trauma is reframed as a sort of hard lesson, the romantic spice of a dull society. This makes it easier for us to live with the idea of suffering, our own and others, and easier to do nothing to prevent or minimize it.

If we presume that healing and recovery are possible and that post-traumatic growth balances the losses sustained, we can see those who remain traumatized as somehow wallowing, refusing to feel better, stubbornly and perversely clinging to their maladaptive coping mechanisms. We become irritated by their failure to recover because it threatens our need to believe in justice and the possibility of healing. The victims become the bearers of pathology – post-traumatic stress disorder, mental illnesses, eating disorders, sleep disorders, phobias, and addictions – and thus the focus of social intervention. This enables us to see suffering as an exceptional and perhaps deviant condition that we should and can get over within a “reasonable” amount of time. The world remains sensible. Our trauma stories are reframed as morbidly fascinating confessions subject to expert interpretation, and stripped of diversity, complexity, and subversive potential.<sup>129</sup>

Some scholars argue that postmodern and poststructural approaches open up a space in between the necessity and impossibility of ethically making sense. As Amy Novak explains, “justice requires not the act of rationalizing, of constructing a smooth and logical account of this moment, but of remembering and maintaining

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<sup>128</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, 11.

<sup>129</sup> Roewan Crowe, “Crafting Tales of Trauma: Will This Winged Monster Fly?,” in *Provoked By Art: Theorizing Arts-Informed Research*, ed. Ardra Cole et al. (Halifax, NS: Backalong Books, 2004).

contradictions”.<sup>130</sup> They thus try to retain ambiguity and uncertainty in their work, without being completely incomprehensible.<sup>131</sup> They call into question or deconstruct both how we’re telling our stories – negotiating the available discourses – and what we’re saying. John Law argues that ephemeral, elusive, emotional, indistinct, and changeable experiences, like trauma, can only be known in embodied, deliberately imprecise, situated, allegorical, reflexive terms.<sup>132</sup> We *can’t* “make sense” in any definitive way. Instead, we try to balance mystery with mastery.<sup>133</sup> We tell stories which are more or less real, or more or less useful, rather than offering tidy narratives with clear truths and morals. Such stories never really understand or enlighten, but, in theory, anyway, they help us bear the unbearable.<sup>134</sup>

The issue of erasing alterity also pops up in relation to a third problem, which has to do with empathy. We often think of empathy as ‘putting yourself in someone else’s shoes.’ But two people can’t be in a pair of shoes at the same time. It implies displacement. Theodor Adorno says, when you believe you have mirrored the other, you

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<sup>130</sup> Amy Novak, “Textual Hauntings: Narrating History, Memory, and Silence in *The English Patient*,” *Studies in the Novel* 36, no. 2 (2004), n.p.

<sup>131</sup> Peggy Phelan, “Reciting the Citation of Others; Or, a Second Introduction,” in *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, ed. Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Benjamin Shepard, “Play, Creativity and the New Community Organizing,” *Journal of Progressive Human Services* 16, no. 2 (2005): 47-69; Novak, “Textual Hauntings”; Patti Lather, *Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts Toward a Double(d) Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2007).

<sup>132</sup> Law, *After Method*.

<sup>133</sup> Robert Louis Flood, “The Relationship of ‘Systems Thinking’ to Action Research,” in *Handbook of Action Research*, ed. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 142.

<sup>134</sup> Vivian M. Patraha, “Feminism and the Jewish Subject in the Plays of Sachs, Atlan, and Schenkar,” in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue Ellen Case (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 169.

have robbed them of their happiness, which is their ability to speak back to us.<sup>135</sup>

Empathy is supposed to be nice, but it can also be “a dangerous act of enfolded cultural projection”.<sup>136</sup> When we empathize with an other’s story, we make sense of it in the context of our lives, often appropriating their story and hearing it only in terms of our own concerns.<sup>137</sup> As Tzvetan Todorov notes, “the illusion of fusion is sweet, but... its end is bitter, to recognize others as others permits loving them better”.<sup>138</sup> Overwhelming or alienating otherness is a form of blasphemy.<sup>139</sup> It leads to much scholarly anxiety about the “violence of objectification” required to turn a life into a spectacle.<sup>140</sup> We may see empathy as a cure for objectification. However, as the feminist critiques of friendly research have noted, our feelings of warmth and communion are not guarantors of justice and respect.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, empathy may be beside the point, if the objective is not to communicate that discrimination hurts but rather that it is morally wrong and demands redress.<sup>142</sup> But *not* having empathy, *not* feeling with and for others, and the othered aspects of ourselves, also seems unethical.

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<sup>135</sup> Thodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trns. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: NLB, 1974), 89.

<sup>136</sup> Liz de Freitas, “Reclaiming Rigour as Trust: The Playful Process of Writing Fiction,” in *Provoked By Art: Theorizing Arts-Informed Research*, ed. Ardra Cole et al. (Halifax, NS: Backalong Books, 2004), 269.

<sup>137</sup> Salverson, “Anxiety and Contact,” 67-68.

<sup>138</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, “A Dialogic Criticism?,” *Raritan* 4 (1984), 72.

<sup>139</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 323.

<sup>140</sup> Patti Lather and Chris Smithies, *Troubling the Angels: Women Living With Hiv/Aids* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 154.

<sup>141</sup> Judith Stacey, “Can There be a Feminist Ethnography?,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 11, no. 1 (1998): 21-27.

<sup>142</sup> Sherene Razack, “Storytelling for Social Change,” *Gender and Education* 5, no. 1 (1993), 57.

So what are we to do? Stephen Greenblatt describes a sense of wonder as “the decisive emotional and intellectual experience in the presence of radical difference”.<sup>143</sup> Rather than empathize, Claudia Eppert asks us to withdraw from identification, from “imagining ourselves into the particularities of [others’] experiences”.<sup>144</sup> Instead, we’re asked to problematize our emotional and intellectual responses, to notice how they enable or obstruct our attentive engagement with otherness.

*(Sniffs, pulls a tissue from her cuff and dabs her nose).*

The fourth problem I want to raise concerns memory and forgetting. While the traumatized may be told that they must, literally and figuratively, “come to terms” with their history, they are also encouraged to forget.<sup>145</sup> This forgetfulness is vigorously promoted by those who are responsible for or threatened by our trauma.<sup>146</sup> Trauma narratives risk being received as old news - redundant, consumable, and relatively insignificant.<sup>147</sup> The over-exposure and misrepresentation of these stories inoculates us against their enormity and meaning. As Norman Denzin notes, “anyone’s personal troubles can now serve as a front-page story, couched as a banal morality tale with a happy ending”.<sup>148</sup> Even public memorialization “can be a forgetting, a way of saying to

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<sup>143</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 14.

<sup>144</sup> Eppert, "Relearning Questions," 228.

<sup>145</sup> Goldman, "A Dangerous Circuit."

<sup>146</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

<sup>147</sup> Roger Simon, “The Paradoxical Practice of Zakhor,” in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, ed. Roger Simon et al. (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

<sup>148</sup> Norman K. Denzin, “Presidential Address on *The Sociological Imagination Revisited*,” *Sociological Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1990), 13.

survivors, ... ‘now you can put this behind you’”.<sup>149</sup> Minimization and forgetting are also common coping strategies.<sup>150</sup>

The process of testimony itself might paradoxically incline us to forget. In fact, that may be part of how it heals. Once a trauma memory becomes conscious narrative memory, a tellable story, the survivor may be able to change its meaning, alter it, and move on.<sup>151</sup> This sets up a collision between our need for cohesion and closure, and our fear - both personal and social - that forgetting invites repetition.<sup>152</sup> This tension was described by Freud in terms of melancholy – with its chronic internalization and attachment to what has been lost – versus mourning.<sup>153</sup> The “right” choice, in most therapeutic frames, is mourning. However, it may involve “complicity with hegemonic assimilationist strategies”.<sup>154</sup> It renders trauma as a personal, manageable, temporary setback, rather than compelling evidence of enduring social problems, and enables us to forget. Some see this as “a sacrilege of the traumatic experience”.<sup>155</sup> If our quest for social justice relies on our wounds, it may seem “virtuous to ‘feed’ righteous indignation, and treasonous to stop the rage”.<sup>156</sup> Henry Krystal calls this a masochistic perversion that prolongs our suffering. We can’t expect the wounded to stay bleeding in order to sustain a

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<sup>149</sup> Brison, *Aftermath*, 57.

<sup>150</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*.

<sup>151</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*; van der Kolk and van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past."

<sup>152</sup> Bold, Knowles, and Leach, "Feminist Memorializing."

<sup>153</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *Collected Papers, vol. 4*, trans. Joan Riviere, ed. Ernest Jones, (New York: Basic Books, 1917/1959).

<sup>154</sup> Goldman, "A Dangerous Circuit," 368.

<sup>155</sup> van der Kolk and van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past," 179.

<sup>156</sup> Krystal, "Trauma and Aging," 85.

social revolution that may never come. But what should we do if the survivor mission that enables us to live with and make sense of our losses requires us to never heal?

*(Puffs out air)*. I'm almost done. Are you with me?

The last problem with testimony that I want to bring up has to do with truth. Truth is a problem on a number of levels.

The first thing we generally want to know when we're told a story is whether or not it is true. However, if it's a trauma story, the question itself can seem vulgar.<sup>157</sup> By the 1990s some scholars had sacralized personal testimony as simple evidence to be affirmed and honored rather than interrogated and theorized.<sup>158</sup> The feminist literalist view argued that "women, whose experience of violence has been ignored, silenced, trivialized, and in general denied throughout history, must always be believed, *verbatim*, period".<sup>159</sup> In Freirian popular education models, stories were "unproblematically conceived of as suppressed knowledge." There was an assumption that the living voices or written texts of the oppressed "express a truth that will win out".<sup>160</sup> Unless, of course, those 'truths' were self-deprecating – in which case, they were seen as signs of internalized oppression, somehow without casting doubt on the general veracity of the testimony.<sup>161</sup> Language simply represented reality rather than constructing it.<sup>162</sup> Trauma survivors accessed

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<sup>157</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, "It's My Nature': The Discourse and Experience of Black Canadian Music," in *Slippery Pastimes: Reading the Popular in Canadian Culture*, ed. Joan Nicks, and Jeannette Sloniowski (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002), 265.

<sup>158</sup> Darlene Hantzis, "Reflections on 'A Dialogue with Friends': 'Performing' the 'Other/Self' OJA 1995," in *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions*, ed. Sheron J Dailey (Annadale, VA: NCA, 1998).

<sup>159</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*, 135.

<sup>160</sup> Razack, "Storytelling for Social Change," 61.

<sup>161</sup> Brown, *Subversive Dialogues*.

<sup>162</sup> Razack, "Storytelling for Social Change," 61.

painful, but irrefutable, truths,<sup>163</sup> and told these truths in order to heal.<sup>164</sup> The origin and organ of their authoritative knowing was a unified self, which could discern truth from falsehood through quasi-mystical means such as resonance.

Critics of this view – and they have been many – argue that we have no such self, and even if we did, it could not produce such truths. We readily resonate with lies or with representations that “reveal ourselves to ourselves as we like to think we are – a re-enchantment and depoliticization of experience and identity”.<sup>165</sup> Our cultural obsession with authenticity, sincerity, true confessions, and sentimentality leads us to invoke ‘personal truths’ which are, according to Richard Schechner, “all too often a combination of clichés of intimacy, unexamined cultural fact, and romantic distortions”.<sup>166</sup> What is happening inside my heart or gut or whatever well-spring of personal knowing I may claim is as subject to conventions and as socially structured as any other epistemology.<sup>167</sup> These relations of ruling are invisible to me and inescapable.<sup>168</sup> As Melissa Orlie notes, “there is a mystery at the heart of our being, a dependence that renders us fundamentally nonsovereign”.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Caruth, "Introduction."

<sup>164</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

<sup>165</sup> Kristin M Langellier, “Personal Narrative, Performance, Performativity: Two or Three Things I Know For Sure,” in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2003), 455.

<sup>166</sup> Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 142; Linda S. Kaufman, “The Long Goodbye: Against Personal Testimony, Or an Infant Grifter Grows Up,” in *American Feminist Thought At Century's End: A Reader*, ed. Linda S. Kaufman (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993).

<sup>167</sup> Kaufman, "The Long Goodbye."

<sup>168</sup> Naples, *Feminism and Method*; Pam Alldred and Val Gillies, “Eliciting Research Accounts: Re/Producing Modern Subjects?,” in *Ethics in Qualitative Research*, ed. Melanie Mauthner et al. (London: Sage, 2002).

<sup>169</sup> Orlie, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically*, 8.

*(Scratches her nose).*

The problem lies not in willful deceit, although that is always possible, but rather in the nature of memory. We assume the past is determinate, complete, and leaves a neutral, if somewhat inaccessible, archive in our minds.<sup>170</sup> However, memory is informed by ideological shifts, personal and historical events, and changing relations of power. Social institutions instruct us in what we should remember, what we must forget, how far back we should remember, how deeply to remember, and how to narrate the past.<sup>171</sup> Memory is thus a selective, complex, social construction.<sup>172</sup> Pamela Sugiman explains, "we remember what we need to remember, what is safe to remember, that which we have the cultural tools to express." Memory is shaped by our audience and our own "intellectual inquiries, personal needs, and moral imperatives".<sup>173</sup> We may be taught "to lie, or at least belie, ourselves as well as others".<sup>174</sup> As such, testimony given in good faith may simply reflect the prevailing discursive constraints and dominant narratives.<sup>175</sup>

Testimony may be better understood as a performative discursive practice. Performative utterances "*make* things happen rather than describing them... they are judged by criteria of effectivity rather than accuracy".<sup>176</sup> Testimony cannot offer totalized, complete accounts. It is both formally and temporally complex, and may

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<sup>170</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*.

<sup>171</sup> Pamela Sugiman, "Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Women's Life Stories," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 3 (2004): 359 - 388.

<sup>172</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*; Ristock, *No More Secrets*.

<sup>173</sup> Sugiman, "Memories of Internment," 364.

<sup>174</sup> Erica Burman, "Fictioning Authority: Writing Experience in Feminist Teaching and Learning," *Psychodynamic Counselling* 7, no. 2 (2001), 9.

<sup>175</sup> Marjorie L. DeVault, *Liberating Method: Feminism and Social Research* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1999).

<sup>176</sup> O'Neill, "Traumatic Postmodern Histories," 164.

behave like fantasy.<sup>177</sup> Thus testimony can be “inaccurate, even flat-out wrong” without being invalid.<sup>178</sup>

This presents quite a challenge for scholars using testimony as a form of knowledge production. As Patty Kelly explains,

...the testimony of the survivor does not, in its articulation, determine meaning, and thus close a familial, cultural, or historical chapter. Rather the speaking of the trauma *opens* meaning, is productive of meaning, and necessitates a willingness on the part of the listener to bear witness to the catastrophic event, to untangle the narrative knots, and to listen through the gaps and ruptures, which takes precedence over any desire for finality.<sup>179</sup>

The challenge is not to adopt some ideal position of respectful skepticism, but rather to accept that the truthfulness of testimony may not be meaningfully adjudicable, and is probably not the most important measure of its value.

Are there any questions?

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<sup>177</sup> O’Neill, “Traumatic Postmodern Histories.”

<sup>178</sup> O’Neill, “Traumatic Postmodern Histories,” 164.

<sup>179</sup> Kelly, “Trauma Narratives,” 9.

***Scene Seven: Dream***

*Sophie is waiting for an elevator, calling home on her cell phone. Tahirih (age 15) answers.*

Tahirih: Hello?

Sophie: Hey, T. How was your day?

Tahirih: It was okay. Are you at school?

Sophie: Just finished teaching. Is Shawn there?

Tahirih: No. His car's gone.

Sophie: Okay.

Tahirih: How was your class?

Sophie: Oh, I gave a really long boring lecture on testimony.

Tahirih: *(laughs)* That's good.

Sophie: Yeah. I even tried not using big words, but.

Tahirih: I'm sure it wasn't *so* bad. Hey, I had this really weird dream last night.

Sophie: Yeah?

Tahirih: I remembered it at school. I was going to tell you about it.

Sophie: Mm hmm?

Tahirih: I forget. But it was *really weird*.

***Scene Eight: People***

*An untidy faculty office. Peter is hunched over a laptop, his back to the door.*

Sophie: *(knocking, in doorway)* Hey.

Peter: *(wheeling around on his chair)* Hey yourself. How's it going?

Sophie: *(steps in to lean on the filing cabinet, groans)* Ugh. I don't know.

Peter: Excellent. *(smiles)*

Sophie: I have to start talking to people.

Peter: Oh, don't do that. People are annoying.

Sophie: They're scary.

Peter: Just do a theory piece.

Sophie: I know. But books only get you so far.

Peter: And you've got that *(waving his hand dismissively)* whole do-good thing going on.

Sophie: Yeah.

Peter: You've really got to get over that.

Sophie: I know. *(sighs)* People are so complicated. I have to deal with ethics and methods and power and subject positions.

Peter: I'm telling you. A nice literature review, you know – some analysis –

Sophie: *(teasing)* I could be you.

Peter: Hey. My life is meaningless. *(smiles)* It's *great*.

***Scene Nine: Pee***

*The empty women's washroom on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor of Dunton Tower, Carleton University.*

*Sophie enters, puts knapsack on counter. Sighs. Stares at herself in the mirror.*

Sophie: *(thinking, all at once)* I look like hell. Bad hair. Angel had good hair. Good styles. Says him. Better. Prettier? Why'd he say that? True? Who cares. Pathetic. Vain.

Pointless. *(Enters a stall, sits to pee. Rests her head in her hands).*

Sophie: *(talking to herself)* What am I doing?

*Sophie comes out of the stall. Time jumps ahead; it is the pee break in her dissertation defence. Sarah is at the sink, washing her hands.*

Sarah: How are you feeling?

Sophie: Tired.

Sarah: You're doing really well. Just remember to lead with the data.

*Time jumps back. Sophie is alone. She washes her hands and exits. She does not notice the two moths clinging to her knapsack.*

**Act III – In which we ask others.**

***Scene One: Theory***

*Sophie is lying in bed with Cricket, a small scruffy white dog.*

Sophie: You're the only thing in my life that makes any sense.

Cricket: (*sighs*) And again, it's all about *you*.

Sophie: Pardon?

Cricket: You're self-absorbed. Studies consistently find about 30% of women have been assaulted by an intimate partner.<sup>1</sup> Health Canada estimates that woman abuse costs \$4.2 billion dollars annually.<sup>2</sup> That's billion, with a B. "There is no null hypothesis in the moral universe".<sup>3</sup> Either you're part of the solution or you're part of the problem (*yawns*).

Sophie: That's harsh.

Cricket: You're dithering over methods because you're afraid of getting it wrong. First problem: who are you talking about?

Sophie: Survivors.

Cricket: Sticking that sign on them signifies power relations, your willingness to identify with them, and your hope or cynicism about their capacity to change.<sup>4</sup> Even your most

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<sup>1</sup> Angela D. Henderson, "Preparing Feminist Facilitators: Assisting Abused Women in Transitional or Support-Group Settings," *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing & Mental Health Services* 36, no. 3 (1998): 25-33.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Todd and Colleen Lundy, "Framing Woman Abuse: A Structural Perspective," in *Cruel But Not Unusual: Violence in Canadian Families*, eds. Ramona Allagia and Cathy Vine (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Dwight Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act," in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2003) 407.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, *Subversive Dialogues*, 133.

preliminary formulations and terminologies can have profoundly formative impacts on the parameters and terms of your work.<sup>5</sup>

Sophie: Maybe I'm just being opportunist. After all, there's romance and cultural capital in working with the marginal in the academy.<sup>6</sup>

Cricket: But there's a deafening silence about the ethics of doing research with 'sufferers' in general.<sup>7</sup>

Sophie: So, what – we *don't* make spaces for the suffering to speak outside of their own contexts?

Cricket: Just do it carefully. Defining your research population has “profound intellectual and moral implications”<sup>8</sup>, so you have to think it through. You shouldn't label people without their consent.

Sophie: There's also the service providers. A lot of them are survivors, but they may not openly identify as such. I want to talk to some of them.

Cricket: They're easier.

Sophie: They're part of the puzzle. But I don't want to create a false dichotomy between them and the survivors.<sup>9</sup>

Cricket: But if you lump them all in together...

Sophie: I'm not making authoritative truth claims anyhow.

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<sup>5</sup> Turid Markussen, “Practicing Performativity: Transformative Moments in Research,” *European Journal of Women's Studies* 12, no. 3 (2005): 329-44.

<sup>6</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Christine Halse and Anne Honey, “Unraveling Ethics: Illuminating the Moral Dilemmas of Research Ethics,” *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 30, no. 4 (2005), 2142.

<sup>8</sup> Halse and Honey, “Unraveling Ethics,” 2145.

<sup>9</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*.

Cricket: (*shrugs*) It's your defense.

Sophie: I'm also worried about subjectivities.

Cricket: Explain.

Sophie: Alldred and Gillies argue, "despite the political intentions of researchers, research can reinforce not only the particular and narrow range of ways of being a 'modern subject', but the broader political relations that stem from the modernist foundation of the research enterprise" - that is, the colonial project. However, the alternative - performative, unfixed subjectivity - may be impractical given our formative influences, norms of ethical practice, and "our common-sense understanding of (and commitment to) treating interviewees decently".<sup>10</sup> As such, we may be ethically bound to support an unethical construction of subjectivity.

Cricket: Do you buy that?

Sophie: I think they're on to something. It's the tension between the postmodern or poststructural self – as constituted by matrices of power and discourse<sup>11</sup> – and our experiences of ourselves as generally coherent, continuous agents. Like Laurel notes, We *experience* our lives as personal, emotionally meaningful, narratively knowable, and tellable".<sup>12</sup> Where is agency if we don't have identity?

Cricket: In reworking and resisting the way your subjectivity is constituted?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Alldred and Gillies, "Eliciting Research Accounts," 152.

<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler, and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 62.

<sup>13</sup> Butler, "Contingent Foundations," 10.

Sophie: In theory, sure. But we see ourselves as conscious, creative guarantors of meaning, not decentered actors.<sup>14</sup>

Cricket: What about Avery Gordon's "complex personhood?"

Sophie: She's so clever. *(sighs)* And she's right. People's lives *are* "simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning."<sup>15</sup> But what if *they* don't see it that way? To some extent you have to use the modernist subject, if only because it's most familiar. You just have bear in mind that it's a fiction with consequences.

Cricket: The lines between and within subjects are wobbly at best.<sup>16</sup>

Sophie: I agree. But I also need to respect the terms of others' identities.

Cricket: What about yours? Are you a scholar? An insider?

Sophie: *(Sophie sits up, gets a bag of knitting from beside the bed, and starts untangling various balls of yarn)* That's tricky. I love how Lather and Smithies ask, "who is this we/they?"<sup>17</sup> I think posing as an outsider is a way of insulating ourselves and our readers. It also makes us look less biased.

Cricket: But?

Sophie: Well, I worry about it when I see a black scholar like Patricia Hill Collins calling black women "them,"<sup>18</sup> or when we ascribe all kinds of epistemic privilege to various

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<sup>14</sup> Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4-5.

<sup>16</sup> Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics."

<sup>17</sup> Lather and Smithies, *Troubling the Angels*, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning From the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," in *Beyond Methodology*, ed. Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A Cook (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).

marginal positions without being overt in claiming those positions for ourselves.

Cricket: But location does matter: so-called insiders often can't just walk away with the data.<sup>19</sup> We have varying degrees of mobility and access to different discourses and communities.

Sophie: Sure. But being an insider isn't some sort of ethical insurance policy. It can also make you arrogant and blind you to really important issues.<sup>20</sup> Experience and identity can't be conflated with critical awareness and understanding.<sup>21</sup> Creating an "inside" can mean erasing internal diversity, and most of us always feel like outsiders anyhow.<sup>22</sup> I don't think I have any delusions of being representative of survivors in any generalizable way. If anything, I'm *too* squeamish about belonging.

Cricket: On the one hand, you don't want to deny your investments and experience.

Sophie: That would seem dishonest.

Cricket: On the other, you don't want to appropriate or romanticize "the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions." Like Haraway says, "to see from

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<sup>19</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 137.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Jolley Bruce Chistman, "Working in the Field as a Female Friend," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1988): 70-85; Joan Acker, Kate Barry and Johanna Esseveld, "Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research," in *Feminism and Social Change: Theory and Practice*, ed. Heidi Gottfried (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Liz Kelly et al., "Researching Women's Lives Or Studying Women's Oppression? Reflections on What Constitutes Feminist Research," in *Researching Women's Lives From a Feminist Perspective*, ed. Mary Maynard, and June Purvis (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Sisterhood, Coalition, and the Politics of Experience," in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory*, ed. Chandra T. Mohanty (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Naples, *Feminism and Method*.

below is neither easily learned nor unproblematic, even if ‘we’ naturally inhabit the great underground terrain of the subjugated knowledges”.<sup>23</sup>

Sophie: Right. I think she got it bang-on when she said that drawing inside-outside boundaries is a power move, not a move toward truth.<sup>24</sup> The point for me is not that some positions offer better truths.

Cricket: You don’t really believe that.

Sophie: Fine. (*sighs*) Nobody has complete or authoritative truth, but there is more and less true, and there are truths with varying outcomes.<sup>25</sup> There are also truths with more or less air-time.

Cricket: So who’s the expert?

Sophie: (*starts knitting*) I want to say, survivors. We’re supposed to see women as the absolute experts on our own experiences and needs.<sup>26</sup> The only one who knows what’s right for her, even if she thinks she’s ignorant.<sup>27</sup>

Cricket: And she’s the expert on the oppressor?<sup>28</sup>

Sophie: Right, the victim knows best. That knowing may be groping and uncertain, may be self-corrective, but it’s still privileged.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying Knots in a Handkerchief*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2003), 29.

<sup>24</sup> Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 22.

<sup>25</sup> Law, *After Method*; Patricia Maguire, *Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach* (Amherst, MA: The Centre for International Education, 1987), 37.

<sup>26</sup> Mary E. Gilfus et al. “Research on Violence Against Women: Creating Survivor-Informed Collaborations,” *Violence Against Women* 15 (1999): 1194-1212.

<sup>27</sup> Henderson, “Preparing Feminist Facilitators,” 29.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Subversive Dialogues*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Liane V. Davis and Meera Srinivasan, “Listening to the Voices of Battered Women: What Helps Them Escape Violence,” *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 10 (1995), 67.

Cricket: But everyone can “claim to stand as oppressor and oppressed in relation to someone else”.<sup>30</sup>

Sophie: And I don't know.... I don't think I necessarily know best about what's up with me. I want to see other women as authorities, as more reliable and insightful than the books. I want to trust them to know and explain what's happening in a useful, reliable way. I believe in the value of first-hand experience and I don't think detached objectivity is ethical or possible. But we have different degrees of capacity and education, different degrees of self-perception or internalized oppression or magical thinking or whatever.

Cricket: All truths aren't equal.

Sophie: Maybe you can't adjudicate truth across discourses. But I also have problems with the idea of something being true-for-you. Its too atomized and relativist. I don't want kingdoms of one; I want a negotiated, complex account, that respects community.

Cricket: You want to piece all the truths together like a quilt.

Sophie: That would be comforting, yeah. If they all fit together. But of course they don't. We pretend they do, so stuff makes sense. We don't know how to think non-dichotomously. If the expert researcher is oppressive and bad, then the expert has got to be the participant, or intuition, or the body. Or the expert is nobody. But maybe we're all both experts *and* delusional. What you trust may not have much to do with what seems intellectually defensible anyhow.

Cricket: It's emotional, intuitive, whatever.

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<sup>30</sup> Razack, "Storytelling for Social Change," 63.

Sophie: You believe what you need to be true. But of course the ability to make that truth stick depends on your power. And nobody wants to be caught being powerful.

Cricket: "Power is presumed to equal oppressiveness".<sup>31</sup>

Sophie: Right. The only ethical approach, for a feminist researcher, anyhow, is to minimize power differences. But of course we both have and want power.<sup>32</sup>

Cricket: Being wounded can make you even more interested in controlling others.<sup>33</sup>

Sophie: Which is really hard to deal with if controlling others is also part of how we define abuse. Maybe there's an important difference in the motivation or rationale behind it, but I worry that we're replicating harmful patterns.

Cricket: Even if you wanted to, you *can't* equalize power in a research relationship.<sup>34</sup>

Sophie: But there are more and less ethical ways of using it. And it's not a simple relationship. Power is "capillary, nomadic, and circulating," not unidirectional.<sup>35</sup> The participants have their own priorities and goals, and I am totally dependent on their willingness to play along. At the same time, this is my project. I take their voices and run with them.<sup>36</sup>

Cricket: Negotiating power or control over the data and analysis only works if both parties are invested, interested in negotiating.

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<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Subversive Dialogues*, 106.

<sup>32</sup> Diane L. Wolf, "Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork," in *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, ed. Diane L. Wolf (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> Orlie, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Sandra Harding and Kathryn Norberg, "New Feminist Approaches to Social Science Methodologies: An Introduction," *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 30, no. 4 (2005), 2012; Alldred and Gillies, "Eliciting Research Accounts", 152.

<sup>35</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 47.

<sup>36</sup> Lenore Lyons and Janine Chipperfield, "(De)Constructing the Interview: A Critique of the Participatory Model," *Resources for feminist research* 28, no. 1/2 (2000): 33-48.

Sophie: Right. And if an autonomous agent gives you her story, gives you her opinions, it seems a bit of an insult to turn that gift into me using my power to take something from her.

Cricket: You're denying the violence of objectification and appropriation?

Sophie: You're denying the possibility of non-exploitative generosity. They're not fools. They know research is not friendship.

Cricket: Doesn't *that* just solve a lot of your ethical problems.

Sophie: *(sighs)* It's a non-reciprocal process. But that doesn't mean it's inherently bad.<sup>37</sup> Trying to establish non hierarchical research relationships means looking for a position outside the text - "a position that is politically irresponsible, empirically impossible, and epistemologically indefensible".<sup>38</sup> Ignoring my power is the surest way to misuse it.<sup>39</sup> I define the parameters of enlightenment.<sup>40</sup> I decide who to talk to, about what. When I write it up I use other people's words to make my points. The best I can do is to make it really obvious that I am at the center of the text and that I don't know the answers.

Cricket: *(with a toothy, sly smile)* No worries there.

Sophie: *(leaning over to blow a raspberry on Cricket's belly)* Be nice.

Cricket: So what are you going to ask?

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<sup>37</sup> Wolf, "Situating Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork."

<sup>38</sup> Jayati Lal, "Situating Locations: The Politics of Self, Identity, and "Other" in Living and Writing the Text," in *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*, ed. Diane L. Wolf (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 197.

<sup>39</sup> Orlie, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically*, 4; Brown, *Subversive Dialogues*, 105.

<sup>40</sup> Val Gilles and Pam Alldred, "The Ethics of Intention: Research as a Political Tool," in *Ethics in Qualitative Research*, ed. Melanie Mauthner et al. (London: Sage, 2002), 44.

Sophie: I don't know. *(sighs)* Supposedly that's okay. Potts and Brown say I can use the hunches, tensions, or disjunctions in my own life. I can go from clarity to fuzziness. My questions can change as I go along, and I might not see what was answered until the end of the process.<sup>41</sup>

Cricket: It sounds like you're reaching for cooperative inquiry.

Sophie: Hmm?

Cricket: You know. "Working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to yourself, in order to: (1) understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things; and (2) learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better".<sup>42</sup>

Sophie: Exactly! Yes. That's my methodology.

Cricket: And your methods?

Sophie: Something like feminist interviewing.

Cricket: Which supports the modernist fantasy that unified, authentic subjects can accurately represent themselves.<sup>43</sup>

Sophie: Accuracy isn't available. The best we've got is multiplicity. And you don't get that without listening, somehow, to others.

Cricket: Finally.

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<sup>41</sup> Karen Potts and Leslie Brown, "Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Researcher," in *Research as Resistance: Critical Indigenous and Anti-Oppressive Approaches*, ed. Leslie Brown and Susan Strega (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2003), 267.

<sup>42</sup> John Heron and Peter Reason, "The Practice of Co-Operative Inquiry: Research 'With' Rather Than 'On' People," in *Handbook of Action Research*, ed. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006), 179.

<sup>43</sup> Alldred and Gillies, "Eliciting Research Accounts", 150.

Sophie: But that's not easy either. If trauma reveals the contingency of the social order, and how it conceals its own impossibility - who wants to hear that?<sup>44</sup>

Cricket: They'll put on their best face and try to give right answers. They'll follow the "culturally defined rules for appropriate behavior between strangers".<sup>45</sup>

Sophie: And so will I. And yet.

Cricket: You've got to give up your desire for victory narratives.<sup>46</sup>

Sophie: Which can feel like giving up hope. Which is a lot to ask, when hope may be all that is keeping you going. How do you learn to hear what you don't want to hear, or can't hear?

Cricket: Of course a move toward the abject isn't always a move toward truth or reality. It isn't always helpful.

Sophie: Or possible. Even if I can find a way to say it, I have to trust that the witness can hear it without me having to take care of them and make it better for them. Where is that trust supposed to come from?<sup>47</sup>

Cricket: The problems of testimony are also problems of witnessing.

Sophie: Sure. And before you can witness others, you've got to be able to witness yourself. You've got to deal with your resistance and dismay. The fear and incomprehension.

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<sup>44</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Pamela Cotterill, "Interviewing Women: Issues of Friendship, Vulnerability, and Power," *Women's Studies International Forum* 15, no. 5/6 (593-606), 595.

<sup>46</sup> Mary R. Harvey et al., "In the Aftermath of Sexual Abuse: Making and Remaking Meaning in Narratives of Trauma and Recovery," *Narrative Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (2001): 291-311; Maclure, *Telling Transitions*.

<sup>47</sup> Jenny Horsman, "Literacy Learning for Survivors of Trauma: Acting "Normal"," in *Violence Against Women: New Canadian Perspectives*, ed. Katherine M.J. McKenna and June Larkin (Toronto, ON: Innana Publishing, 2002), 270.

Cricket: You should never ask someone else a question you'd not be willing to answer yourself.<sup>48</sup>

Sophie: And you've got to make space for answers that may be beyond your intellectual horizons and your emotional comfort zone.<sup>49</sup> You've got to let yourself "be wounded by their wounds." To let their experience resonate with and destabilize your own.<sup>50</sup>

Cricket: So you're holidaying on other people's misery?<sup>51</sup>

Sophie: And calling it a career. *(smiles)*

Cricket: Excellent. So then the problem is guilt management.

Sophie: And nerves. You're supposed to seem relaxed and capable, or they'll think you're an idiot.<sup>52</sup>

Cricket: But you can't control your feelings, or theirs.

Sophie: So you've got to open yourself up to sensory, emotional, and bodily life - all the stuff we usually suppress in our academic discourses<sup>53</sup> - and see your anxiety as a sign of potential, not pathology.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Potts and Brown, "Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Researcher," 270.

<sup>49</sup> Angela McRobbie, "The Politics of Feminist Research: Between Talk, Text and Action," *Feminist Review* 12 (1982), 55.

<sup>50</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 189.

<sup>51</sup> McRobbie, "The Politics of Feminist Research," 55.

<sup>52</sup> Cotterill, "Interviewing Women," 601.

<sup>53</sup> Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography," 355.

<sup>54</sup> Julie Salverson, "Anxiety and Contact in Attending to a Play about Land Mines, in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, eds. Roger Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Eppert (Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 72.

Cricket: But if you're really going to take in information and allow it "to affect you, baffle you, haunt you, make you uncomfortable, and take you on unexpected detours,"<sup>55</sup> isn't that just contagion? Counter-transference? Vicarious trauma?

Sophie: No. It's about trying to be human.<sup>56</sup>

Cricket: *That's* over-rated.

Sophie: If you don't listen deeply you perpetuate colonization by reproducing dominant perspectives. You hear only what you want or expect to hear.

Cricket: So what are you hoping for - absolution?

Sophie: No. The witness offers "fairness, compassion, and the willingness to share the guilty knowledge of what happens to people in extremity".<sup>57</sup> It's a non-interchangeable, sometimes involuntary responsibility.<sup>58</sup> You can't produce truth or meaning. All you can do is attend. You can engage in a relationship of attention.

Cricket: But "there is a risk, a stake, attention is not neutral, it is paid".<sup>59</sup>

Sophie: Of course there's risk. You've got to offer "an embodied cognizance" that opens you up to "the very terms of reading, listening, and viewing, to grasping the sense of one's limits and to what must be disturbed in order to realize remembrance as a radical position of learning".<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Marjorie L. DeVault and Glenda Gross, "Feminist Interviewing: Experience, Talk and Knowledge," in *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006), 182.

<sup>56</sup> Erin Graham, "This Trauma is Not Vicarious," *Canadian Woman Studies* 25, no. 1-2 (2006), 19.

<sup>57</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 69.

<sup>58</sup> Felman, "Education and Crisis," 15.

<sup>59</sup> Salverson, "Anxiety and Contact," 73.

<sup>60</sup> Roger Simon et al., "Introduction: Between Hope and Despair," 7.

Cricket: As if you're not disturbed enough.

Sophie: Witnessing is an obligation, not a pleasure. It requires "an actual desire to go somewhere you may be hurt and stay there".<sup>61</sup>

Cricket: But you can't just take on some masochistic self-wounding schtick. Salverson finds "an element of vitality, perhaps even joy, in the contact with another and the experience of being opened, of opening, of response".<sup>62</sup>

Sophie: (*sighs*) I hope she's right.

Cricket: You have an ethical obligation to refuse despair.

Sophie: The relational therapists would agree with her. I'm just having trouble getting past the idea that my despair is unethical.

Cricket: It's just a little self-absorbed.

Sophie: Thanks.

Cricket: Being open to the other takes trust. And like Heather Lash says, "trust demands a quieting of the ego, a sort of giving over to an intelligent and uncontrollable world, one full of potentials we cannot yet imagine." It's a surrender.

Sophie: Well, I've got trust issues.

Cricket: You don't say. Hence your voyeuristic need to 'find out,' or egotistical impulse to comprehend.<sup>63</sup>

Sophie: So I have to leave space for mystery.

Cricket: Or admit the space that's already there.

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<sup>61</sup> Salverson, "Anxiety and Contact," 73.

<sup>62</sup> Salverson, "Anxiety and Contact," 62.

<sup>63</sup> Lash, "You Are My Sunshine," 227.

Sophie: Lash says “art has the capacity to leave this silence intact”.<sup>64</sup> So I’ll get my participants to draw or something, and we’ll see.

Cricket: You have three problems, don’t you: how to connect with yourself, how to connect with their stories, and how to connect with them.

Sophie: Yeah. *(sighs)* It’s all about the connection.

Cricket: No sitting on the sidelines, safe-distance cop-out.

Sophie: *(Gloomily)* Yeah.

Cricket: Caring, feeling-with, receptivity. All that warm fuzzy feminist goodness.<sup>65</sup>

Sophie: *(muttering)* You needn’t be so dismissive.

Cricket: Hey. I’m a *dog*. We *invented* the ethic of care.

Sophie: Receiving what is there as nearly as possible, without evaluation or assessment. Being in a non-instrumental world of relation, without striving for established goals. Not attempting to transform the world but allowing ourselves to be transformed”.<sup>66</sup> Existing in a state of mutual concern, caring and trust.<sup>67</sup> *(sighs, looks at her knitting)*

Cricket: What about it?

Sophie: *(starts unpicking her work)* It all sounds so right but something about it gives me hives.

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<sup>64</sup> Lash, "You Are My Sunshine," 227.

<sup>65</sup> Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 105.

<sup>66</sup> Maura McIntyre, “Ethic and Aesthetics: The Goodness of Arts-Informed Research,” in *Provoked By Art: Theorizing Arts-Informed Research*, ed. Ardra Cole et al. (Halifax, NS: Backalong Books, 2004), 256.

<sup>67</sup> Yvonna S. Lincoln, “Engaging Sympathies: Relationships Between Action Research and Social Constructivism,” in *Handbook of Action Research*, ed. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 127.

Cricket: Distance is your survival strategy. You don't actually want to *feel* with anyone.

Not in an unmanaged kind of way.

Sophie: Possibly.

Cricket: You don't have *time* for pain, yours or anyone else's. This whole (*makes air quotes with her paws*) "project" is really about avoidance. But the feminist theory you prefer requires you to remain emotionally connected and present.<sup>68</sup> So you're in a pickle.

Sophie: But principles don't magically make you empathic and non-manipulative.

Cricket: Try using them.

Sophie: A belief is not the same as a behavioral skill.

Cricket: So do something simplistic and shallow and call it feminist. All this angst is tedious. (*yawns*)

Sophie: I know the right answer is to look at them, and me, with loving perception.

Compassionate curiosity. Whatever.<sup>69</sup>

Cricket: The right answer is to keep asking the question.

Sophie: Just enough trust to initiate research, safe enough spaces for research relationships.<sup>70</sup>

Cricket: You'll do it wrong. Who cares. That's part of what makes it interesting.

Sophie: *I care.*

Cricket: (*lifts her head to lick Sophie's hand*) I know, I know. You're working on that.

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<sup>68</sup> Susan McDonald, "Asking Questions and Asking More: Reflections on Feminist Participatory Research," *Resources for feminist research* 30, no. 1-2 (2003): 77-100.

<sup>69</sup> Gilfus et al, "Research on Violence Against Women," 119.

<sup>70</sup> M. Brinton Lykes and Erzulie Coquillon, "Participatory and Action Research and Feminisms," in *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 301.

Sophie: How do I be respectful? I can't say they have false consciousness, because that implies I have true consciousness, but I also have to hear and analyse what they're not saying.<sup>71</sup>

Cricket: Yup. You middle class intellectuals still tend to see the disadvantaged as victims of distorted perceptions.<sup>72</sup> Unless you feel like they have something worth saying, participation is just a token phase "in which all have their say in order to feel better before the expert tells them what they need".<sup>73</sup> If you assume you understand the structural causes of their problems better than they do, your "consciousness raising becomes indoctrination and domination".<sup>74</sup>

Sophie: But sometimes I think I *do* know better. Or at least differently.

Cricket: You do get scholarships for being the expert.

Sophie: And I can't just let their testimony speak for itself, either. I'm supposed to analyse it and deliver it to an audience and tell them what it all means.

Cricket: Yup.

Sophie: I've got to connect but not collapse differences.<sup>75</sup> To try to see from an other's

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<sup>71</sup> Sherry Gorelick, "Contradictions of Feminist Methodology," in *Feminism and Social Change: Bridging Theory and Practice*, ed. Heidi Gottfried (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 32; Lorraine Code, "How Do We Know? Questions of Method in Feminist Practice," in *Changing Methods: Feminists Transforming Practice*, ed. Sandra Burt and Lorraine Code (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>72</sup> Gilles and Alldred, "The Ethics of Intention," 45.

<sup>73</sup> Tim Prentki, and Jan Selman, *Popular Theatre in Political Culture: Britain and Canada in Focus* (Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2000), 158.

<sup>74</sup> Francesca M. Cancian, "Participatory Research and Alternative Strategies for Activist Sociology," in *Feminism and Social Change: Bridging Theory and Practice*, ed. Heidi Gottfried (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 192.

<sup>75</sup> Margaret Randall, *When I Look Into the Mirror and See You: Women, Terror and Resistance* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 195.

view without imagining that it's possible to do so.<sup>76</sup>

Cricket: That one is tricky. I like how Salverson explains it: "Loyalty to and identification with the fate of another are not the same thing. We desire to empathize and understand the pain of another but end up making our own selves the focus of the inquiry. Such identification is not only voyeuristic, not only does it distort my ability to listen and respond, it is also too great a burden".<sup>77</sup>

Sophie: It's that empathic unsettlement Dominic LaCapra calls for. Putting yourself in someone else's position without taking their place.<sup>78</sup>

Cricket: Or Cotterill's sympathetic listener. She says assuming you understand and can participate in someone else's feelings about their experience "is, at the very least, condescending and insensitive".<sup>79</sup> Or Eppert's reading for alterity.<sup>80</sup>

Sophie: I've got to be receptive, passive and patient but not pretend to let participants run things.<sup>81</sup>

Cricket: Yup.

Sophie: I've got to bear witness to myself so I have space for the otherness of the other, but not get lost in myself and erase the other.

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<sup>76</sup> Molly Andrews, "Feminist Research With Non-Feminist and Anti-Feminist Women: Meeting the Challenge," *Feminism & Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2002), 60.

<sup>77</sup> Salverson, "Anxiety and Contact" 67-68.

<sup>78</sup> Dominic LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1999), 699.

<sup>79</sup> Cotterill, "Interviewing Women," 598.

<sup>80</sup> Eppert, "Relearning Questions," 228.

<sup>81</sup> John Rowan, "The Humanistic Approach to Action Research," in *Handbook of Action Research*, ed. Peter Reason, and Hilary Bradbury (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 116; Lash, "You Are My Sunshine," 225.

Cricket: Melissa Orlie calls it thinking. She says it “opens a space of freedom in relation to what appears to be necessary”.<sup>82</sup>

Sophie: I’ve got to get out there and try to make a difference in the world without presuming that I can actually *do* anything for anybody, or that they need something done for them, and I have something real to offer them.<sup>83</sup>

Cricket: Aiming to help suggests you are external and superior to the problem.<sup>84</sup> As soon as you assume the women need or want conscientization, you stop listening.<sup>85</sup> Being trustworthy means you avoid ‘rescuing’ others, even when asked, because this colludes in the suggestion that they can’t act on their own behalf.<sup>86</sup>

Sophie: (*whining*) But I want to be saved. I want to be rescued.

Cricket: That’s clear. But you can’t pretend you’re going to save *them* with your healing power of art or truth or whatever you’ve got up your sleeve.<sup>87</sup>

Sophie: I’ve got to give up on certainty and use slow, uncertain, risky, troubling, vulnerable, quiet, diverse methods, but I also need to be able to explain and defend my findings.<sup>88</sup>

Cricket: Precisely.

Sophie: (*putting down her knitting, frustrated. She has unpicked the whole thing*) But I don’t know how to do ANY of that.

Cricket: (*with a long lazy stretch and yawn*) Sounds like you’re ready to begin.

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<sup>82</sup> Orlie, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically*, 174.

<sup>83</sup> McRobbie, "The Politics of Feminist Research," 52.

<sup>84</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 18.

<sup>85</sup> Beverley Skeggs, “Situating the Production of Feminist Ethnography,” in *Researching Women's Lives From a Feminist Perspective*, ed. Mary Maynard, and June Purvis (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 79.

<sup>86</sup> Horsman, "Literacy Learning for Survivors of Trauma," 269.

<sup>87</sup> Lash, "You Are My Sunshine," 221.

<sup>88</sup> Law, *After Method*.

*Scene Two: Practice*

To: sarah\_todd@carleton.ca

29 January 08

Hi Sarah -

I am working on the proposal, and it is a bit like trying to put back in order a few decks of cards that have been spilled on the floor, in the dark, with intermittent gusts of wind.

There is so much that I could say, I am not sure when to stop (or even how to organize it in a really succinct way).

What I am wondering is how brilliant does this have to be? Is the aim simply to (a) show that I know something about the field and (b) that I have thought through my planned inquiry? Or is the proposal meant to showcase me, represent my best thinking, etc?

*Feb 6*

*Feeling very lost. So much stuff did not make it into my proposal draft. So many dots I don't know how to connect. I am dropping so much of the things I need to carry. Feeling pretty discouraged about the whole thing. How am I going to make it all make sense?*

*Feb 11*

*The proposal is not brilliant but at least now, with Sarah's input, I can feel the shape of it and know where it has to go.*

22 Feb

I have a second draft for you.... this one was written with less ambient distraction (other than the freshly spayed, flea-ridden dog spastically flailing her cone-wrapped head around trying to get at her stitches).

I think it is better but I am sure you'll let me know ...

*4 March*

*I hate titles.*

*I am never any good at them.*

*I can write anything but titles undo me.*

*I need a title for this dissertation.*

*I have spent the past half hour walking the dog all over town trying to come up with a good title. Now I have mud all over my kitchen floor and still no brilliant title.*

27 March

None of this is urgent, so if you are in the grip of end-of-term madness, feel free to let it slide.

I have received feedback from the ethics office and made some edits accordingly.

I am waiting to hear back from the shelter - the director was away all this week but I am to call her Monday. She'd like me to come in and meet with her and a couple other people in order to see if they can support my work or not.

31 March

Hiya

About the defense... I have not really given it much thought, though I suppose perhaps I should. I've been too busy marking papers, installing joists and waiting for my interminable cold to end.

That being said, I have no familiarity with this sort of ritual and may be going into it with totally the wrong attitude. I am feeling pretty confident and hoping that all these clever people will offer encouragement and/or useful advice - I am assuming we are all on the same team and not seeing it as an inquisition. It seems to me that you are in charge, and if that is the case, I have no worries.

*8 April*

*My proposal defense is tomorrow and I have no idea what is expected of me. Sarah says I should be ready to speak to the project off the top and then answer questions. I don't know what to say, I am feeling stupid and exhausted after four full days of working on the house. I just finished installing the bathroom subfloor today.*

27 May

Is the ethics review ctee there to assess the rigor of my methods (my dissertation ctee's job, as I understand it) or to assess whether or not the methods will hurt anybody? It seems as though many of their questions pertain to evaluating the merits of my epistemology and methodology rather than determining the risks the inquiry might pose

to others. Are they allowed to reject my inquiry, not because it is unethical, but because, for instance, they think autoethnography and arts-based inquiry are flakey?

6 August

I hope your summer is going well.... school is probably the farthest thing from your mind but I have a quick question for you.

I have not heard back from the ethics ctee since they requested revisions (which I sent in on June 1). I have called and emailed several times. I am wondering if you think I ought to be doing anything other than waiting at this point, and if you know whether there is any compensation for students who can't do their work due to administrative delay (but pay full fees nonetheless).

18 August

I have been trying to woo my brain into functioning for me so that I'll have at least thought things through before we meet tomorrow. I am feeling entirely demoralized (predictably, I suppose) and am hoping that I'll feel more optimistic about my dissertation after seeing you. I don't know what options I ought to be considering but I thought I should go back to basics and try to restate what my dissertation is all about.

This is what I said in my proposal: "This thesis moves into the gap between traumatic experience and representation, and asks how we render trauma communicable, if representing trauma makes sense of it, and whether sense-making is essential for recovery."

So far, so good. I am still on board with that.

However, I go on to say this: "It pursues these questions through participatory action, arts-based, and autoethnographic research in Lanark County, Ontario, in collaboration with survivors of spousal abuse. This research hopes to offer survivors and service providers creative recovery strategies, scholars deeper insight into the ethical and practical challenges of representation, and the host community education through activist performance." This is now seeming (a) really ambitious and (b) impossible to get through ethics review.

I don't know what their decision to send this to the psychology ethics review committee entails (or why - if that's who has to review it - it wasn't sent there sooner), but at minimum, it means more delay - which I can't afford. I seem unable to help them understand the line between PAR and therapy... the whole thing is really frustrating.

I think I'm going to have to cut the participatory arts based play-groups and ethnodrama and resubmit something which is (at least on the face of it) really conventional - which stinks, but so it goes. I can still do interesting things in the autoethnographic section (they don't seem to care if I treat myself unethically) and there will be other projects. To that end, I've come up with a few possibilities for us to mull over..... See you tomorrow!

19 August

How lovely to hold your baby and be able to talk through all my worries about my thesis.

Thank you so much Sarah and don't worry about sidetracking into baby-land.... I think

the world would be a much more civilized place if babies and children were more often present at so-called important meetings.

I have emailed the other ctee members with a brief heads-up on where things are going and how we propose to change my methods... I'll let you know what sort of feedback I get.

Thanks again and good luck with the sleeplessness.... I came home to find mine had all gone out cross-country running but it feels like just last week they were spitting up all over my shoulder....

I also really appreciated you saying how you want me to love at least some part of my work.... that is really important for me to remember as I am too prone to turning life into a series of hurdles.

1 September

I have not heard anything from ethics and am wondering how long I should let it slide before I storm in there and stand on a desk banging pot lids until somebody pays attention to me.... or perhaps another email would suffice?

17 September

a bunch of little questions for you....

I've made a poster/flyer and am awaiting a call back from the shelter ED to hear if she minds me distributing it at Take Back the Night. I'll leave little stacks of them in likely places around town and put an ad in the local paper. I guess I'll give it a couple of weeks

after I put out posters and if I have not gotten enough response I'll start beating the bushes a bit more aggressively. Does that sound right to you?

I was thinking about focus group locations. My parents have a big beautiful house nearby that will be empty a lot this fall (she's in NYC, he is in Baghdad) ... Can you see a problem with having some of the focus group meetings there? It would make it logistically simpler.

I saw Andrea yesterday and she seems to feel things are on track and is going to send me a couple resources on feminist group interviewing. She was asking after you and baby and happy to hear that things had gone well.

I'll send ethics back the last change that they want but otherwise it seems like finally we're through those hoops. Sheesh, what a horror show.

I am also working on setting up a routine of some sort of arts-based research journaling or something - trying to come up with a semi-systematic reflective process that does not seem like an imposed pain in the ass. I am concerned that if I don't establish my expectations for my own process nothing will happen - but that may be just my not-trusting-the-universe, control-freakish thing.

Hope all is well and that you're getting some sleep -

*23 Sept*

*Restless & fitful sleep these past couple days since I started putting out posters for my research. I feel like a big fat fraud, like it is an insult to survivors for me to be claiming their subject position. Like I am going to get in trouble. I am scared about what would or will happen when Joel finds out about it. I was even scared to tell my Mom about the*

*autoethnographic part of my work – I could feel her concern about what havoc I might wreak with my irresponsible tendency to talk.*

*Shawn says I need to arrive at an understanding of why I feel like such an imposter. But even as he spoke in between us was a stirring or muted roaring, like an air conditioning or duct system – white noise. And a compression in my chest, like a coffee press slowly being plunged. And an immobility – curling like a paralyzed hand. And I wish I could remember because it shows what I mean about the problems with testimony.*

*There's too many voices in me. The only thing that makes sense is the dog sleeping with her head on my shoulder, under the covers.*

26 September

Well, I have distributed a bunch of flyers and need to send out a few more and so far my phone has not been ringing off the hook (or at all, other than that first day), which is kind of discouraging. I need to send out follow up emails to various folks and see what I can do.

On the plus side, I have a former student who used to work at one of the shelters in the city and who is very excited about my research and has offered to pull a group of suitable women out of her network and to host the group at her home in Ottawa.... I don't know if there is some problem with doing that but it sounds like a fine idea to me. So recruitment is not going brilliantly so far but it is still early days I suppose...

26 Sept

*Getting the posters out has me feeling raw and gross and crazy and lost. So I had my kids pass them out at the Take Back the Night march when I should have done it myself.*

30 September

Well, I have five service providers confirmed - a counselor, a doctor, a shelter staff person, a woman who runs the distress line, and a woman who works with victim services through the Ministry of the Attorney General - plus the woman who runs the sexual assault program out of the hospital has said she will send me at least one nurse who works on the front line with them. They aren't all available at the same time, of course, so scheduling might be tricky.

I am still talking to my contacts at the local shelter - I am assuming I will get at least a couple more from there. I have one survivor confirmed (yay!). The shelter folks also may allow me to go meet with their two writers groups and their assertiveness group - all survivors.

So things are proceeding... the ad comes out in the paper this Thursday so I may get some calls from that. It makes me feel so shy to ask people about it! But so it goes....

10 Oct

I know you are at your sister's and I hope the weather is as lovely in St Catherine's as it is up here. It looks like a perfect weekend for studio tours and pumpkin pie and putting gardens and cottages to bed (which is what's on my agenda).

So far all the agencies I have contacted have been responsive and are sending someone (pending scheduling) - except I am having problems with the shelter. I think the situation is that the woman I am talking with - their outreach coordinator - is a bit of a friend and wants to support it but I suspect the new ED (who doesn't know me) is reluctant to get

involved. I am still emailing back and forth trying to get them to talk about what their concerns are (so that I can have an opportunity to explain or adapt where possible). They are apparently going to talk about it again at their staff meeting next week but I don't have high hopes of anything being forthcoming. This stinks as they are the major gatekeeper to survivors and so far I have only one who has spontaneously called me. I am not feeling like the project is imperiled but it hurt my feelings that they weren't more open. So much for feminist solidarity :(

Anyhow, my former student has pulled a group together for me in the city... if needs be when I see them I will ask them all for referrals or ideas and maybe things will snowball from there. I just wish I had the data in hand so I could start working with it but these things take time, I guess. I am trying to be detached about the shelter issues - if they sign on it is gravy but I have enough to go on either way.

I hope all is well with you and your little bundle of joy...

24 Oct

Well, I have a group here in town this Sunday afternoon, with five women confirmed, and I have another group next Saturday in Ottawa, and another one in Perth the following Wednesday. In addition I am doing an individual interview with a woman who can't make any of those meetings on Monday Nov. 3, and I have another willing participant yet to schedule.... so things appear to be chugging along at their own sluggish pace. I am feeling somewhat anxious about the meeting (it will be dumb, they'll all look at me like I am a moron, the recorder won't work, they won't want to be taped, the artsy fartsy activity will

be lame, it will be awkward, the sky will fall) ... all the typical thoughts. It feels a bit better if I pretend that this has nothing to do with school and it is just the same as the umpteen workshops I have done in gathering material for a play. The trick will be to somehow make it not feel formal (despite the huge consent letters and the recording device etc etc).

Luckily I have a whack of marking to plow through so I can't just fret myself into a tizzy... although I would much rather be out walking the dog or planting my bulbs....

29 Oct

It went really well, I think. I finished transcribing it today - I am trying to stay on top of that, because I have another meeting Friday and Monday and Wednesday - and I also wanted to hear it all again while it was somewhat fresh.

There were four women. They all really engaged with the questions and the art activity and want to be involved in feedback/analysis reflection stuff through the website.... so that is all good. They were very positive and thanked me copiously for giving them the opportunity to reflect and participate in the conversation.... so all in all I think it went as well as could possibly be expected.

Anyhow, I think it was all because of the menu of snacks: brie and stoned wheat thins, nice hard black grapes, pistachios from the Middle Eastern grocery store, a poppy seed cake iced with chocolate ganache, and tea. We totally underestimate the importance of food in setting a mood, I think. Either that or I obsess over the food because it is the most

readily controllable part of what is going to go on and my typical way of managing how people are feeling.....

So the upshot is success! And I am quite proud of myself for having the thing transcribed already (the participants were incredulous that I was actually going to transcribe the whole thing.... but if I don't how can they meaningfully engage with it, as it will already be so pre-filtered by me?)

The meeting this Friday has me a little scared because it is so many people in a space I've never seen (my former student's house!) so the logistics may be challenging - but there will also be a lot of enthusiasm, so I am sure interesting things will happen.

On going over the tape I did think of some things I would have liked to have probed further, so I may let my question list evolve, group to group. I don't know if I am going to be kicking myself for not be systematic enough, but going out there knowing exactly what I am hunting for seems like not what I'm into. As I keyed the meeting I bold-ed stuff that jumped out or seemed important for whatever reason - not trying to think too much yet about analysis. I am sort of hoping/trusting that if I just sit with all the data in my head and on paper, and listen into it, the stories it wants to tell me will come winding out. If not, I suppose I can still chop it up and impose some sort of order on it later.

Anyhow, I am now desperately late to get the kids to the Halloween fun fair at their school (and I still have one costume to make - yeegads!) so I am going to have to dash - but thank you for the email asking how it went.....I hope all is well with you?

*30 October*

*I finished transcribing my first meeting. I really liked, actually, spending the time with the women again as I listened to their voices. I could remember their gestures, and how they looked as they spoke, and the light in the room.*

*31 October*

*I don't know what, if anything, this will all mean in the end. But again the women were grateful to me for the opportunity, and seemed to trust that my work was meaningful and going to be helpful. One woman drove from two hours away for the meeting. They have so much faith in this, so much confidence that it will be useful. That is the trust they have placed in me: that I will do something useful. I am not sure how to do that but I will have to try.*

*I have not been keeping track, really, of who my participants are....although I guess my committee is going to want to know. I just hate how reductive those labels are....it seems insulting to try and sort them by class/age/race/education level/occupation/years since they left their abuser/duration of therapy .... as if I could sum them up so easily. Most of the women I met today I know nothing about, though I suppose Dawn could fill me in if needs be. Of the seven women there, five made it clear that they had been abused by a partner, one said she had not been abused, and one did not indicate either way. Five of the seven have been or are service providers, in varying capacities - a front-line shelter worker, a provincial policy advisor, a counselor, etc. At the first meeting, two of the four women identified as having been abused, and the other two as having been through trauma, having had bad things happen to them, but not specifically as having been abused themselves. Three of them were service providers - in a social service agency, in a shelter, and in a private counseling practice. Of the seven women I've got coming up, two are openly survivors and six are service providers in the health/social services/justice system. This works out to eight women identifying only as service providers, four only as survivors, and*

*six as both - but I am suspicious of tidy numbers like that.... what do they actually say about how credible or useful our conversations are? You can easily have been abused without self-identifying as a survivor, and many service providers can't or won't disclose. Even if they could be sorted into column A and column B, what does that prove? It's too close to the kind of power/authority moves I am working against. Even sorting them demographically gets messy... I have one visible minority, one woman who said she's disabled, one with an indigenous background, two who indicated poverty....and a partridge in a pear tree. Just over half live in rural areas,,. they all seem to be 35-65 and heterosexual, and mostly middle-class. I know this matters because of the need for diversity and etc etc but I just can't find a way to think of them in this project in those terms. I can't ask when they left their abusers, or how much therapy they've had - maybe it would be rude and unethical or maybe I'm too shy. Even if I could map them ten different ways on a sociological grid, what would I actually know? They all got a poster or email or phone call, and drew themselves into the circle of people with something to offer. I just didn't feel like I could ask them to justify their right to speak to the issues.*

3 Nov

My interview went well today. Of course it got much more interesting after the tape stopped running, as I was standing up to leave, but so it goes. The woman is a psychiatrist who does a lot of work with trauma survivors.... so her perspective was very different from the others I have spoken with. It may be that through this research process I just get to the point where I start to figure out the questions I really want to be asking.... but that is to be expected, I suppose.

I didn't ask her to draw for me but it turns out she does art and singing and stuff as part of her own self-care/management of vicarious trauma routine. She also said I should let her

know if there was anything else she could do for me, and if I was doing any arts-based projects.

*5 Nov*

*I feel like I am blowing it by asking all these dumb questions and never really getting to the heart of what it is that I am really asking, the answers I really need, what really matters. I am afraid I am missing the point. That they are coming with a gift for me and I am never giving them the opportunity to give it. I am not attuned properly, or right-minded or grounded enough, I am too shy or inhibited or confused to see the simple question at the core of all this...whatever that may be. I am still imagining that this is a world of locks and keys.*

*15 Nov*

*Just had the last group meeting ...*

*It was a different feel from other meetings - a third woman was supposed to attend but ended up being unable to do so (ex bailed on her kids). But the two who were there were therapist and client.... which changed the dynamic. I also felt more comfortable with the women for some reason - maybe I am getting more relaxed with the groups, or maybe I am just in a different place.*

*I find it hard to do the art exercise because the things I want to draw I can't due to technical limitations. I also feel vaguely embarrassed because they create these ultimately hopeful things but my drawings are not hopeful. I feel like I have to make them hopeful in order to not worry people. I made my own image of the post-abuse process in two of the meetings ... both times it felt awkward, as if I was making it about me or usurping the position of the participant.*

24 Nov

I hope all is well with you and yours...

I have spoken to 18 women now, with four group interviews and one solo. Each meeting took about 3.5 hours. I have transcribed them all, and am about to listen to them all again to go through and correct/revise the transcripts. I will be done with that process this week.

Shawn has started building the website for posting the transcripts and getting feedback - it should be up by mid December (I am hoping). I don't know how many of my participants will actually engage in the revision/comments process ... I will be encouraging participants to not just edit for clarity or confidentiality but also to feel free to elaborate or add to what others' have said - to add anything they didn't get the chance to say in our meetings.

My next step is to spend some time on reflective work - mulling the issues over in a non-linear way. As I went through the transcripts I kept thinking of follow-up question I wished I'd asked.... There's also possibly amateurish things I didn't do - like asking each participant where they worked or how old they were.... but I am sure I'll be able to make something out of what I've gotten. What that something will be, at this point, is a bit of a mystery....which may be a good sign, who knows.

17 Dec

I know you are away but wanted to write this now so it gets out before my brain is consumed by other priorities....(it feels like I have an unruly pack of hyenas in my head

competing for my attention as if it were some half-eaten antelope that can't possibly feed them all).

I have a question - which is not really a question, I guess - I have been coding my data - first by emergent themes, second by questions and their associated responses, and third by sticky phrases - things that just jumped out at me for whatever reason. My fourth sort was going to be just by visual images - working into a visual analysis using their artwork - perhaps with me creating a composite visual piece which combines and borrows from the images they created (via scanning/cutting/pasting etc) and connects the visuals with a hybrid of the narratives they used to "explain" their art. I don't know if a collective image(s) will emerge but it seemed like it was worth pursuing as a mode of analysis.

On my way there, however, I stumbled into another strategy.

Laurel Richardson is offering a workshop at this year's Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, in which participants have to write a piece that is both personal and historical (sociological) using only three word sentences. I was mulling over the point of this exercise (other than fun) and it occurred to me that maybe I could adapt it as a verse-form method of analysis and presentation. What I like about writing poetry is the close to the bone feeling that comes when language is stripped down and spare - and I felt like my data was buried in words. So mostly as an experiment I've gone through and condensed the transcripts - keeping the images, the issues and opinions (more or less) intact. It's a bit like looking at a sine wave and keeping all the peaks - the places where their voices advance or reveal, like bright spots on the page - where the motor of reading slows down to work through a thick chunk. I'm keeping the distinctive turns of phrase - lines packed

with personality - but sifting out all the extraneous text - including who said what. I'm a bit worried about it (what if this unethically erases authorship, diversity, etc.) but given that their voices are mediated by me anyhow - and the point is what they're saying, not who is saying it - I thought it might be okay or at least interesting.

Rewriting all the group interview transcripts in (more or less) three word lines has allowed me to really see the shape of the data, almost like lines of melody. I'll leave a few stories intact - longer bits where we hear one voice, a bit like a recitative or solo passage - but most of it will get chopped up (literally, with scissors - my brain can't do this on-screen.) I'll sort and tape them back together, clustered around themes and tensions, to see what lines emerge. I'm hoping that, by organizing it thematically, I'll be able to combine voices to call out the tensions and harmonies and produce a sort of analysis by juxtaposition, like a piece of choral music. It's a way less didactic approach than "proper" analysis but maybe it'll move toward that slower, more humble, exploratory sort of knowing that Lather and Law are reaching for.

I've sung in a lot of choirs and there is this amazing thing that happens when you are singing full voice but so well attuned and arranged that instead of hearing yourself you hear something far bigger and richer and more complicated. I don't know if I can do it but it would be great if the participants got a bit of that feeling from the way I made their voices sing.

My worry is, to a reader, it could look like I've just dumped some semi-processed data disguised as lame free-verse poetry ... it takes some patience to put up with not being told what stuff means (it's a lot easier to be pomo in theory than practice) and the form

might seem deceptively simple. What do you think? Is this a legit method of analysis or just me being freaky?

Hope you are having a wonderful time at your sister's place...

6 Jan

Happy new year to you too! I was going to email you tomorrow, actually, as I am hoping to have the last bit of coding done by the end of the day and was planning to crow about it. I am a little worried about how I'll find some threads or patterns or meaning... how I will decide what stories the data is telling. It's not like putting together a puzzle or comparing apples and oranges - more like apples and lawnmowers. I am trying not to worry about it though... my brain seems to be a pattern-finding (or creating) machine and I am hoping that all I have to do is pay attention to what I am doing involuntarily. It's like an artist, I guess... the challenge is not the seeing, but rather allowing what you see to be how it is, rather than what you were expecting or hoping to see. I also have to get around my irrational anxiety that someone is going to tell me I have done it all wrong. I am not used to being the expert on my own project and I guess I am still looking for the approval of a Big Other (go figure). But I am trying not to go too far down that rabbit hole because I know if I actually do produce something ridiculous or inappropriate or weak or whatever, you won't let me go out there with it into the critical world and get creamed. I am probably more likely to weaken my work through excessive timidity rather than excess boldness, and I suppose even being spectacularly wrong is not necessarily a waste

of time. All kinds of idiocy gets published and funded. I just need to have faith that my form of idiocy is worth writing.

I did take some time off at Christmas to do rolled cookies and grandparents and all that stuff... with an undercurrent of anxiety, of course, but I think nothing short of a lobotomy would change that. Having been away from my participants' voices for a bit I am finding my emotional response to the material has changed - I find it more difficult or depressing to fill my head up with abuse when I haven't been thinking about it for awhile. So I take breaks. But I am really trying to push through it, because I think the longer you spend out of it the harder it is to get back in.

Maybe I will come by for tea sometime when I have been beating my head against the data for a few weeks and it still isn't speaking to me....

Thanks for checking in...

8 March

Things are going okay...

I have not been able to do much on the dissertation as I have been (not so patiently) waiting for Shawn to get the site on line and the password protection sorted out so my participants have a chance to look at what I've done securely before I get totally invested in it as is... but the site is now up - you can check it out if you like - [sophie.tamas.com](http://sophie.tamas.com).

2 April

I am rereading my thesis proposal and noticing the big differences between what I proposed and what I have done. In my dissertation, do I need to speak to (explain, justify) these discrepancies? Or is that something that I would do orally, in my defense? Are those discrepancies okay?

In terms of where I am at with the project, I am coming to the end of gathering ingredients. I have just finished going through all of my database of notes, and pulling out about 250 pages of potentially useful/relevant quotes - as a sort of thematically organized bank of other peoples' pertinent ideas. I have also reread most of the papers I've written in the past few years, and noted bits that might be useful or relevant.

I am currently compiling my own journal entries related to the dissertation that I have been keeping (off and on) for the past couple years, and getting those thoughts organized.

I have not heard much back from the participants about the data - but I don't want to pester them for reassurance.

Next I am going to spend some time with my interview findings, seeing how or if they connect with all the other material I've got on the table. I've really enjoyed working in verse form.... I've organized the findings around the themes that emerged from the women's voices and used spatial arrangement on the page to show the tensions and overlaps. In some sections I also use sub-headings to help the reader navigate and clarify what I'm hearing .... to show the logic behind my clustering. You can't always tell when the words move from woman to woman and often several voices are combined in one phrase or segment. It was a lot like writing counterpoint choral music. I've done a little

grammatical smoothing (verb tense, etc.) to make it flow but otherwise it's all their words.

I am not sure how I'll integrate it into the dissertation .... I feel like I have worked it over pretty heavily in getting it onto the page - there's a lot of analysis embedded in how it's presented. I don't want to chop it up and feed the reader one pre-digested bite at a time... of course it's all how I heard them but I really want some space for us to just *listen* - which isn't easy.

My hope is to have an outline for the dissertation roughed out by the end of this coming week. To me, outlining is really the creative part of the project, so I am hoping my brain will be ready. I will have to make some important decisions about boundaries, mandate and form - balancing what I want to do, what I can do, and what my audience will accept. This could end up being the kind of writing I *can't* outline ... so we'll see how that goes. Next week will be eaten up by marking exams, but my plan is to start writing on Monday April 20. I am presenting at two conferences in late May and going to a week-long Gender and Health researcher thing out west in June, but I am hoping to have something like a good draft together before the kids are out of school.

Thanks again for all your support,

Sophie

4 April

*Dream that I have been asked to join a small choral ensemble. I tell the conductor I don't think I am ready for it, that my voice is not strong enough, and she says she thinks I will do fine. There are only two altos. We start practicing but instead of sheet music I have a book of poems. I can't find the page we are singing from. Everyone else seems to know what to do. Are they improvising? It feels good to be in a choir again. I have forgotten how much I miss singing. I try to join in, to copy the other alto, but I am not doing it right. Then I am told there are two alto parts, so we have to sing different lines. The other alto is trying to help me find my place, but our books are different. Are you ready? the conductor asks. Yes, I say, but I am not.*

## Act IV: Findings

### *Scene One: Poems of Others*

*Sophie's dissertation defense, in a large seminar room. The committee sits behind a long table, facing a wall of windows looking out over fields. Sophie enters, and stands in the middle of the room. She shakes her head, and a swarm of theorists, in the form of moths, fly out of her hair. They cover the windows; the light is filtered through their wings. A zipper pull appears between her teeth. She grasps it and pulls it down, unzipping herself to the waist. The participants step out of her chest: Margo, Olive, Alice, Stella, Dawn, Ubah, Tammy, Victoria, Belinda, Cheryl, Heather, Dr. White, Shirley, Anne, Anna, Alexa, Jen and June. They appear simplified, as if crudely carved, and flicker a little, like holograms projected through Sophie's eyes. As they come a bittersweet musical prelude builds. They form a semi-circle around Sophie. There is a faint rustling; the ghosts of the abused are gathering, as a spectral audience.*

*Sophie: (to the participants) Thank you. Thank you all, so much. (zips herself back up again, and the music fades; to the committee) This is how, or if, we recover.*

## Recovery

### *Do we recover?*

*(yes)*

Definitely yes  
healing is possible  
its amazing what  
happens sometimes  
without a lot  
of intervention.

I have seen  
amazing resilience  
and I trust  
that it's there.

The human spirit  
just has this  
this drive for life.  
People find a way.  
It's a mystery  
to me where  
that comes from  
but I see it.

I'm amazed at  
the spirit in  
women who leave  
who make a new  
life for themselves  
sometimes with few  
resources. Hope is  
very key in  
people's ability  
to carry on.

They keep going.  
They manage. They cope.

It doesn't haunt  
me. I don't  
think everyone  
loses themselves.  
A little part  
of you knows  
it's not right.  
I hung on to that.  
That was my tree.  
We're all dealt  
something in life.  
I can be  
who I am.  
You have to  
believe in yourself.

*(maybe)*

It's not quick  
so many factors  
in optimum circumstances  
over time yes  
recovery is possible.

I'm not going  
to let him win.  
After sixteen years  
I'm whole again  
I'm almost there.

I don't think  
we've discovered yet  
really good ways  
of transforming  
ourselves beyond  
but I want  
to believe that  
it's possible.

I like the idea  
that people recover  
but like chronic illness  
you don't necessarily.  
Illness and health  
are not opposites.  
You achieve  
wellness, maybe.  
It doesn't disrupt  
like it did.

I don't mean  
they go well  
but, by golly  
they do keep going

like broken bone  
you get treated  
after some help  
the pain goes  
you always remember  
under an x-ray  
you see the crack  
but things are  
alright for awhile.  
it might come  
back like arthritis.  
You have to  
take care of yourself.

*(no)*

Sometimes you never  
recover from traumas.  
Recovery almost has  
a cruel sound to me.  
I don't expect it.

It's been fourteen  
years. I will  
never recover.  
I acknowledge it.  
It's always there.

It takes part  
of your fundamental  
being away. You're  
always looking to  
recover that part,  
always changed.  
Can you heal?  
No.

It's so  
traumatic you can't.  
You survive because  
you have to.  
To lay down  
and die, no.  
It doesn't go  
away. There's no  
magic. People carry  
their wounds forever.

often in a great  
deal of pain,  
using some crutches.

the dream you had  
family you hoped for  
part of you  
you can't get back -  
there is a  
kind of death  
that's happened to you.  
people who come  
to a shelter,  
they've died.  
you separate inside  
to get things done.  
You don't heal  
like broken bone.

*Do partners help?*

I never had  
another relationship

I'd always be watching  
if he raised  
his hand to  
scratch his head  
I'd be like  
you are going  
to hit me, go.

You lose trust  
in your ability  
to see. It  
sneaks up on you.

I'm at the point  
fuck the relationships

I've learned but  
I can't say  
who I'll pick next  
I can sense smell  
feel who's going  
to beat me  
financially break me

They're bad for me.  
I'm attracted to that.  
I can't trust  
that part of me.

what helped me  
was a partner

I was in a  
quite suicidal place  
just given up  
actually finding love  
hope in another  
person's eyes  
who absolutely believed.

You're not alone  
suffering will end  
you trust yourself  
in stages, eventually.

*Where do we get stuck?*

we're creatures  
of habit, you know?  
I still go to  
the wrong cupboard  
for the coffee,  
the places that  
things aren't there.  
I'm thinking I'm  
in my house.  
then I correct myself:  
I am at home.  
That's very hard.  
Home is huge,  
your safety net,  
all you know.  
Suddenly you're gone.  
Part of you  
is always connected.  
All the memories  
can be dangerous.  
It's easy to fall  
into depressions.  
You have to learn  
like baby steps.  
That was then,  
this is now.  
Go to that  
happy place.

the longer it's  
been, the longer  
it takes  
a song, a smell  
a season will  
take you back

your kids are  
a constant reminder

you can't help it -  
my brain a  
bunch of doors  
one opens up  
and I'm shaking  
I thought I  
was so strong  
moved on  
then something hits  
you boom  
right in your face.

like a rogue virus  
that jumps in  
and takes over

the aftermath doesn't  
go away.

to break up  
my son's home  
the guilt pretty near  
ate me alive

the other fish  
the fish that's hooked  
looks crazy, right?  
but that fish is  
working for its life.

if I forget it  
might repeat but  
my happiness depends  
on whether or not  
I can forget.

I never will be  
that's part of me  
and I don't really  
want to say, okay,  
I'm recovered,  
goodbye.

## Testimony

Best of all worlds  
telling helps a lot  
takes a lot to do it, though.

### *How*

People find all  
kinds of ways  
of expressing trauma  
pre verbal, sub verbal  
outside the realm  
of your world  
creative processes words enacting art poetry drawing journaling music play  
come in, tapping  
your inner guide (*who?*)  
like you were  
back, really back  
as a girl.  
one wrote abuse  
upside down  
cannot deal  
with that word.

### *Why*

it's important necessary  
had to divulge  
verbalize on some  
level tell  
their story  
stored like luggage.

telling oneself (*to know yourself*)  
can be the  
hardest part.  
you talk, you  
think, things  
come out that  
you didn't really-  
you know.

what the connection  
is between play  
and thinking well  
of yourself I'm  
not sure but  
it's important.  
they start to paint.

there's a purity  
and humor in that.  
the rest of the  
world go hang.  
in the moment  
you can't go wrong.

*(you're safe)*

talking helps process emotions-  
put in perspective

make sense categorize

I found a counselor  
in the yellow pages  
spilled my guts  
and said, okay,  
I need to know.

*(validation)*

Was it?  
Am I?  
I don't understand  
what's going on.  
Am I being  
a crybaby? Am I?

She just looks  
at me. She says,  
Yeah, you were.  
Really. Yeah.  
That whole weight  
went off.  
You think you're  
going crazy.

you talk and  
talk and talk.

at the gym  
strangers ask  
how you're doing  
and it all starts  
coming out

after I said  
I didn't mean to,  
sorry. And they  
said it's okay,  
I've been through  
the same.

you start forming  
connections.

*(connection)*

you feel compelled  
to talk, testify, tell  
what happened to you  
we all want it better for  
to make a difference  
to someone else.

the next woman.

*(your mission)*

### ***Why not***

they may very  
much regret telling  
because it changed  
their whole lives.

*(fear)*

police are required  
to lay charges  
victims are required  
to tell again  
and again and  
all of a sudden

she has no money  
he's after the children  
he's set a trial date  
he gets away with it  
he gets off.

she's worse off  
than she started.

you may say  
you didn't let  
it get out of hand.  
it wasn't so bad  
no big deal  
you blew it off.

*(minimizing)*

it feels worse to think I was as one time helpless  
to deal with  
that terrible feeling.

you may be silenced  
disbelieved discounted  
told it doesn't  
matter get on  
with your life  
it may be  
used against you  
you're just hurt again.

everything you had  
to say is  
under the carpet.  
we don't want  
you to talk  
about it.

*(suppression)*

women from certain  
cultures will be  
believed because  
you know,  
    those men.  
but if he  
is mainstream why  
wouldn't you want  
to be married to him?

*(stereotypes)*

if you are poor,  
meek, broken down  
you may be believed

if you regained  
your power, you're  
very vocal, asking

for support, you  
don't look like  
an abused woman.

when you talk  
about it you  
    can't move  
    past it  
constantly justifying  
I've done enough.

relive it over  
and over and  
over again  
I'm tired.

open that door  
digging things out  
I don't want to  
deal with it any more.

*(justifying)*

the sorrow, the sorrow  
the hurt, the hurt  
the pain, the pain  
when it identifies  
who you become  
you're very lost.

I'm not a  
major survivor  
but I think  
we've all had  
something  
in our lives.

I've never looked  
at it as "surviving."

I must be naïve  
I never thought  
of it as recovery.  
I understand now.  
I do.

*(naming)*

I hope to  
learn from it.  
continuing to talk  
brings me back.

survivor  
is a good word  
a strong word  
but one woman  
hated it.  
she said,  
I'm a thriver.

I lost half my family.  
you could say  
I'm a survivor  
of all that.

I don't want  
to be remembered  
as a "survivor."  
it was horrendous.  
it was done.

recovery sounds  
like I'm recovering  
from alcohol  
and drug abuse.  
it sounds like  
it was your fault.

I like discovery.

like being naked,  
there's a limit.

some never tell.

## Needs

### *Personal Characteristics*

Financial. That's how  
they control.

You've got to  
be able to  
take your losses.  
there's nothing of  
great value if  
you're dying inside.  
Run with a bag  
if you have to.  
but that's not  
for everyone.

(grit)

I allowed someone  
else to control me.

I used to look  
in the mirror  
and think, ugh!  
Now I don't  
see that person.  
I like who I am.  
I'm vibrant, happy  
in control of my life  
and my destiny.

(control)

You make time  
to look at it  
an internal commitment  
it's a lot of work  
to do that  
so some just  
aren't willing.

You can take that  
and carry on  
or let it  
make you stop  
if you don't  
work to  
get better.

So many women  
come in  
black and blue.  
How they recover?  
At some point  
they must want  
to let that go.

(will)

I'm healing because  
I want to heal.  
I want to move on.  
It's made me  
much wiser.

some take medication  
in hopes that they  
don't have to  
look at it.  
which is fine.  
their choice.  
healing is relative.

You have those choices.  
Sometimes you do.

Sometimes people  
are ready to work  
sometimes  
they're not as ready.

Not everybody  
is into that.  
not everybody  
wants to.  
It's not the  
right time,  
or whatever.

(courage)

One of the most  
inspiring things  
is the courage  
the spirit  
that will not lie down.

a lot of women  
don't even have  
the courage to say  
hey, I need help.  
women don't.

if you reach  
out for help  
and don't get it  
where is the courage  
to do it again?

we don't look in  
until we move on  
look at ourselves  
and say, wow  
I had the courage.

Sometimes things  
immobilize us  
until we tap  
into that thing  
that makes us strong.  
recognize where  
your strengths are,  
where you need to grow,  
to find connections.

when you start  
to heal all  
that repairs itself  
if you can  
recover the strength  
and courage to say  
this is how  
you make me feel.  
To leave.

women who get  
strong enough to leave  
give me hope.

(strength)

*Intangible*

you need time, often.  
 very traumatized people  
 it takes them years.      *(time)*

|   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| sometimes you have to<br>rip everything down<br>that terrible nothingness<br>until you can<br>rebuild again | your identity is lost<br>who you were<br>who you are<br>you have to<br>find yourself | women reinvent themselves<br>change their given name<br>cut their hair<br>get tattoos or piercings<br>silly as that sounds. | you've got to<br>have a self.<br>then you get<br>to work on<br>the esteem part. |
|---|--|---|---|

*(identity)*

you're just like  
a hollow shell.

|  |                   |                |
|--|-------------------|----------------|
| you need to<br>be taught how<br>to make decisions<br>because that whole step<br>has been taken away. | know your choices | trust yourself |
|--|-------------------|----------------|

*(self-trust)*

|  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| for years all<br>I wanted was<br>to be truly<br>hugged by someone<br>who loved me.<br>it was just<br>something I craved.<br>had to be<br>the craziest thing. | back home I<br>had my grandma<br>had my aunts<br>around the corner.<br>now I don't. | I got to the<br>point where I<br>didn't have anyone.<br>I'd already hidden<br>what was going on.<br>you're by yourself.<br>how do you<br>face people?<br>what do you say? | I don't want to<br>look at a man<br>deal with a man<br>a man doctor<br>a man officer<br>a man anything.<br>I need to<br>talk to<br>a woman. |
|--|---|---|---|

*(care)*

|  |  |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| you should have<br>someone to sit<br>with you when<br>you're scared. | someone to call<br>and they come<br>and get you. | someone who's going<br>to let you cry<br>let you get<br>angry and say<br>you'll get through it.<br>just make it<br>to the end<br>of the day.<br>tomorrow will take<br>care of itself. | someone to listen<br>to your secrets<br>and say,<br>you're okay.<br>it's not<br>your fault.<br>it's going to<br>get better,<br>hopefully. | that strong<br>friend who can<br>speak for you,<br>go to the<br>doctor's, have<br>a cup<br>of coffee. |
|--|--|---|---|---|

*(respect)*

|  |  |   |  |   |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| you should<br>put his name<br>on school forms<br>not argue with<br>the teacher | go here<br>say this<br>act this way<br>do that | follow the norms<br>a certain way<br>you're supposed to<br>or else. | your insides<br>are enraged.<br>you want to<br>be respected. | you're so vulnerable.<br>no should-do-ers.<br>I was always<br>doing it wrong. |
|--|--|---|--|---|

*Tangible needs*

what women need  
is to be able  
to use a gun.

is to be  
medically cleared.  
literally stitched up.

is a sandwich  
and a cup of tea.  
cereal for the kids.  
If we make  
the kids happy  
the woman will stay.

is to change  
the environment.  
remove yourself  
no matter how hard  
change something.  
Not everyone can.

chocolate is

a really important

part of recovery.

we have a  
really good protocol,  
constantly under scrutiny  
by all of us  
to ensure the support  
networks are there,  
in the community.  
as long as  
they want help  
we can provide  
it for them.

with all the  
community partners -  
police crown attorney  
family lawyers counselors  
probation officers  
Interval House  
some monies for  
lock changes although  
that could be improved.  
by the time  
it's through the court  
the issues are identified.  
the nets are in place.

people want  
to feel safe  
first and foremost.

they come for  
safe haven first  
and sometimes  
we send them  
right back out  
with no safety net.

the first thing  
you need is  
a place to live  
money financial assistance.

domestic abuse  
it's the financial  
hook that gets  
every one of them.  
they'd be out  
ten times sooner  
if they could support  
themselves and their children.  
we deal with that  
three times a day.

they do everything  
to stop you.  
even though you  
have a job  
you don't have  
the means to  
insure your car,  
put gas in your car.  
you've got to  
climb that mountain.

a lot of women know  
yes, he'll hit me  
but I can  
deal with him  
I can predict,  
I can handle  
rather than  
that scary world  
being humiliated  
to beg for money,  
to justify.

they don't care  
what you're going through.  
the plate glass window.  
I don't *want*  
to scream my name out  
in a room full of people  
I don't know.  
I don't want  
to say my name.  
I don't want  
to say anything.  
I don't want  
to be here.

when I envisioned  
this, my life,  
I wasn't begging  
showing everything,  
or do I have  
any jewelry to pawn  
before I can  
get help?  
You just want  
to hide.  
This isn't right.  
This isn't normal.

something like  
transportation.  
You've got to go  
get the tickets.  
You've got to go  
back every week.  
*You've* got to  
go get them.

when you  
bring a cheque  
into the bank  
and the teller  
looks at you?  
You can see  
it right  
in her face,  
in her eyes.  
You're always feeling  
you have to  
kiss people's asses  
be grateful for everything.

it's like being  
hit by a car  
all of a sudden  
you're lying there  
wounded from  
head to toe  
in every aspect  
of the word  
and now you've got  
to fight for your life.

you have to  
be able to  
jump loops hoops  
pound doors.  
you don't have it.  
you're surviving  
from surviving.  
it sucks.  
you have to, though.

you've got to do  
the running, paperwork,  
fighting. You cry,  
you're angry.  
And you're  
supposed to work?  
Raise your kids?  
Go home and  
make supper?  
I don't know.

it's so overwhelming  
discontinuous support  
systems, waiting lists  
begging on your knees  
crying at the bank.  
If you yourself  
working in the field  
are frustrated  
imagine a woman  
so wounded?

you need information  
about resources, referrals  
the fear is big  
you don't absorb  
take stuff in  
so it has  
to be reinforced.

you want to  
insult me?  
call me by  
my married name.

it's been five years.  
the school won't  
recognize it.

just getting  
your name back.  
your name!  
it was the biggest  
thing in the world.  
I'll never give  
my name away  
again.

I couldn't change  
my kids name.  
I needed permission.  
Finally he's  
no longer knocking  
at my door.  
No way am I  
going to go  
find him.

## Trust

in order to heal  
you need  
to trust somebody  
you need  
to trust yourself.

maybe I was  
just fortunate I didn't  
have that desire  
to go back. Thank God.  
I did go back  
the first time.  
I keep forgetting about that.  
I keep forgetting about that.  
all that brainwashing.  
he had it  
drilled in my head  
that financially I couldn't.  
how do you trust yourself?

most say  
I don't trust anybody  
I have walls around me.  
but trust is  
a relative thing.  
one trustworthy person  
helps the healing.

rebuilding trust  
is gradual.  
things in your upbringing  
make it more or less likely,  
faster or slower.

relationships?  
they're out.  
I cannot trust myself.

trust the process,  
trusting the client  
to preserve their life.

we don't listen  
to ourselves.  
your gut  
will lead you.

our head is  
incredibly brilliant  
at deceiving us  
all the time.

I scramble  
to be worthy  
of the trust  
that's already given.

it's not about  
me being trustworthy.  
I am. I know that.  
you don't.  
you're not going  
to feel that  
all the time.

## Making sense

Viktor Frankl said  
suffering ceases  
to be suffering  
in some small way  
when it finds meaning.

I can backtrack.  
I can see how  
the chains, the links.

I am caught  
between compassion  
for him as a child  
and hatred for  
who he became.

there was abuse  
in my home but  
I choose not to yell  
I choose not to  
use a strap.

almost always  
there's childhood issues  
sexual abuse issues.  
women say how  
did I get  
myself into this?  
I say, you didn't.  
you were set up.  
Our society, the abuse  
set you up.  
We cannot in  
any way blame  
you for doing  
what you've been  
trained to do.  
but it is  
your responsibility  
to look after  
your future.

my bad relationships  
stem back to childhood  
I can say it.  
I know it's  
not my fault.  
I made these  
choices because  
of whatever circumstances.  
my entire life  
has gotten me here.

people do make  
sense of their  
experience, rightly  
or wrongly.

sometimes it causes  
problems, sometimes it  
leads to healing.

some degree is possible  
some of the time  
but the big question  
doesn't really make  
too much sense.

I had a woman  
say maybe I was  
bad in another life  
that's why it  
happened to me.

I don't think  
I ever went  
out of my way  
to hurt another person.  
what's the point?  
why would you?  
At some point  
I get so  
tired of thinking.  
That's his issue.  
it doesn't say  
a lot about  
who I am.  
Differentiate that.  
I was socialized  
into taking care  
and he needed  
me so I was  
kind of hooked.

something you don't  
even remember  
is extremely difficult  
to understand  
I've got this  
great brain here  
likes to take a chunk  
throw it out the window  
and it comes back  
every so often.

trying to figure out  
why it happened  
is accepting blame  
on yourself again.

I don't think  
it needs to  
make sense.

the why isn't  
ever answerable  
because the offender  
doesn't say why.  
not very often.

good people  
can't fathom  
the kind of violence  
some people experience.

it's actually unbelievable  
so not right  
that it didn't happen  
nothing in my  
world prepared me  
hard to speak  
there aren't words.  
Hearing the stories  
is incredibly hard.  
It upsets your world view  
and can be a huge shock.  
what *is* changes.  
how can a person?  
how is that possible?  
we have some  
theories, intellectually  
we can rationalize  
but that's not  
understanding it, really.

I don't need  
to understand anymore  
why I had a gun  
to my head  
did this drug  
got into places  
whatever.  
That's what happened  
but I don't  
need to understand.

## Time

there's a lack  
of understanding  
the time it takes  
to even resume  
a semblance of a life.

there's an expectation  
if you're through  
the court stuff,  
you've got custody,  
you're fine.

but it may take 10 years  
to recover to the point  
where they can start  
rebuilding their lives.  
women aren't cookie cutter.

If somebody had  
mentioned it might  
take another 15 years  
it might have  
been easier

we beat ourselves up.  
why can't I  
work through this?  
why am I stuck?  
why am I crying?  
all those stupid,  
negative things.

I don't have time to cry.  
I don't have time now.  
I don't have time.  
I don't have time.  
I don't have time.

I'm tired. Always tired.  
There, I'm done.  
Time to move on  
and all of a sudden  
you fall back  
on your butt again.  
and you think,  
what's wrong  
with me?  
I must  
be depressed.

I've done 15  
years of therapy  
and it's not ever  
going to end.  
it's part of  
you that died.

how the hell  
are you supposed  
to afford it?

there's not  
enough resources  
even if they want to.

I truly believe  
recovery starts in therapy  
and ends in therapy  
and you'll be in therapy  
for the rest  
of your bloody life.  
To me, therapy is God.

Sometimes people are  
in therapy for  
a very long time  
and aren't going anywhere  
almost dependent on therapy  
a kind of stuck-ness  
like a bad marriage.

you only wish  
you could keep  
your counselor in  
your pocket  
keep her around  
but she has  
other work to do.  
there are other people.

it's just about the money.  
it's always about the money.  
the people who are  
making these decisions  
need to come down  
and follow a person  
through what the system  
actually does.

we've said that  
for years and years  
and years but  
they never do.  
it never happens.

## Helping

*(labels)*

I don't get  
hung up on words.  
my job is helping  
the person name  
their particular problems  
encouraging reflection  
within experience

it's overwhelming.  
women out there  
right now, this  
afternoon, who don't  
know if they're  
being abused.

what is trauma?  
something that shakes  
you to the core  
violates your self esteem  
people don't come out  
just normal from  
something like that.

labels are useful  
to me in  
terms of treatment.

diagnosis can be  
insult or awakening  
some say, I finally  
know what's wrong  
with me.

most people with  
mental health diagnosis  
have historical  
child abuse  
and adult trauma.

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| as long as<br>it doesn't replicate<br>the power dynamics<br>of the abuse.  | I come at it<br>from, well, probably<br>a feminist point of view.<br>the two of you<br>working together.<br>each with a<br>level of expertise.   | a good medical evaluation<br>psychiatric evaluation<br>there is a lot<br>of co-morbidity<br>as we call it<br>could be depression<br>substance abuse, psychotic.               | (role)<br><br>it's not a doctor.<br>the doctor can't<br>fix this.  |
| she was me<br>but for the<br>grace of god<br>it could be<br>us switching.  | me doing this work, yes<br>but tomorrow I<br>may need her help.  | after all those years<br>working in the shelter<br>the more I do<br>the less I know   |  |
| I listen more<br>than I talk.<br>the woman<br>guides the process.<br>she lets me know<br>what she needs.   | I'm like a coach<br>a witness to hear<br>your story.<br>a little kindness<br>and respect can<br>go a long way.   | paying attention.<br>I have this talent<br>of writing and<br>maintaining<br>eye contact.  | noticing what<br>happened to you<br>how do you see it<br>can we see<br>it differently<br>some teaching<br>is involved.   |
| How do you heal?<br>every woman is different.<br>everybody has to<br>do what they can<br>with the tools<br>they are given<br>judging for themselves<br>what works for them.<br>that's all.<br>different stages -<br>emergency out of whack<br>suicidal addicted<br>all kinds of things.<br>some are not<br>comfortable being pushed<br>they feel they're going<br>to fragment, fall apart. | start with the body<br>start with now.<br>the body is often<br>where trauma lives.<br><br>the present experience<br>is your emotional state<br>whatever you<br>are going through.<br><br>(process)<br>trauma memories<br>you need a<br>strong foundation<br>a crisis plan.<br>trust is absolutely essential. | it will take time.<br><br>if a person is<br>traumatized as<br>a child they<br>may need a<br>childlike avenue<br>to heal.<br>our creative self,<br>there's a child<br>for you. | physical<br>emotional<br>spiritual<br>relational<br>once you feel<br>you're finished<br>give it<br>some time<br>you get the<br>money back<br>guarantee.<br>If you are<br>not sure you're<br>quite there,<br>give me a call.<br>Let's talk,<br>let's meet.<br>That would<br>be ideal. |
| knowledge is power<br>to make change<br>once you<br>become aware<br>it's hard to<br>become unaware<br>if you live with that<br>for a time<br>let it effect<br>your decisions<br>your future is changed<br>your feelings<br>eventually change too.  | (understanding)<br><br>I like to talk about<br>the effects of trauma<br>in plain language<br>hyper-reactivity<br>constriction<br>dissociation<br>depression<br>addictions<br>relationship problems<br>anger, denial, upheaval.<br><br>ways of describing<br>that make sense.                                 | I have faith.<br>I have seen successes.<br>you plant the seeds.<br>that's how it starts.<br>hopefully. hopefully.   | the important<br>beginning piece<br>is understanding.<br>the kernel of abuse<br>is that they<br>have no power.<br>facing feelings<br>internal responses<br>what you allowed<br>how you were trained<br>what you can do<br>taking those steps.  |
|  | people need<br>to have hope<br>they'll get better.   |   |  |

## Abusers

there's nothing  
they don't do.  
they're like con artists.

when my ex  
walks into the school  
he's got this whole façade going  
I could just *spit* on him  
it makes me so mad.  
It makes him look good  
and I look like a pain.  
They don't know who he is.

you think  
what made me fall  
into that trap?

you're young  
you're in love  
you see the  
little boy inside them.  
but the shell  
it's tough.

always trying  
to bring out  
the little boy  
as opposed to this  
monster you see  
all the time.

what kind of  
relationship is that?  
and you can't.

forget the little boy  
forget the little boy  
you've got to see  
the man.

I come to a  
point of realization  
unfortunately  
he's lost a little soul.  
You can't change them.  
I lost respect for him.  
Once you lost that  
you don't get it back.

it's pretty hard  
to accept, you know.  
you put me  
through hell  
and you sit here -  
you don't voice it  
but things start changing.

he still tries.  
it's *amazing*.  
I shake my head.  
what is it  
you don't understand?

my greatest  
greatest, greatest  
moment was when  
I said, you no  
longer control me.  
This is my life.  
He still doesn't  
understand.

all the stuff  
we have in schools  
all the mental health  
all the ads  
all the public ed  
all the everything.  
it's not working.  
it's not getting out to them.  
abusers don't  
listen to that.

we're not the problem.  
the problem is male violence.  
buddy over there,  
somewhere he learned that.  
it takes a man  
challenging them, saying  
no, you can't  
do that, dearie.  
something meaningful  
in their face.

education isn't enough.  
programs for abusive men  
that focus on violence  
as learned behavior  
have a one percent  
success rate.  
you have to touch  
the emotional part.

the victim wants  
the offender punished  
to have treatment  
the system to fix them.

I have very seldom  
seen an abusive man  
change his ways.

## Collective analysis

recovery programs  
have to be  
done in context.  
we aren't just doing  
it for ourselves.  
this isn't a women's issue.  
it's the planet's issue.

it's a social issue.  
what we see on TV  
with other people  
in books, movies  
it's how people view women.

the media is  
so complicit in  
the status quo

there's no  
justice.

a lot of times  
as women  
we look beyond ourselves  
and see there are  
people who  
have suffered more

we have this illusion  
we've made it  
as women

what is the norm?  
the norm is often  
what is  
abusing women.

anytime there's  
an equality issue  
that unites women in Canada  
within the week  
there'll be some  
documentary on  
how bad it is  
in some third world country  
almost to say  
what do you  
really have to complain about?  
it could be worse.

it amazes me  
the amount of times  
it still happens.  
we think we're being  
so progressive.  
women are still  
not feeling good  
about themselves.

why are we still  
doing so much  
post recovery?  
when the pre  
is still not fixed?

it's hard to believe  
what goes on out there.  
how do we change that?  
one person at a time.

we are still  
collectively beginning  
to tell the stories  
of ourselves as women.  
no more silence.  
sheer grit and determination  
as a group, no more.  
never again.

this is your journey  
but not just your journey  
it's the journey  
of many women.  
I am the first  
woman born a person  
in my family.  
while I'm old  
I'm not that old.

the collective journey  
is important if  
we want things  
to be different  
for the next generations.

I am tired  
of doing this work.  
I want it to stop.

you won't be angry  
that other people  
didn't do anything.

you won't be angry  
at a system  
that doesn't work  
for you.

you won't be angry  
at them.  
get well, shut up,  
go away.

the names  
are put on  
to keep systems safe.

something is very  
wrong in our world.

I find the  
injustice difficult.  
I bring it home.  
sometimes anger  
colors your world.

the unfairness.  
the unfairness.

sometimes the only  
means of protest  
has been through  
hurting yourself.

we are caught  
in our time  
and place in history.

## Intervention ideas

more affordable therapy.  
people who are  
well enough to be functional  
are walking wounded.  
six sessions is really  
not going to help  
trauma very much.

first stage groups  
second stage groups  
then kind of nothing.  
  
(therapy)

for a lot of women  
the women's movement  
groups and stuff  
become the place  
where they heal  
find those supports  
build their trust  
they get validation:  
you're not crazy,  
you're abused.

places of women  
where there is  
time, understanding, support  
to express, to rest,  
to be held.  
It's so easy to forget  
there's so many of us  
while we have differences  
there's comfort  
in just being together.

when you forget  
why you struggle  
that you're not alone  
it's so easy to get  
hard on yourself  
to stay down  
to be filled with anger.

like a 24 hour  
drop in center.

(women's centers)

I think of  
the school system.

bringing guidance  
counselors back.

psychologists  
in each and every school.  
no waiting lists.  
on the level  
with the kids  
not subject to  
those damn budget cuts  
just a right.  
male and female.  
paid full time.

(schools)

make violence  
compassion empathy  
part of the curriculum  
at ground level  
as early as possible.  
kids know, not fair.  
there's a sense  
of anger with it  
which I rather enjoy.  
never lose it.  
it's precious.  
we don't talk  
about justice  
in the curriculum.

schools are so  
apprehensive of  
feminist agencies  
because of the  
stereotype.

grade five, six, seven  
someone coming in  
reminding the next year.  
I was never told  
that you could say no.  
It's okay. You have  
your own life.  
If someone tried  
to make you  
it's against the law.  
Here's who you call.

if I had learned  
to put labels on  
these terrible things  
that abuse isn't normal.  
The more often  
I got raped, got hit,  
put down, whatever  
I always thought it was the norm.

I would like to  
volunteer to  
talk in schools.

It's not enough.  
it's only out enough  
to say we're  
politically correct.

## Five stories

*The choral recitation ends. One by one, five women step forward to speak. As they do so, they become more visually solid and well-defined.*

### *Stella*

I used to think  
 who are these people?  
 I want to run  
 away from this.  
 I didn't understand  
 everything so nice  
 in deep denial  
 it was pretend.  
 Lovely people  
 very sick.  
 my whole live  
 observing,  
 getting red flags,  
 breaking up fights.  
 Like being  
 strapped to a bomb.  
 I look my  
 father's spitting image.  
 mum attempted suicide  
 three times.  
 so much shame  
 she stayed with dad.  
 sometimes it's terminal.  
 mum drank  
 herself to death.  
 I found my sister's body  
 in mum's apartment  
 eleven days later.  
 they don't hug you  
 they don't touch you  
 and there's her body  
 five feet from me.  
 they called the  
 victim crisis unit.  
 she made me  
 a cup of tea  
 and she held me.  
 you don't know  
 how far that goes,  
 the kindness of strangers.

### *Belinda*

One time coming out  
 from this horrible,  
 horrible relationship  
 I went to my mom's  
 and my brain  
 just said, enough.  
 I woke up  
 three days later  
 and my mom said  
 I think you had  
 a nervous breakdown.  
 She goes, it's okay.  
 I took care of you.  
 I had to go  
 do these things  
 but my brain didn't  
 interfere with my feet.  
 it was probably  
 god-sent or spiritual  
 or whatever you want to call it.  
 my feet did it for me.  
 my brain didn't work  
 it was so badly- whatever.  
 I did what was needed.  
 and I didn't trust myself  
 for a very long time.  
 It took a long time  
 just to walk  
 out the door.  
 I was young.  
 I didn't have a clue.  
 I never questioned it.  
 It was normal.

*Jen*

You see little things  
 and don't recognize them.  
 I tried to get  
 out of my first  
 date with him.  
 He just absolutely refused.  
 that annoyed me a little bit.  
 It used to be the joke.  
 or one time  
 he fell down  
 the basement steps  
 only a few steps  
 but he punched  
 a hole in the wall  
 he was so angry.  
 he was never  
 one to physically hurt you.  
 he'd go on rampages  
 which was worse.  
 slamming the cupboards,  
 the doors.  
 disrespect for property.  
 you think, oh,  
 he's got a bad temper.  
 he's an Irishman.  
 well, we don't come  
 with instructions, hey?  
 No one comes with instructions.

In those relationships  
 you don't feel  
 like a good person.  
 You're the one  
 that's done all the wrong  
 never do anything right.  
 Guilt, blame, shame.  
 You don't know  
 what to do with them  
 always trying to please  
 make everyone happy  
 it's like you're  
 a mediator in this nightmare.

I keep thinking  
 I see my mother in law.  
 she died during the separation.  
 she was good to me,  
 you know. And I didn't  
 have a chance  
 to say goodbye to her.  
 Every once in a while  
 I'll see this  
 little old lady  
 I'll think it's her.  
 It's the strangest thing.  
 She had a hard life.  
 I can understand  
 what made her  
 the woman she was.  
 they were always  
 gruff with mom  
 a lack of respect  
 toward their mother.  
 she was this  
 kind little old lady  
 would do anything  
 for these kids.  
 baking, cooking, you know.  
 she'd put up with them  
 being ignorant with her.  
 and you'd think, *wow*.

She left in the end  
 after 38 years of marriage.  
 She found the courage.  
 I could understand her fear  
 of not having her children around.  
 She knew.  
 She knew.  
 But I understand, now.

**Tammy**

When you hit  
 crash rock bottom  
 you need someone  
 to watch over you.  
 I had my parents, my family.  
 I remember like  
 it was yesterday.  
 I had my son  
 who was three  
 I packed everything  
 in the car  
 and took off.  
 My parent's home  
 I was raised in  
 was always a safe place.  
 The minute I stepped  
 on their property  
 the *minute* my feet  
 touched that grass  
 I felt my body start to burn.  
 I went through the motions  
 son bath snack bed  
 before my head  
 hit the pillow  
 I was out.  
 I had no period.  
 I was 107 pounds.  
 I had nothing left in me.  
 You're broken.  
 Your spirit is broken,  
 your body is broken,  
 your soul.  
 You need someone to  
 put their energy around you  
 and say, you're *safe*.  
 Once you've got that  
 you can't do everything  
 but you can  
 start to survive  
 little by little.

**Victoria**

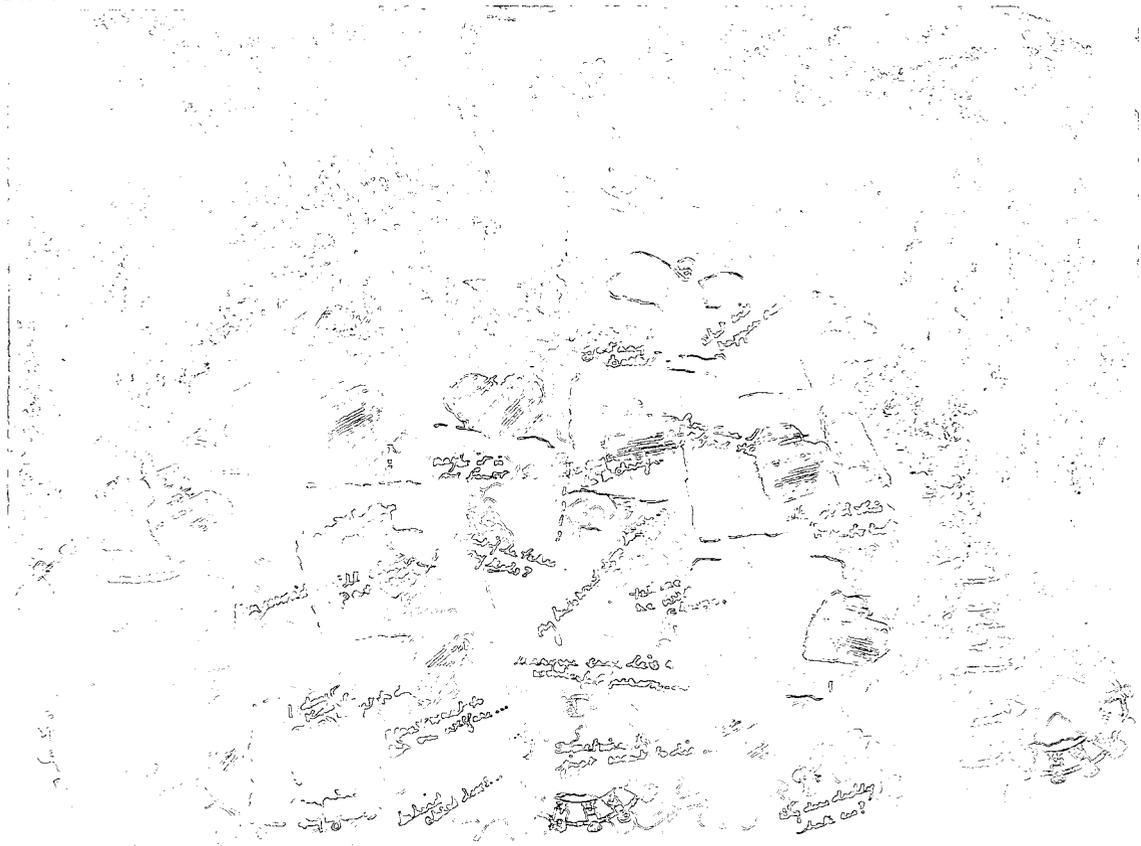
You lose  
 part of yourself.  
 I lost a tangible thing  
 partial functioning of my brain.  
 I couldn't believe  
 he'd taken that too.  
 It was just stunning to me  
 to lose part of your function  
 just blew me away.  
 Two years later  
 I still thought  
 it was my fault  
 and I did have  
 counseling and so on.  
 For three years  
 I tried everything  
 to recover that part  
 then I got to acceptance.  
 now I have to be  
 a different person.  
 so what am I going to do?  
 We all want  
 it better for the next woman  
 so they don't lose  
 that part of themselves.  
 it's a method of survival.

Sophie: *(to the participants)* Can you show me what recovery looks like?

*A piece of paper blossoms in each woman's hand. As they give their papers to Sophie, they turn into moths. Each is unique, but constantly moving, so we can't quite see them.*

*They circle Sophie's head, crawl up her sleeves, and land on her hair and face, She struggles to be calm and still, to not brush them off.*

Olive



Mine's the shelter  
first line of defense  
hunkering down  
dark clouds  
I've worked there  
for 28 years  
every year we  
have more calls.

They've often said  
I feel I have  
a guardian angel  
when they say that  
when a woman tells me  
she feels some level  
of spiritual protection  
I feel so hopeful  
really very positive  
and its just said  
to me so  
many times, that.

The squares are  
the rooms  
one per family  
children all over  
women come  
with kids, right?

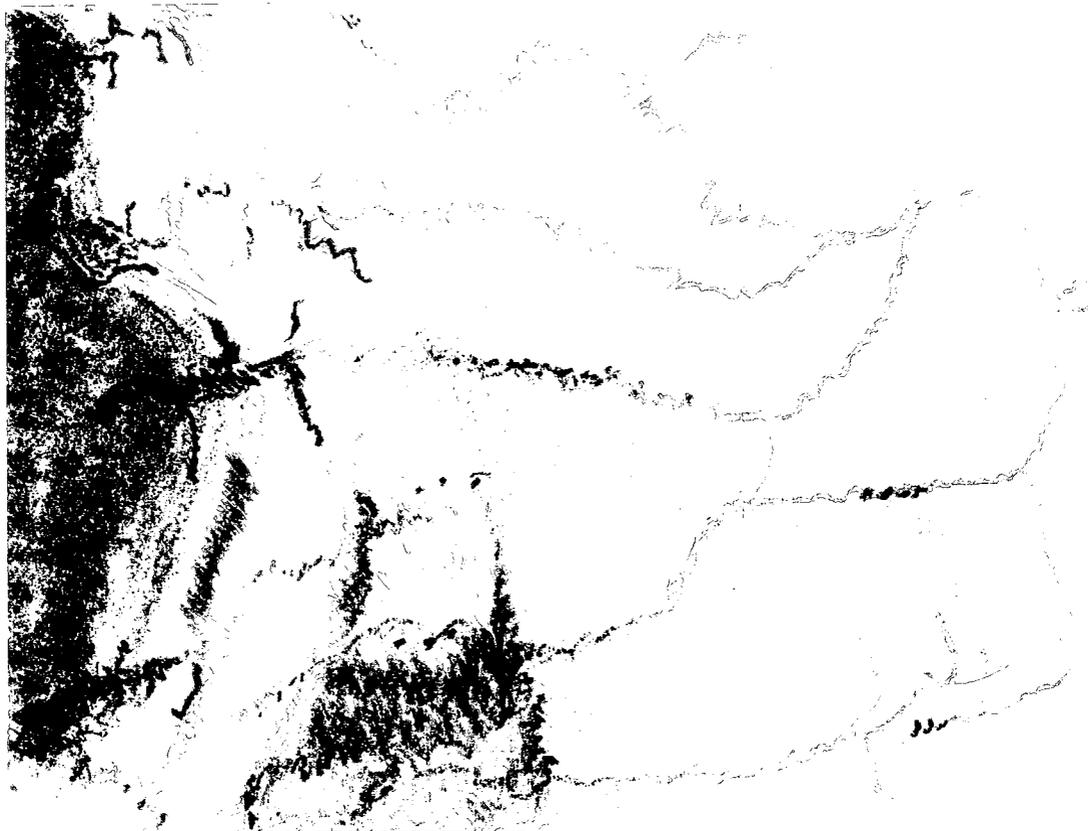
all these  
crooked little paths.  
I don't know  
how people  
come to us,  
and they go away  
and they often  
come back.  
  
nobody makes it  
on the first go around.

One of the things  
that dies in a shelter  
I think, is hope.  
Hope for what  
they've had in the past.  
And it's a  
terrible, terrible thing  
to come to a place  
where you have no hope.  
a terrible, desperate place.  
Almost you have to  
give up that hope  
in order to  
make a new hope  
but just that  
in between time  
is extraordinarily  
difficult and  
some women  
don't get there.

I turned 65 this year  
I found I can't not work.  
I have such admiration  
for the women.  
I do.  
Just to be able to go on.  
Just, go on.

I don't know if  
that's recovery  
or not but  
one step in front  
of the other is sometimes  
the greatest act  
of courage  
you think you can see.  
Just, that.



*Belinda*

the first thing  
I thought of  
was my aura or chakra  
I want it to bleed out  
all the time  
because for me  
it was constant.  
it still is.  
it's much better  
but there's still  
a helluva lot  
of dark blue depression  
the green and black  
are the real shit  
even looks like  
shit, the colors.  
Shit. All the shit  
coming out of me.  
The black is –  
I don't know.  
Constipation.

All the stops  
along the way.  
My aura, my feelings  
branch out,  
start again  
stop again.

This is years.  
This is years.  
This isn't a  
day, or anything.  
It stays really mucky  
for a long time.

This part is without  
anyone in my life  
there's not as much chaos  
but it still  
comes out everywhere  
job, house, kids, whatever.  
It's still there.  
this is where it's going.

I'm still post,  
if you ask me.  
I'll be post probably  
the rest of my life.  
Post depression, post this,  
post whatever.  
You get bursts of happiness  
and then it just  
gets into the shit again.

Victoria



I started down here  
 armed camp  
 like a prisoner,  
 the wire and everything.  
 the monster.  
 then coming out  
 walking through flames.  
 seethe with rage  
 get your kids  
 try and move on.

first time, probably  
 for a lot of us  
 you're able to  
 cry out loud  
 be vocal about  
 what's happening.

it's a voyage  
 of discovery.

the community of  
 women who care  
 what happens to you.  
 The shelter workers  
 were a lifeline  
 for me. I was.  
 almost murdered.  
 I had a  
 young daughter  
 and had a  
 very hard time  
 with survivor guilt.  
 I was so badly hurt  
 I thought it would  
 have been easier for her  
 if I had just died  
 and he went to jail  
 and she had a chance at life.  
 The shelter workers  
 really brought me back  
 so "choose life" means a lot to me.  
 They encouraged me  
 to see things can change.

I have all kinds of possibilities.

finally seeking  
 serenity.  
 All I wanted  
 All I have  
 ever asked for  
 is quiet.  
 I just want peace.  
 I just want  
 some peace.

*Cheryl*

I started my journey  
in the well  
not realizing  
I'd been abused.  
It took some time  
to come to that awareness.

I kind of sprung out of it  
and went, wait a minute  
broke free  
and then plummeted.  
I felt like  
I was drowning,  
that first year.  
It wasn't as visible,  
people didn't believe me.  
From my mom I got,  
you have to  
treat your man  
like a king.  
Alright, thanks for that.  
It was awful,  
after discovering awakesness  
having to bury it again.

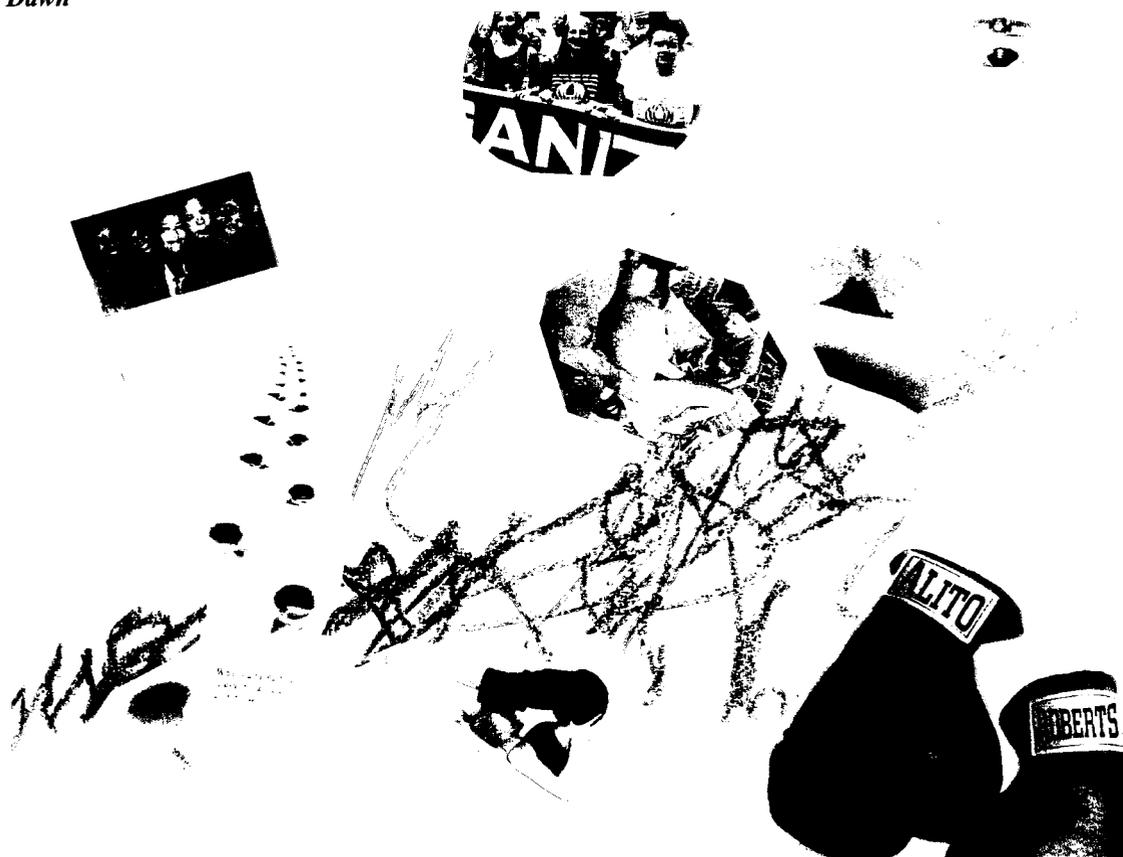
The next few years  
very tumultuous  
Then I broke out again.  
Okay, I'm fine!  
I'm fine! Whoops!  
No, I'm not  
completely fine.

This is a 16 year journey  
of finally being able  
to see the light  
having ground around me  
or under me  
most of the time  
but sinking  
into the waters.

The only way  
I was able to let go  
was through art, dance  
body movement.  
I had to let go.  
Words weren't working.

Art for me  
is very simplistic.  
I actually hate it.  
It is something I  
have never enjoyed.  
I almost did a numbers graph.

*Dawn*



The path starts  
low and black  
tension, confusion  
red spikes of  
rage anger frustration

walking alone but  
friendships support  
is a huge part.

color changing  
not really linear  
more circular  
when it's down  
it's hard to see  
it's going up.

action motivated  
feminist movement  
connected fighting  
for women's rights  
is a huge part  
of healing.

movement is huge  
in any healing process  
so, dance. Yoga  
but I don't  
do it yet.  
Body, being able  
to feel from  
the neck down  
which is really  
really hard  
in this process  
for me.

being angry.  
I'm not able yet  
so I guess  
I'm having  
a hard time  
getting it out.  
But I want to be.  
That's why the  
boxing gloves  
are so big.

For me it's not  
recovery of who I was  
because too many things  
started happening  
right away.

Trying to heal, to grow  
is a birthing of myself  
represented in a plant  
you are nurturing.

Learning to be understanding.  
I can do self compassion  
for other women  
but it's very, very hard  
to do it for myself. To trust.

Margo



You start with  
a kind of desert  
place in your life  
where you've  
hit bottom  
the whole world  
is just shriveled and dry

You begin a  
circular journey  
circumambulate  
beautiful round city  
symbol of the self  
layers and layers and layers  
pieces of discovery

Nebulous uncertainty  
caught in a cocoon  
embryonic pushing  
not fully formed  
giving birth  
to yourself  
this little sprout

beluga whale  
dream connecting  
heaven and earth  
stretching out  
to the infinite

hiking boots  
woods canoe water  
very spiritually connecting

feels like a maze  
dead end  
turn around  
try a different direction  
kind of lost

looking at the clock  
damn, when is this  
going to be finished?

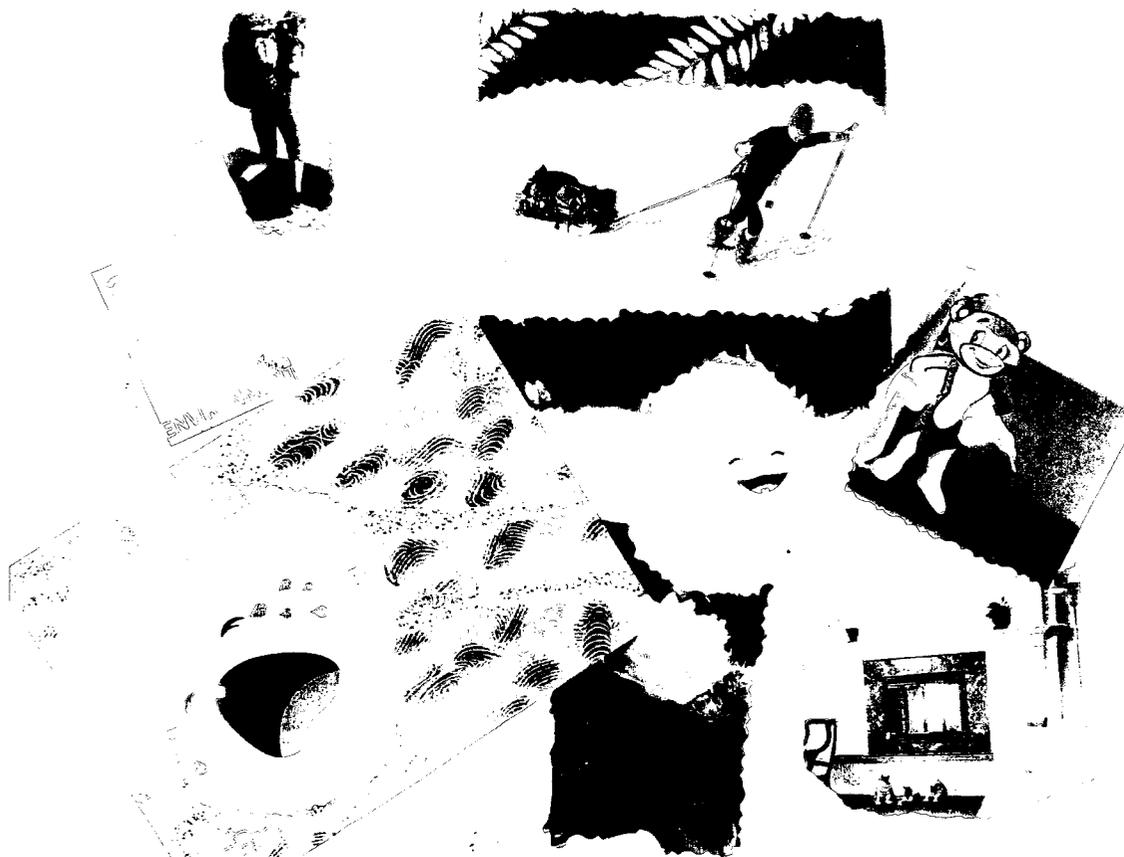
chocolate self care  
the elephant never forgets

dancing responding  
feel good sexuality  
spiritual meditation

surrounded by  
styrofoam peanuts  
search for safety  
want to withdraw

looking down  
the waterfall  
reflecting.

Jen



These represent different struggles emotions you go through.

moments when you cry like a baby throw yourself on the floor cry out everything your pain the thing you would have liked to have done

Every once in awhile it just comes back to you That's the hardest part. When you have to make changes in your life you're travelling from spot to spot but in your mind you're all over the place.

all that weight carrying that guilt it's a long haul and you still go back there every once in a while.

so much peace around the flowers

It's a long journey. you have to figure how many years I spent heading downhill on an emotional level. Takes many years to get back up there.

you're cheering for yourself. Whoo hoo! Having that bath You really feel alive like I do today. You don't, then.

You're dying so suppressed so unaware of your needs your wants, your desires your dreams. Everything's locked up like a bottle. You can't grow become the person you are.

There's days when I feel like a hero. Like superwoman I done this let's see what else I can do.

When you walk out of that marriage that's a battle. That's a big one.

Stella



here I'm smiling  
 because the abuse  
 is finally over  
 it took an immense  
 amount of tragedy.  
 it was terrible  
 what happened  
 in Yellowknife.

A really, really long road  
 like the roads  
 everybody went  
 their own way.

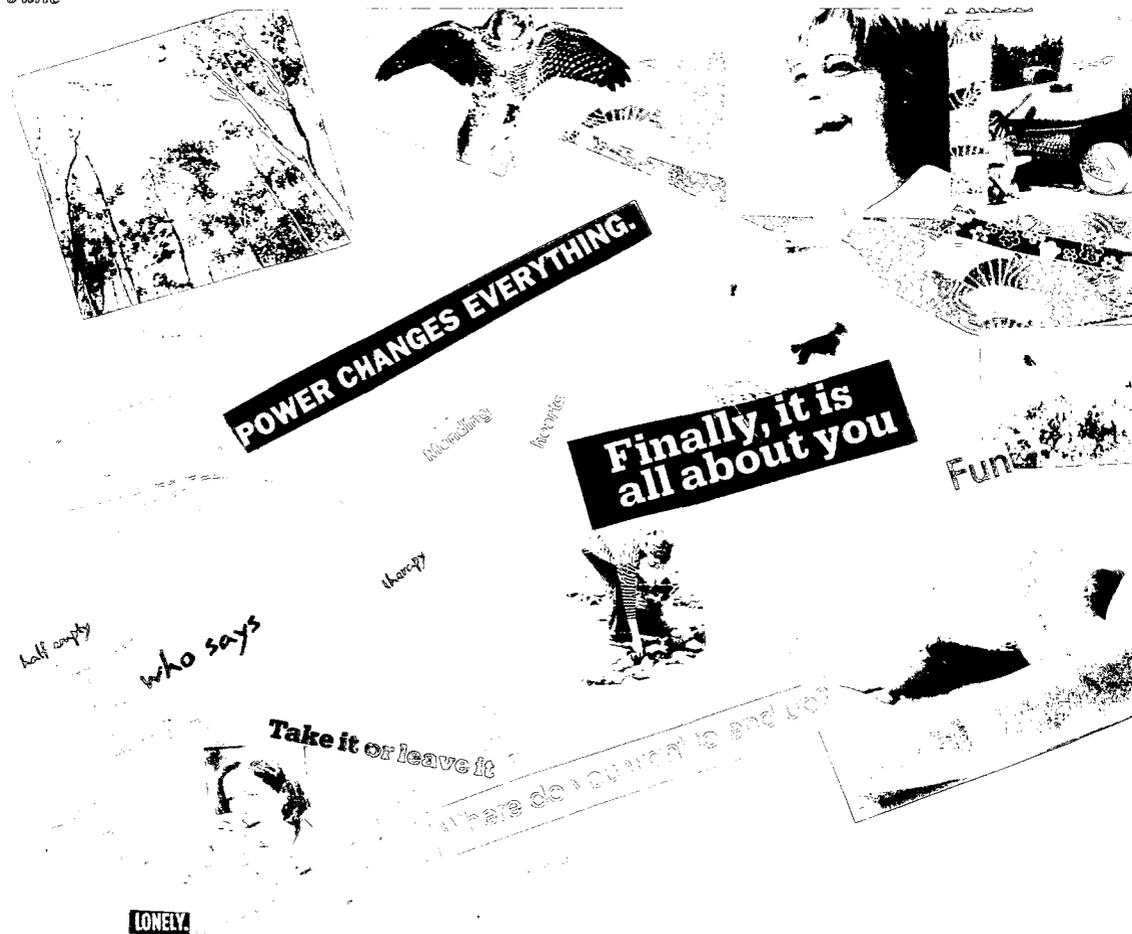
we were never  
 together again after that.  
 God had a hand in that.  
 if we had stayed  
 I could have died.  
 I'm telling you,  
 this is what I see here.  
 my life was spared.

none of us deserved that  
 but we had to  
 break apart to live  
 so I was able  
 to go on  
 and have two children  
 who didn't grow up  
 knowing this.  
 the cycle was broken.

for some reason  
 I always felt that  
 Great Slave Lake  
 is where my  
 sister's ashes  
 need to be.

I knew there was  
 a reason to  
 be here today.  
 It's just amazing.  
 That's what I saw.

June



beginning all the confusion  
the crying,  
feeling lonely.

I like the beach ball  
something I use  
to help sexual abuse survivors  
understand the process.

when you first  
start to look  
its overwhelming.  
a beach ball  
right in your face.  
the only way  
to see anything else  
is a supreme effort  
to turn your head.

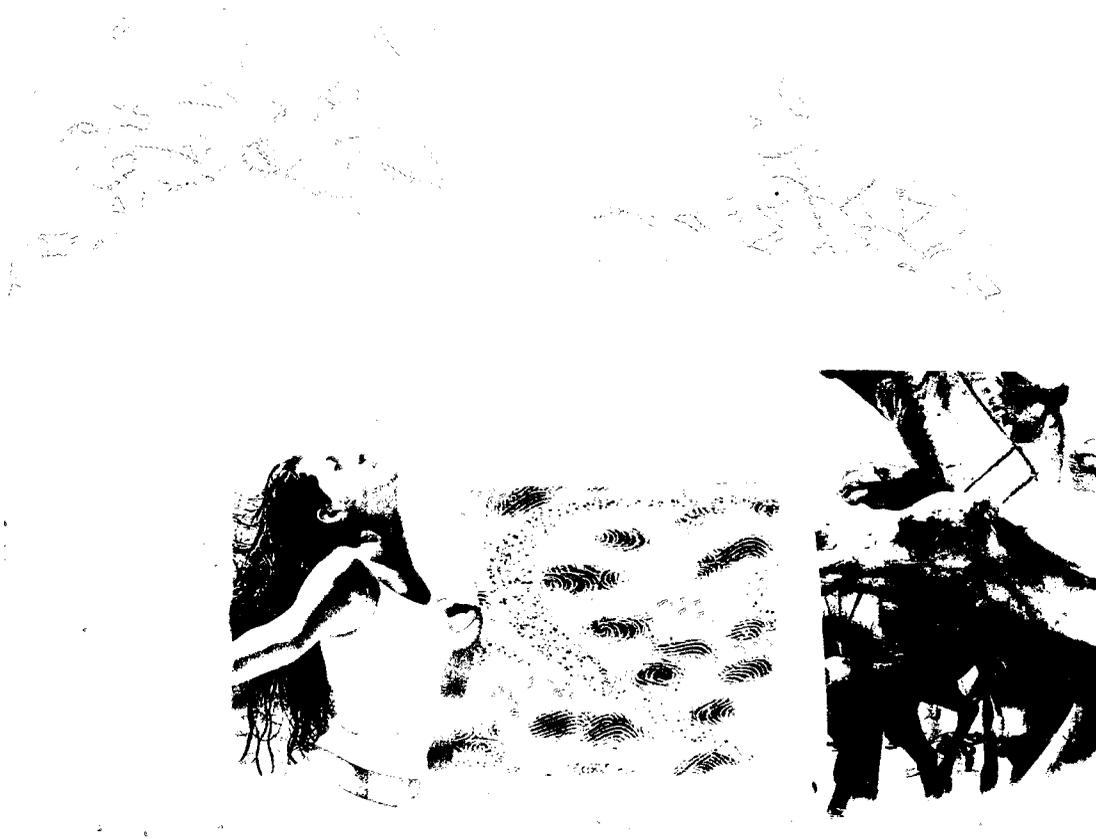
at some point  
the ball sits  
on the table  
in front of you.  
all you have  
to do to see  
the rest of the world  
is turn your eyes  
but it's still  
the center  
of what is going on.

the sky is the limit  
fly like an owl  
I couldn't find  
an eagle and  
owls represent  
wisdom, too, hey?

further along  
the ball gets  
put in a corner  
of the room  
most of the time  
you focus on  
other stuff but  
now and then  
it's still there.

well, big optimist, here.  
messy nonlinear  
experiment playing  
interesting to see  
how absorbed you can get  
in this stuff.

the final stage  
the ball goes into the attic.  
it's still in your  
consciousness but  
you can choose  
to look at or deal with it.  
you never really  
get rid of it  
but you can get to  
the point where  
you are in charge  
of your life  
and you choose.

**Heather**

This is an oasis.  
I am a shelter worker  
my interaction  
is very sort of  
in a crisis.

Listening today  
affirms what I do  
to help women move along  
to be there when  
no one else is.

I enter and  
do what I can  
but they can't stay forever.

they come  
on their own journeys  
with the rest of their lives.

here's woman  
taking a moment  
to experience her own life  
in a way she may not have  
before she came to us.

I was thrilled  
with these camels.  
it was like  
the pile of paper  
knew I needed  
a picture of a camel.

*Alexa*

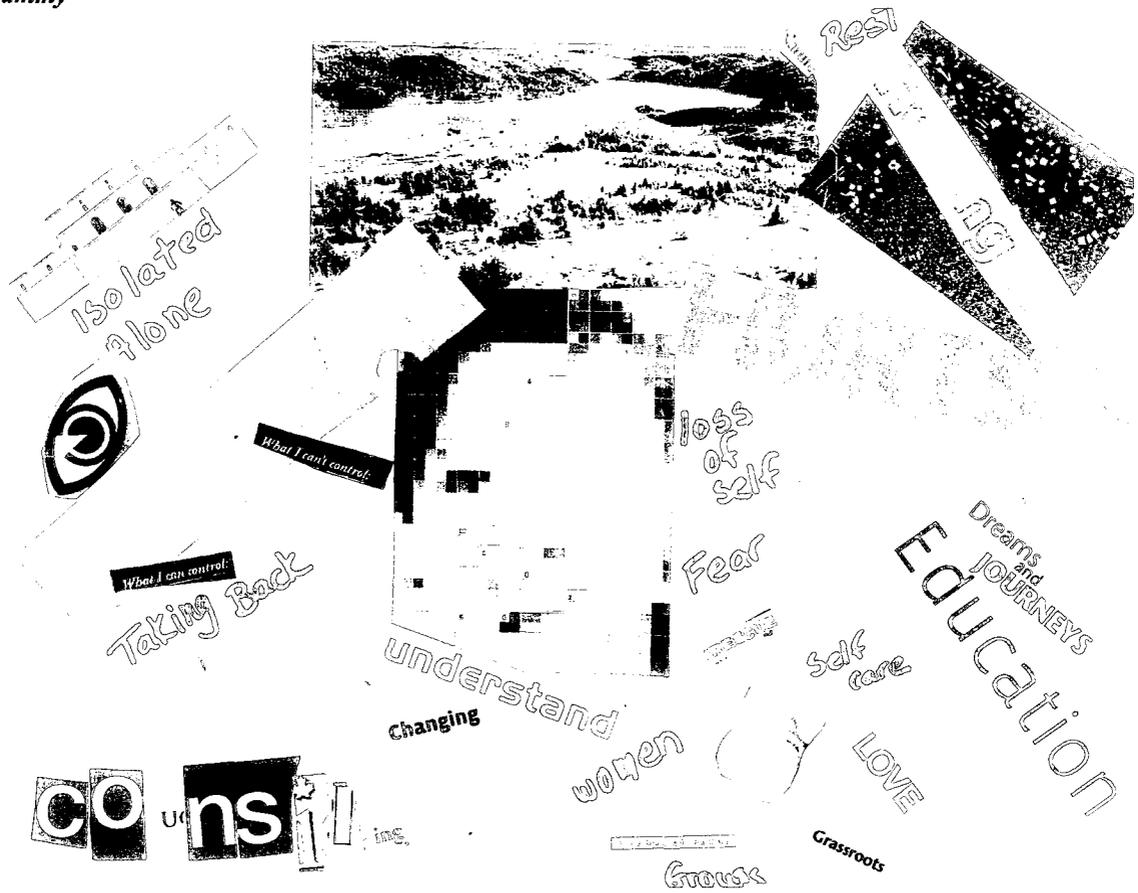


This is kind of  
the whole process  
of working through it.  
There's a little better time  
but you go back into  
it goes all around.

then slowly over time  
it clears up, it changes.  
we have more life  
and less of this turmoil.

it was fun.  
I like doing  
that stuff.

Tammy



right after it starts  
 it's all blurry  
 this is how I feel  
 with police courtrooms  
 judges lawyers  
 that's all me down there.

I feel really at peace in nature.

becoming educated talking  
 taking back my power  
 what I can control and can't  
 my dreams and journeys.

*Alice*

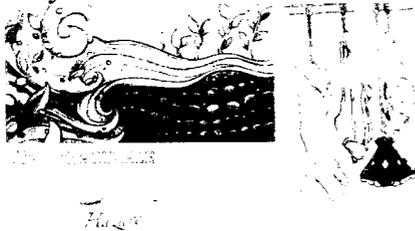


not prophetic, I have to say  
the colors are the paths we have  
dished out to us

fairly controlled  
what we're allowed  
to express, experience

like a book, or a window  
the fun thing of life  
is getting to know, open, see inside  
glimpse who you really are.

*Shirley*



It's self explanatory, really. In my mind it is, anyways.  
It's like swimming, gardening, being under a microscope.

Anna



PROBLEMS  
OF SOCIETY

SELF  
ACCEPTANCE

FEELS PART  
OF COMMUNITY

TRUST

Mine is just the end feelings.

Anne



# Antioxidants

lightning

Sex, God, and  
Rock 'n' Roll



Just coming in,  
a bit of the drowning effect  
and fixing them up  
with whatever it takes.

whatever it takes  
from a medical perspective  
then just feeling good  
about yourself.

Anne: *(as she gives Sophie her piece of paper)* I have no idea what you're doing. Really.

But my god, you're a good baker. *(she becomes a moth)*

*Ubah has no paper. She is a bit sniffly.*

Ubah: *(to the committee)* Sorry, I had to go. I was allergic to the cat. *(sniffs)* But it was so interesting to come. So helpful for me in my work. Thank you. *(she transforms)*

*Dr. White is last; she has no paper. She looks around, calm and amused.*

Dr. White: Shall I sing instead? *(She opens her mouth to sing and transforms).*

### ***Scene Two: Assemblage***

*Dr. White joins the swarm of moths crawling and flying around Sophie's body. The ghosts in the audience are speaking to one another; we hear the whispering of wind in dry leaves. Sophie closes her eyes to listen. One ghost, with beautifully styled hair, approaches Sophie and opens her hand. She is holding a small engagement ring. The ghost Angel opens her mouth to call Sophie, and there is a sudden rush, as the vacuum of the enunciatory void pulls all the moths and ghosts into her mouth. She swallows herself and is gone. Sophie opens her eyes.*

*There is a pause. Peter clears his throat.*

*Sophie is standing alone in the middle of the room. She turns to the committee, takes a big breath, and speaks.*

Sophie: So. What have we heard? In a modernist project, this is where I'd pull out and explain my findings and arguments, illustrated by anecdotes from these women, now read

as primary sources, pinned and displayed under glass. I would elucidate my clear contributions to the glorious project of knowledge. As a postmodernist, I can scoff at such certainties while still craving them. Let us pretend, then, that knowing is possible, and truthful stories are tellable. If I could understand and explain what this means and why it matters, what would I say?

I would say that my findings speak to many issues, but, for the sake of this game, let's narrow it down to three. I might even give us headings to hold on to, like this:

### *Naming*

The way women who have experienced spousal abuse are sorted and labeled has been well critiqued, particularly by Karen Kendrick.<sup>1</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw Williams points out that subordinated people also participate in and sometimes subvert the naming processes imposed upon them.<sup>2</sup> My findings suggest that women's ability to do so is constrained by several factors.

Women who have been in abusive relationships must present themselves as appropriately innocent and pathetic victims in order to access services. As Ubah notes, you have to appear meek and broken down in order to be believed and helped; you have to "look like an abused woman." This means you must not have "regained your power" (Ubah). Such women are expected to "kiss people's asses, be grateful for

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<sup>1</sup> Karen Kendrick, "Producing the Battered Woman," in *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class and Gender*, ed. Nancy Naples (New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw Williams, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991), 1297.

everything” (Tammy). The social institutions serving survivors rely on simple categorizations which erase the complexity and, often, the agency of the “victims.” Olive observes, “the names are put on to keep systems safe.” Many women thus express ambivalence about being seen as survivors or recovering.

However, the process of being named may be internalized as well as resisted. For instance, Jen says, “I must be naïve. I never looked at it as recovering. I understand now. I do.” She finds fault with herself, rather than the adequacy of the label. This deference is sustained by our need for validation; like Tammy, we “need to know. Was it? Am I?” Our impossible histories leave us feeling like we are “going crazy” (Tammy). If the social institutions we depend on for material support and the therapists we turn to for emotional support both explain and frame our experience in terms of abuse, survival and recovery, those labels become powerful and hard to question. Many participants expressed discomfort with the prevailing terms but found it difficult to even imagine alternative labels.

This could be a bit like putting on a pair of shoes that pinch and chafe but “go” with your outfit. We may, on some level, like these labels. After all, being a survivor sounds tough and hardy, as if there could be a reality TV show about our lives, making everything we do seem “active and assertive when that is not always the case”.<sup>3</sup> The language of recovery imposes a certain logic on what may otherwise feel like random suffering. Recovering is an optimistic verb; it suggests we are doing something, going

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<sup>3</sup> Ristock, *No More Secrets*, 94.

somewhere, on a journey that can be predicted and which will eventually end. The labels don't quite fit but at least we have something to wear.

The problem is that, like ill-fitting shoes, the labels can make you bleed.

Performing the role of a recovering abuse survivor in response to these external and internal pressures can provoke a sense of fraudulence, alienation and resentment which compounds our difficulties with trust. Walking too far in these labels can hurt and deform. Those who would seek to help us must, therefore, be much more tentative and careful in naming, recognizing that the prevailing terms are not neutral and do not arise naturally from our experience. The gap between signifier and signified may be inevitable, but it must not be ignored.

### *Testimony*

The second issue my findings speak to is the problems of testimony and memory. Several participants described their memories as unreliable. As Belinda puts it, "I've got a great brain here, that just likes to take a chunk and throw it out the window. And it comes back every so often." Dawn says "our head is incredibly brilliant at deceiving us all the time." Jen, who asserts that she is not haunted – "I don't think everyone loses themselves" – also describes, with wonder, how she continually forgets that she is no longer in the marital home, reaching for the coffee in the wrong cupboard, or seeking the vacuum cleaner she left behind three years ago. She says, "maybe I was just fortunate I didn't have that desire to go back. Thank God." When her therapist reminds her that she did, in fact, go back the first time, she shakes her head. "I keep forgetting about that," Jen

says. “I keep forgetting about that. All that brainwashing. He had it drilled in my head that financially, I couldn’t.”

The participants thus seem to be both affirming and demonstrating the problems with trauma testimony and memory which are well debated in the secondary literature, and which I have discussed earlier. However, none of them seem to experience remembering and telling their stories, in the context of our group interviews, as problematic. In this text, I have similarly offered an apparently smooth and trustworthy narrative, even as I describe the impossibility of such accounts. All of us seem able to know and tell what happened to us. Even Jen, notwithstanding her slip, remains confident in the truth and validity of her own testimony.

The question of the reliability and possibility of testimony thus sits in tension. It seems disrespectful, if not politically and ethically irresponsible, to decide that a narrator who believes herself to be reliable is actually not, particularly when we sit in a position of relative power, and their narratives have been given to us as a gift. At the same time, it seems intellectually dishonest to presume that our testimony – even my own – is unproblematically accurate. As Peter Hodgins notes, our memory is inescapably “shaped by the present context and imperatives”.<sup>4</sup> Testimony may work through a sort of placebo effect, rendered potent by our belief in it, rather than its substance, but I balk at the willful delusion this invites. The way out of this impasse may be, somehow, to see ourselves as simultaneously reliable and unreliable, or to find less dichotomous terms in which to think about truth.

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Hodgins, “Our Haunted Present: Cultural Memory in Question,” *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 12 (2004), 101.

*Recovery*

I could, perhaps most importantly, offer findings concerning the ethical and practical shortcomings of the recovery paradigm. As this is a complex issue, I'd need to unpack it in pieces.

The first piece relates to the problem of making sense. The recovery paradigm rests on the assumption that understanding our losses is both possible and necessary. The service providers I spoke with who aim to "help" us with this task position themselves as peers, doctors, coaches, witnesses or teachers. They are generally confident that knowledge or comprehension constitutes "the power to make change" (June) and that changing our thinking will, eventually, lead to changing our feelings. They see themselves as receiving and demystifying our memories in order to render our experiences understandable.

All of the participants in this study - we're just playing, so let's not call us *subjects* - have had a lot of therapy. This could be read as indicating our faith in the recovery paradigm. However, many of us still doubt that abuse could ever make sense. As Olive notes, "we have some theories, intellectually, but that's not understanding it, really." After fourteen years of therapy, Belinda says, "I don't need to understand anymore." This may be read as acceptance, but seems more like a sort of epistemic despair. She adds, "I will never recover." For many of us, making sense is not working.

Part the problem may lie in how we have positioned our abusers. Alice points out that our experiences are inexplicable because "the offender doesn't say why." Abusers, predictably, do not affirm and often actively undermine any explanation in which they are

implicated. We collude in letting abusers off the hook by adopting explanatory models which hinge on the internal and social conditions which set us up. Our childhood sexual abuse, socialization as compassionate caregivers, or the ways in which we have done what we were trained to do (June) may be important pieces of the puzzle, but we allow them to displace the abuser who will not, or perhaps can not, explain himself.

This both obscures the centrality of the agency of the abuser, and shifts responsibility onto the survivor. Belinda says “I can say it. I know it’s not my fault,” but there is a gap between knowing and feeling. If, “because of whatever circumstances, my entire life has gotten me here” (Belinda), then our lives, our choices, are at least part of the problem. Explaining as a process of finding out what is wrong with you may help you see what you can change but it can also involve “accepting blame onto yourself again” (Belinda).

The tendency to blame survivors is perpetuated by the recovery paradigm’s reliance on formulas which reduce the post-abuse journey to a series of predictable and manageable steps. My participants describe and draw their post-abuse processes as “not really linear” (Dawn), a circular journey or maze full of dead-ends (Margo), or a zig-zag path that loops back on itself (Cheryl, Alexa). Their process is not tidy and sequential; as Jen explains, you may appear to be “traveling from spot to spot” while “in your head you’re all over the place.”

Nonetheless, the dominant recovery models outline a series of interlocking, cumulative steps, leading upwards to various articulations of recovery, achieved by the survivor through adjustments in her attitudes and perceptions in a process reminiscent of

feminist consciousness raising.<sup>5</sup> As Molly Andrews argues, many scholars, feminist and otherwise, “believe that most people lack the critical and analytic tools to make sense of their lives”.<sup>6</sup> She notes that Stanley and Wise’s (1983) observation of a three-stage model, beginning with false consciousness and moving in a linear progression through raised and finally feminist consciousness, is still apt. Even feminist therapy, with its focus on equalizing power relations and ostensible refusal to blame the victims, relies on a process in which the steps of recovery can be clearly and externally explained, and the survivor heals through changing herself. This tendency to simultaneously privilege survivors as the experts on our own lives and chart out for us the paths to our healing and enlightenment reflects a pervasive cognitive dissonance which must be surfaced and negotiated if we are to arrive at effective strategies for “helping.” However, this sort of reckoning may be unlikely, as “even those who critique this hierarchical model of consciousness cannot resist placing themselves within it, at the highest level”.<sup>7</sup>

Karen Kendrick confirms that a sort of false consciousness is often ascribed to survivors, which both homogenizes our experience and confers expert power (true consciousness) on an external other.<sup>8</sup> Recovery thus becomes a process of enlightenment that mothers are morally obligated to undergo in order to protect their children from cycles of violence. By extension, our non-recovery also becomes our fault. We are

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Tutty, "Identifying, Assessing, and Treating"; Landenburger, "The Dynamics of Leaving and Recovering"; Smith, "Recovery From Intimate Partner Violence"; or Judith Wuest and Marilyn Merritt-Gray, "Not Going Back: Sustaining the Separation in the Process of Leaving Abusive Relationships," *Violence Against Women* 5, no. 2 (1999): 110-33.

<sup>6</sup> Andrews, "Feminist Research," 57.

<sup>7</sup> Andrews, "Feminist Research," 58.

<sup>8</sup> Kendrick, "Constructing the Battered Woman," 170.

supposed to make “an internal commitment” to make time to look at it, to do the work (Alexa). You can “carry on or you can let it make you stop” (Shirley). You have to “want to let that go.” If “I heal because I want to heal, I want to move on” (Jen), my *not* healing can only be seen as a result of failures of will, courage, grit, self-control, or strength. My need for decades or even a lifetime of expensive counseling is attributed to my weaknesses or injuries, rather than shortcomings in the therapeutic constructs and tools with which I am being served.

Peter Hodgins argues that one of the major reasons we go back to the past (imagined or otherwise), unearth the dead and force them to speak again is that we want answers to the questions of “how did we get in this mess?” and, perhaps more important, “who is to blame?” This blame-seeking around events construed as pivotal “allows the chaos of the past *and* the present to be reordered into stable binaries of authentic/simulated, heroes/villains and victims/oppressors”.<sup>9</sup> Our desire for such stable dichotomous stories often trumps our need for absolution, as we would rather be guilty agents than vulnerable and uncertain. This inclines us to accept theories which attribute our experiences to characterological and behavioral flaws which may not be our “fault” but are nonetheless ours to fix. As June explains, “we cannot in any way blame you for doing what you’ve been trained to do. But it is your responsibility to look after your future.”

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<sup>9</sup> Hodgins, “Our Haunted Present,” 100.

Patti Lather points out that “theory is too often used to protect us from the awesome complexity of the world”.<sup>10</sup> The project of “making sense” presumes a hierarchy of consciousness, in which the intellect can encompass and demystify profoundly emotional, somatic, relational experiences. It reveals the extent of our attachment to rational, dichotomous, orderly explanations. Like Cinderella’s stepsisters, we would cut off our own unruly toes and heels in order to fit within these crippling paradigms – the modernist scaffold in which we are hanging. No wonder, then, that Olive says “recovery has almost a cruel sound to it.”

(I could give you a subheading, here, but I’m really not allowed to discuss it with you. I’m invisible and certain, clear and masterful, so sensible you could read me with your eyes closed).

The second, related piece of what’s wrong with the recovery paradigm has to do with its reinforcement of the status quo. Jenny Edkins observes that the survivor seeks resistance, but is confronted by state-supported normalisation and medicalisation:

The aim is recovery, or the reinsertion of survivors into structures of power. Survivors are helped to verbalise and narrate what has happened to them; they receive counseling to help them accommodate once more to the social order and re-form relationships of trust... if this fails, then the status of victim of post traumatic stress disorder serves to render the survivor more or less harmless to existing power structures. In contemporary culture victimhood offers sympathy and pity in return for the surrender of any political voice.<sup>11</sup>

Ubah observes that this political silencing is enforced; “you must follow the norms a certain way you’re supposed to, or else.” Well-behaved survivors should tell their stories, truthfully, but only when appropriate; undue interest in our past trauma may be seen as an

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<sup>10</sup> Patti Lather, “Research as Praxis,” *Harvard Educational Review* 56, no. 3 (1986), 267.

<sup>11</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 9.

indulgent dementia, possession by ghosts, or a calculated (and suspect) effort to mobilize support for particular interests.<sup>12</sup> If we have children, we should develop business-like co-parenting relationships with our abusers, sitting sweetly beside them in parent-teacher interviews. Like Tammy, we cannot spit when they lie. We should work to put our experiences away, like June's image of a beach ball in the attic, and we should not be angry. Olive explains, "you won't be angry that other people didn't do anything. You won't be angry at a system that doesn't work for you. You won't be angry at *them*... Get well, shut up, go away."

Karen Kendrick notes that one of the most damaging aspects of the recovery paradigm is that it foregrounds women's emotional needs over their material ones, as if, through personal transformation, we could feed our children and move on with our lives.<sup>13</sup> In practice, we often defer our emotional needs to address more pressing and intractable resource problems, such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, and substance abuse.<sup>14</sup> In this inquiry, the need identified as most pressing is *not* personal healing; it is financial security. Because we have been at home with our babies, or financial control was part of our abuse, or we've had to leave our jobs (because we've moved, or he's stalking us, or our children have gone wild with grief), or perhaps just because we are women in a sexist economy, many of us end up "crying at the bank" (Victoria). We are supposed to accept gratefully the disrespect that comes with being a beneficiary of social services, the dehumanizing and demanding systems by

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Simon et al., "Introduction: Between Hope and Despair," 2.

<sup>13</sup> Kendrick, "Producing the Battered Woman," 159.

<sup>14</sup> Tutty, "Identifying, Assessing, and Treating," 389.

which Canadian society manages and instructs the poor and marginal. We are supposed to accept the impossible social assistance levels and the insurmountable paperwork that comes with it, each page dripping in social stigma. Neoliberal economic policies, with their austerity agenda and social program cuts, have compounded the financial difficulties we face in our efforts to move on. We move from one system of fear and control to another. Our failure as self-sufficient adults reinforces our sense of inadequacy and shame.

The challenges we face in feeding and housing our families often mean we don't have *time* to do the 'work' of recovery (Tammy). We are supposed to recover quickly – within a couple of years – but many of us find this expectation unrealistic. As Victoria says, "it might take 10 years to get to the point where you can start to rebuild your life. It might take 15 years. It might never end." Our recovery timeline is shaped by financial considerations; the medical system seems unable or unwilling to provide long-term, stable mental health services, and ongoing private counseling is prohibitively expensive. If we fail to recover on time we are pathologized as depressed or dependent. "There's an expectation," Shirley explains, "if you're through the court stuff, you've got custody, you're fine." But many of us are not. As soon as we are "well enough to be functional" we become "walking wounded" (Dr. White). We are then perceived as failed survivors, like non-compliant patients.

Responding to the evidence of an unjust social order, as it manifests in women's lives, as a series of tragic or pathetic female emotional and mental problems is a longstanding cultural tradition, perhaps most notably exemplified by Freud's decision

that the middle-class Viennese hysterics in his care suffered from their repressed desire for, rather than experience of, sexual abuse.<sup>15</sup> The emotional work of surviving is important and daunting, but it conveniently displaces the tangible needs and injustices in which the state is more directly implicated. “While we are being exhorted to focus on our feelings, a lot of people are falling through the cracks in our society”.<sup>16</sup> The goal of the recovery project is our personal happiness. However, as Linda Kauffman argues, “my happiness, frankly, is not very important in the grand scheme of things. I never thought feminism was about happiness. I thought it was about justice”.<sup>17</sup>

Many of us seem to agree with her. Despite widespread anxiety about the decline of feminism, and the personalizing, pathologizing tendencies of the recovery paradigm, all of the women I spoke with understand their experience as the outcome of an unjust social order, rather than a private mental health problem. Many place their experiences firmly in a social and political context, often in explicitly feminist terms. As Ubah explains, “the norm is often what is abusing women.” We are left “surviving from surviving” (Tammy).

While we are not a representative sample, my participants’ degree of political commitment is striking. For some, this is a coping method; we survive through our work to make “it better for the next woman, so they don’t lose that part of themselves” (Victoria). As such, we call for broader, systemic solutions, such as anti-violence education and counseling in the schools, the establishment of women’s centers,

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<sup>15</sup> For a full description of this turn, see Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 18-19.

<sup>16</sup> Kauffman, "The Long Goodbye," 270.

<sup>17</sup> Kauffman, "The Long Goodbye," 274.

and a much greater focus on male violence. “We’re not the problem,” Alice explains.

“The problem is male violence. Buddy over there, somewhere he learned that.”

There is a fundamental disconnect between the politicized priorities of survivors and the often deliberately depoliticized policies and programs supported by state-funded social services. It is profoundly disrespectful to presume that what we need most is counseling when we are calling for concrete changes in programs and policies. We may be expected and pressured to appear to recover because our unhealed wounds reveal the cracks in the social order. Marlene Goldman thus calls for a refusal of mourning, due to its complicity in hegemonic strategies of assimilation, but pursuing a political survivor mission without attending to our own losses would seem irresponsible at best.<sup>18</sup> We should not have to choose between docile healing and masochistic activism. Some, like Judith Herman, try to reconcile the personal and the political within their taxonomies of recovery. Rather than seeking to resolve these imperatives, I see them as evidence of the layers of understanding which come into play when we navigate by the stars of trauma.

The recovery paradigm’s lack of revolutionary or subversive impact could perhaps be excused if it actually worked. But – and here is my final point - I am beginning to believe that, by and large, it doesn’t.

Survivors apparently need to have hope that we’ll “get better” (Shirley). Most service providers thus express faith in our resilience, drive for life, and recovery prospects. However, they are not unanimous; some acknowledge that “the aftermath doesn’t go away” (Margo). As June describes, “you can never really get rid of it but you

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<sup>18</sup> Goldman, "A Dangerous Circuit," 368.

can get to the point where you are in charge of your life.” Upon closer examination, their vision of “recovery” looks much more like coping with a chronic illness than “getting better.” Recovery is generally defined in terms of managing the degree to which we are haunted by intrusive, controlling, and disruptive conscious and unconscious, narrative and somatic memories. We learn how to cope when, as Tammy describes, a door in your brain flies open and suddenly you’re shaking. Like Bluebeard, we live with locked rooms.

A couple of important dissonances emerge. First, I am struck by the tension between the variable and modest terms in which service providers explain our recovery prospects, and the absolute investment in recovery implied by their identities and careers. Their enacted commitments tend to obscure their stated reservations. For instance, Dr. White says “I like the idea that people recover ... but you don’t necessarily.... You achieve wellness, maybe.” At the same time, however, as a psychiatrist, her identity and occupation are premised on the idea that she can and will evaluate, diagnose and treat survivors of trauma. A similar tension can be seen in secondary sources such as Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery*. In this text, she admits that recovery may not be possible, and might never be complete.<sup>19</sup> However, by setting these comments within the context of a major work describing the process and stages of recovery, she undermines her own caveats. It is as if they are saying, “you can’t do this, but here’s how.”

Likewise, some service providers’ positions seem to drift. For instance, Shirley initially frames recovery as just like a broken bone which, after it is treated, is no longer

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<sup>19</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 211.

painful and even stronger than before. She goes on to say, however, that you could always find the crack with an x-ray; things would be alright for awhile, but it wouldn't ever really be the same again. Then she muses that it might come back, like arthritis, so "you'd have to take care of yourself." I understand these mobile and layered positions as reflecting the inadequacy of the recovery paradigm, rather than shortcomings in the service providers.

The second and perhaps most interesting tension which emerges is that survivors seem to be three times more likely than service providers to be pessimistic about our recovery prospects. "You survive because you have to," Tammy explains. But the story is not coherent. Jen, for instance, sees herself as recovered and says she is not haunted, but also says that "memories can be dangerous. It's easy to fall into depressions." Belinda says "I'm still post, if you ask me. I'll be post probably for the rest of my life. Post depression, post this, post whatever. You get bursts of happiness and then it just gets into the shit again." Nonetheless, like many of us, she visually represents recovery as a left-to-right, past-to-present process of gradual clearing, lifting, or brightening. I understand these inconsistencies as the signs of an experience chafing in an ill-fitting metaphor.

### *Implications*

The recovery paradigm thus seems to be failing, on a number of grounds. Many of its faults are common to modernist progress-narratives - including, I suppose, this scene. But if recovery is inadequate, how else can we understand the post-abuse process?

As Melissa Orlie explains, thinking can rely on reason if it must only account for “the world according to its reigning terms” but in order to transcend its boundaries thinking requires metaphors. “Metaphor bridges the gulf between the visible and invisible”.<sup>20</sup> According to Hannah Arendt, metaphors turn “the mind back to the sensory world in order to illuminate nonsensory experiences for which there are no words in any language”.<sup>21</sup> In metaphor, “something invisible within us deals with the invisibles of the world”.<sup>22</sup> It is the primary way we can seek to speak beyond the edge of naming.

In this section, I have described the recovery paradigm as unethical in its imposition of labels, enforcement and proscription of testimonial practices, hollow promise of making sense, allocation of power and blame, reduction of complexity, and depoliticized perpetuation of the status quo. It is, perhaps, time to seek another metaphor. The best place to do so is within our own language.

*(Sophie takes a step back, and starts to lose her color and shrink. There is a quick drum roll, and she smiles, faintly, before continuing.)*

I have been struck, in listening, by the number of times the women in this study, both directly and obliquely, refer to their experiences as a death. This is important because you don’t recover from death.

You don’t recover from death.

This may be why recovery, as a metaphor and as a project, doesn’t quite fit what goes on in the years after leaving abuse. Our survival is a sort of autonomic response -

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<sup>20</sup> Orlie, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically*, 163.

<sup>21</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind, Vol. 1* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), 106.

<sup>22</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 123.

“you survive because you have to” (Tammy). You resume a “semblance of a life” (Victoria). Things which endure their own deaths and have a semblance of a life are zombies, vampires, angels, phoenixes, and ghosts. I argue that new possibilities would emerge if we reframed our post-abuse process in those terms, using the metaphors of the undead and spectral to imagine our way through stuck and narrow places.

The scholarly terrain of spectrality has been well trodden, with Derrida leaving perhaps the largest footprint. In her seminal work, Avery Gordon proposes haunting as a way of apprehending the density, complexity, constrictions and longings of our everyday lives, enabling us to honor and attend to “the things behind the things”.<sup>23</sup> Gordon argues that “the ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life”.<sup>24</sup> By nature, ghosts “are haunting reminders of lingering trouble”.<sup>25</sup> She explains,

What’s distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely. I used the term *haunting* to describe those singular yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over- and-done-with comes alive, when what’s been in your blind spot comes into view. Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future.<sup>26</sup>

She thus ascribes to haunting many of the characteristics which others have used to describe trauma. However, she draws an interesting distinction between the two:

Haunting is a frightening experience. It always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present. But haunting,

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<sup>23</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xix.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.

unlike trauma, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done. Indeed, it seemed to me that haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done.<sup>27</sup>

In the confrontation with ghosts, Gordon suggests “we might locate a profound and durable practice of thinking and being and acting toward eliminating the conditions that produce the nastiness in the first place”.<sup>28</sup> As she explains, “[t]he way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition”.<sup>29</sup> She thus sees haunting as a mode of producing knowledge and change. To me, this is an appealing and oddly hopeful way of perceiving the post-abuse journeys we undertake in the aftermath of death.

While many theorists indicate their doubts about the viability of recovery, they persist undeterred in explaining how we ought to pursue it. If, rather than recovering survivors, we are understood as women who have endured our own deaths, what we can and should do shifts in the direction of grief and accommodation. The spectral offers expressive tools which may circumvent and subvert some of the traps in the modernist journey of recovery, and unsettle our common-sense understandings. As ghosts, angels, zombies, vampires, and phoenixes, we gain a range of vocabulary and metaphors for

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<sup>27</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.

<sup>28</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvii.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.

imagining and articulating ourselves into and out of our pasts and futures. And perhaps we can stop feeling guilty for not feeling better already.

*As she speaks, Sophie has become very small and almost entirely colorless. She shrugs, and turns into a small brown moth. She flies, a little uncertainly, to land on the table in front of the committee. She waits, slightly trembling, fanning her wings. Each time she does, her wings double. The wings are getting bigger and heavier; she beats them faster to try to bear the weight but they keep increasing. She struggles while the committee watches, a little repulsed but fascinated. It sounds like the shuffling of a deck of cards. Finally, the movement subsides. All that is left is a pile of wings, which resolve into pages, which you hold in your hands, reading.*

**Act V** - *In which our story ends.*

**Scene One:** *Hope*

*Sophie and Shawn are lying in bed, in the dark, holding hands. It is very dark and quiet.*

Sophie: Isn't it peculiar that I am so effective and have almost no hope?

Shawn: Your lack of hope is a disease. You got infected and never recovered. It's what keeps you from being super-über-extraordinary. It's not your fault, though. It's the trauma that happened to you.

*Pause*

Sophie: That would be a good line for my dissertation. I'll never remember it, though.

*Long pause*

Sophie: What if this whole thing is just a big projection?

Shawn: I think you'd find a way to use it.

**Scene Two:** *Home*

*Sophie is typing at her desk.*

Dear Participants

My complete dissertation is now up on the project website! You can feel free to download and read the text. It's not what I expected to write, so you may also find it a bit surprising.

Dissertations are usually only ever read by a handful of people. I am planning to produce other work based on what I've learned from you that will hopefully be much

more widely useful or accessible. I would really like to hear any concerns or thoughts you may have about it.

I have a bunch of ideas about where to go next - I want to talk to more women, to get a better feel for how we see our recovery prospects. I'd like to develop some research-based theatre that could be used in communities to raise funds and awareness about abuse issues. I'm also thinking about a web-based project collecting images of the post-abuse process, and I'd still like to experiment with arts-based play groups for survivors. What I can do next will depend on my funding/jobs but I'll post updates from time to time.

I could not have done this without your support. I have learned so much from you, and I am eternally grateful -

*(A door bangs open).*

Dora: *(distant)* We're HOME!

*Sophie closes her eyes. Her shoulders slump.*

Dora: MOM?

*Sophie: (opens her eyes, calls) Up here. (starts re-reading the letter, deleting sections)*

Dora: *(distant, to Ruth)* OH mygodgetouttatheway I have to PEE! *(distant commotion)*

*Ruth (age 11) enters. Her cheeks are pink.*

Ruth: Hey there.

*Sophie: (holds up one index finger without turning, finishes typing a line, then spins around to face Ruth)* How was your day?

Ruth: *(sitting in Sophie's lap)* It was okay. Whatcha doing?

Sophie: Trying to be sincere.

Ruth: How's *that* going?

*Sophie sighs.*

Ruth: Oh, mom. (*pats her back*)

Sophie: I'm trying to write to my participants.

Ruth: How come?

Sophie: I've got to post my dissertation for them. But I'm scared they won't like it.

They'll see it as a big rip off academic bullshit thing that doesn't make a difference in the real world.

Ruth: (*shakes her head*). You worry too much. (*reads on screen, stops suddenly*) Hey!

Sophie: Hmm?

Ruth: (*eyes sparkling*) If you're *done* now, are you gonna be less grumpy?

***Scene Three: 2009.***

*Sophie enters, and speaks directly to you.*

Sophie: I am 37 years old, washing dishes in a partially renovated hundred-year old house in a small Canadian town. Two daughters are doing homework; the third is loading the dishwasher beside me. The phone rings. I dry my hands.

Hello?

(It's a woman, around my age).

*Sophie bows, and exits.*

***Curtain.***

## PROGRAM

I hope you enjoyed the accompanying piece. You may, however, be left with some questions, such as ‘what the hell is this?’ and ‘how am I supposed to evaluate it?’ Laurel Richardson points out that “credibility is accomplished, in part, through the artistry of the teller ... and, in part, through locating the story within a larger context of genre”.<sup>1</sup> You will make sense of this work (or not) based on your own “treasury of stories”.<sup>2</sup> This program aims to support that process by offering some background on the representational genres I have called on in presenting this text to you.

### *Haunted*

As Avery Gordon described earlier, knowledge produced about and through haunting comes with its own methodological imperatives.<sup>3</sup> We decide what constitutes useful and successful forms of attentiveness and learning from trauma stories based on dominant discourses.<sup>4</sup> However, an “epistemology of trauma and testimony” subverts and disrupts our typical relationship to history.<sup>5</sup> Patti Lather describes it as a genre in which “loss becomes the very force of learning”.<sup>6</sup> Ethical practice, in this genre, demands an

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<sup>1</sup> Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 77.

<sup>2</sup> Susan K. Hippensteele, “Activist Research and Social Narratives: Dialectics of Power, Privilege, and Institutional Change,” in *Researching Sexual Violence Against Women: Methodological and Personal Perspectives*, ed. Martin D. Schwartz (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 89.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Simon, “The Paradoxical Practice of *Zahkor*,” 17.

<sup>5</sup> O’Neill, “Traumatic Postmodern Histories, 159.

<sup>6</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 13.

aporetic suspension of “assured ontologies of the ‘real’, of presence and absence, a postcritical logic of haunting and undecidables”.<sup>7</sup> Inquiry becomes a ruin in which we are “surprised by difference into the performance of practices of not-knowing”.<sup>8</sup> Jenny Edkins argues that re-inscribing trauma in linear narratives depoliticizes experience, and proposes an alternative she calls *encircling the trauma*.<sup>9</sup> Given that many of the women I speak to describe their post-abuse process as circular, this approach seems particularly appropriate. This text thus circles through stories and ideas, using what Lather calls “failed accounts” and “subversive reiterations or repetitions” as sites of opportunity and agency.<sup>10</sup>

### *Postmodern*

Haunted knowledge has given up on the hope for “some sort of truth which can tell us how to act in the world in ways that benefit or are for the (at least ultimate) good of all”.<sup>11</sup> It thus reflects the postmodern rejection of what Jane Flax describes as unified, innocent knowledge. Postmodern work “displaces mastery with a recognition that we often do not know what we are seeing, how much we are missing, what we are not understanding, or even how to locate those lacks”.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Jane Flax, “The End of Innocence,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler, and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 47.

<sup>12</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 146.

Derrida calls on us begin “*wherever we are*: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be”.<sup>13</sup> Instead of mastery, we offer modest, good enough accounts. Rather than a “comfort text” that provides “the consolations of certain meaning and knowing, the romance of knowledge as cure,” we aim for “stammering knowing” that opens categories of analysis through indeterminate, evocative accounts of experience.<sup>14</sup> We produce metaphoric, fragmented, polyphonic texts, the meanings of which are dialogically co-created in the encounter between the author, the reader, and the page.<sup>15</sup> Like Laurel Richardson, we may withhold much description or analysis until the end, to invite the audience “to ‘read for’ themselves”,<sup>16</sup> or use language as a means of discovery rather than a vehicle for simple exposition.<sup>17</sup> Our narratives include discussion of “subjectivity, rhetorical moves, problems of voice, textual politics, limits to authority, truth claims, unconscious desires, and so on”.<sup>18</sup> We both tell and deconstruct our stories, complicating reference by “calling into question” and “opening up” terms to release them “into a future of multiple significations”<sup>19</sup> in order to provoke “fields into new spaces where they hardly recognize themselves in becoming otherwise”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri C. Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 162.

<sup>14</sup> Lather and Smithies, *Troubling the Angels*, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Foley, “Critical Ethnography: The Reflexive Turn,” *Qualitative Studies in Education* 15, no. 5 (2002), 479.

<sup>16</sup> Laurel Richardson, “Reading for Another: A Method for Addressing Some Feminist Research Dilemmas,” in *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 460.

<sup>17</sup> Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 95.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Gottschalk, “Postmodern Sensibilities and Ethnographic Possibilities,” in *Fiction and Social Research: By Ice Or Fire*, ed. Anna Banks, and Stephen P. Banks (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1998), 207.

<sup>19</sup> Butler, “Contingent Foundations,” 16.

<sup>20</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 106.

*Responsible*

Laurel Richardson points out that “at issue is not whether we should write narratives - we always do - but how the stories we tell do and do not reinscribe tyrannies, large and small - do and do not improve the material, symbolic, and aesthetic conditions of our lives”.<sup>21</sup> Responsible scholarship is often described as counter-hegemonic.<sup>22</sup> It demands doubt, humility, and careful attention to our uses and misuses of power.<sup>23</sup>

In this genre, we have no inherent right to knowledge and truth,<sup>24</sup> and should not use academic epistemologies and representational norms to obscure or abstract the “experienced realities of local people”.<sup>25</sup> We are not entitled to “trim and fit our subject’s accounts” into our tidy, cohesive paradigms.<sup>26</sup> Anecdotal or experiential knowledge must be respected and the marginalized are authorized as theorists rather than simply sources of raw data to be mined and interpreted by us.<sup>27</sup> The separation and ranking of (systematic, ‘objective’) expert discourses over (personal, emotional) survivor discourses is rejected.<sup>28</sup> We strive “not to drown the poem of others with the sound of our own

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<sup>21</sup> Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 77.

<sup>22</sup> "The definition of a hegemonic viewpoint is (a) that it defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe, of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and (b) that it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy - it appears coterminous with what is 'natural,' 'inevitable,' 'taken for granted,' about the social order." Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham, and Douglas M. Kellner (London: Blackwell, 1980), 175. The problem with being counter-hegemonic is, of course, that you depend upon and reinscribe the dominant discourse you meant to circumvent (see Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 78).

<sup>23</sup> Goodall, *Writing Qualitative Inquiry*, 176.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 177.

<sup>25</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Gilles and Alldred, "The Ethics of Intention," 156.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy Naples and Emily Clark, "Feminist Participatory Research and Empowerment: Going Public as Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse," in *Feminism and Social Change: Bridging Theory and Practice*, ed. Heidi Gottfried (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 172; Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvii.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy Naples, *Feminism and Method*, 169.

voices, as the ones who know, the “experts” about how people make sense of their lives and what searching for meaning is”.<sup>29</sup> Of course, we can neither listen to our participants in their own terms, nor can we (or should we) offer their unmediated voices.<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly, I have treated the voices of survivors and service providers equally, and positioned myself as an (at best) “unreliable narrator” telling an “imagined history”.<sup>31</sup>

Rather than demystifying or evaluating their claims with my expert insight, I approach them for insight and help.

Responsible scholarship also implies a retreat from simplistic narration. Patricia Hill Collins explains that the lives and stories of the marginal can easily be consumed by privileged, passive voyeurs as a form of entertainment or interesting spectacle.<sup>32</sup> The seductiveness of telling women’s untold stories sometimes overpowers caution about the degeneration of those stories into dichotomous, generalized accounts.<sup>33</sup> Patti Lather calls this “a too easy, too familiar eating of the other” which we can avoid through “moving softly and obliquely... not knowing too quickly.”<sup>34</sup> I have tried to avoid placing either myself or my reader in the position of the voyeur, by creating a text that is a little unpredictable and perhaps indigestible.

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<sup>29</sup> Lather and Smithies, *Troubling the Angels*, xvi.

<sup>30</sup> Anne Oakley, “Gender, Methodology and People’s Ways of Knowing: Some Problems With Feminism and the Paradigm Debate in Social Science,” *Sociology* 32, no. 4 (1998), 715; Melanie Mauthner and Andrea Doucet, “Reflections on a Voice-Centered Relational Method,” in *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*, ed. Jane Ribbens and Rosalind Edwards (London: Sage, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Kamala Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 62.

<sup>32</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “Toward a New Vision: Race, Class and Gender as Categories of Analysis and Connection,” in *Women’s Voices, Feminist Visions*, ed. Susan Shaw (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 2001), 77.

<sup>33</sup> Razack, “Storytelling for Social Change,” 56.

<sup>34</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 136; Lather and Smithies, *Troubling the Angels*, 155.

This demands caution in speaking. As Laurel Richardson explains, “no matter how we stage the text, we - the authors - are doing the staging. As we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them. As we inscribe their lives, we bestow meaning and promulgate values”.<sup>35</sup> She warns, “what is text to us may be life to others”.<sup>36</sup> While I can reach for a more egalitarian, exploratory, dialogic “speaking with,” I cannot disclaim my accountability and power.<sup>37</sup> Following Lather, however, I can “foreground the limits and necessary misfirings of a project, problematizing the researcher as ‘the one who knows’”<sup>38</sup> to learn how to live in “de-authorized space” that “works otherwise than to secure claims through data”.<sup>39</sup> Deborah Britzman and Alice Pitt differentiate “lovely knowledge”, which we think we want, from “difficult knowledge” that induces breakdowns in representing experience. My dissertation offers you an experiment in this “difficult knowledge”.<sup>40</sup>

However, responsible scholarship must also consider to whom it speaks. While the formal written dissertation format is familiar and useful, and a heavily postmodern text may be theoretically satisfying, they are generally only meaningful to a small elite, and may be entirely unintelligible to those we have written about. They have thus been critiqued as “alienating and parasitic”<sup>41</sup> and “almost inherently classist, exclusionary, and

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<sup>35</sup> Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 148.

<sup>36</sup> Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 115.

<sup>37</sup> Haugo, "Negotiating Hybridity," 128.

<sup>38</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 13.

<sup>40</sup> Deborah Britzman and Alice J. Pitt, “Speculation on Qualities of Difficult Knowledge in Teaching and Learning: An Experiment in Psychoanalytic Research,” in *Doing Educational Research*, Eds. Kenneth Tobin and Joe L. Kincheloe (Boston, MA: Sense Publishers, 2006), 390.

<sup>41</sup> Gottschalk, "Postmodern Sensibilities and Ethnographic Possibilities," 222.

appropriative".<sup>42</sup> As Trinh Minh-ha states, "a conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them' is a conversation in which 'them' is silenced. 'Them' always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence".<sup>43</sup> This is the tension Lather negotiates in debating (and ultimately rejecting) her participants' desire for her to write up their experience as "a K-mart book".<sup>44</sup> My response to this call is a text that is quite readable but does not fit easily within (and thus privilege) the norms of a particular audience.

### *Multiple*

The genres described above share a common commitment to the presentation of multiple points of view, all of which are admittedly partial. While many scholars have adopted and explained the necessity of this position,<sup>45</sup> it is perhaps most persuasively presented in the work of John Law. He suggests that the world and its structures are not simply technically complex but at least theoretically graspable; they "necessarily exceed our capacity to know them".<sup>46</sup> The world is better understood as "an unformed but generative flux of forces and relations that work to produce particular realities," a tide or flux of general unpredictability within which mapping offers only momentary (illusions of) stability.<sup>47</sup> We live within multiplicity but not pluralism; overlapping realities which

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<sup>42</sup> Potts and Brown, "Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Researcher," 276.

<sup>43</sup> Trinh Minh-Ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 67.

<sup>44</sup> Lather and Smithies, *Troubling the Angels*.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Gergen and Gergen, 2000; Mann, 2000; Richardson, 1997; Visweswaran, 1994; Haugo, 1995; Brison, 2002; and Gottschalk, 1998.

<sup>46</sup> Law, *After Method*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Law, *After Method*, 7.

interfere with one another, but are not fragmented.<sup>48</sup> This world is fractal; more than one but less than many. Our methods detect and amplify ‘realities’ to produce allegories in which “the realities made manifest do not necessarily have to fit together”.<sup>49</sup> Allegories relate realities that cannot be contained in a single narrative and present “ways of knowing in tension”.<sup>50</sup> Law calls for accepting ontological multiplicity and refusing

the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical (as various philosophers of science have noted, the literal is always ‘dead’ metaphor, a metaphor that is no longer seen as such). That we refuse the dualism between the real and the unreal, between realities and fictions, thinking, instead, in terms of *degrees* of enacted reality, or more reals and less reals. That we seek practices which might re-work imaginaries. That we work allegorically. That we imagine coherence without consistency.<sup>51</sup>

Based on this paradigm, I have taken imagination and metaphor as representational and analytic tools as well as sites of change.

There is considerable debate over how to render these multiple, partial truths textually. I have borrowed from and adapted Laurel Richardson’s “collective story” in which multiple voices speak with direct quotations in a unified chronological narrative. The goal of such stories is to display “an individual’s story by narrativizing the experiences of a social category to which the individual belongs”.<sup>52</sup> Rather than presenting our voices set against a disembodied backdrop of theory, I have brought the theorists into the conversation.

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<sup>48</sup> Law, *After Method*, 61.

<sup>49</sup> Law, *After Method*, 116, 90.

<sup>50</sup> Law, *After Method*, 98.

<sup>51</sup> Law, *After Method*, 139.

<sup>52</sup> Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 32.

*Playful*

To make space for this multiplicity I have invoked the genre of play. Play is basic to animals - human and nonhuman - and a "cornerstone of communication".<sup>53</sup> Benjamin Shepard argues that, like dreams, "it is not a secondary state of reality... but has primacy as a form of knowing".<sup>54</sup> Play offers a critical and creative mode of engagement which can deal effectively and subversively with serious issues, as a form of social critique and healing.<sup>55</sup> It "gets us out of our theoretical ruts" and involves "creating, experimenting, and finding ways of reconsidering intractable problems".<sup>56</sup> It is a welcome antidote to the humorless, heavy-handed, unsustainable, and sometimes exploitative representations we produce when our own need to heal has been sublimated into messianic zeal.<sup>57</sup> Tanya Mars points out that the tradition of anti-humor, anti-narrative, anti-entertainment trauma-based representations evoke a reactionary rather than contemplative response and are thus implicitly conservative. She suggests that wit and humor are powerful tools for truth-telling, which Canadian women artists have wielded with particular deft.<sup>58</sup> Humor can "repudiate reality, and thus enable the humorist to resist his or her own subjection".<sup>59</sup> It disarms audiences and invites them to identify with marginalized subject positions.

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<sup>53</sup> Shepard, "Play, Creativity and the New Community Organizing," 64.

<sup>54</sup> Shepard, "Play, Creativity and the New Community Organizing," 48.

<sup>55</sup> Leah Burns, "Seriously. Are You Really an Artist? Humor and Integrity in a Community Mural Project," in *Wildfire: Art as Activism*, ed. Deborah Barndt (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2006), 34; Mimi Gisolfi D'Aponte, "Native Women Playwrights: Transmitters, Healers, Transformers," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 14 (1999): 99-108.

<sup>56</sup> Shepard, "Play, Creativity and the New Community Organizing," 50.

<sup>57</sup> Lash, "You Are My Sunshine."

<sup>58</sup> Tanya Mars and Johanna Householder, *Caught in the Act: An Anthology of Performance Art By Canadian Women* (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004), 40.

<sup>59</sup> Jane Wark, "Dressed to Thrill: Costume, Body and Dress in Canadian Performance Art," in *Caught in the Act: An Anthology of Performance Art By Canadian Women*, ed. Tanya Mars, and Johanna Householder (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004), 98.

I have employed play in my engagement with participants, explicitly inviting them to play with various visual materials to show me what “recovery” looks like, and working with them to create relational spaces in the focus groups which welcomed a sort of gallows humor as well as anger and tears. There was a surprising amount of laughter in our meetings. Perhaps more significantly, I have been playful in my staging of the text, playing with meaning, format, language, theory, and my reader, to create a serious text that does not take itself too seriously. Like giving some play to a rope, I am playing the survivor, to offer some slack and space for movement. Play is one of the central motifs of postmodern scholarship. In this project I have played with the representational possibilities of play, while framing the whole text as, of course, a play.

### *Magical*

I have also borrowed from magic realism. Texts in this genre offer an alternative to Western rationalism, typically drawing “upon cultural systems that are no less 'real' than those upon which traditional literary realism draws - often non-Western cultural systems that privilege mystery over empiricism, empathy over technology, tradition over innovation”.<sup>60</sup> In magic realism, the supernatural is not inherently disruptive or disturbing but rather ordinary and everyday, and ghosts “serve as reassuring figures of memory” withstanding hegemonic pressures to forget.<sup>61</sup> Some Indigenous literatures, rather than

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<sup>60</sup> Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, “Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s,” *Magic Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>61</sup> Herb Wylie, “It Takes More Than Mortality to Make Somebody Dead: Spectres of History in Margaret Sweatman's *When Alice Lay Down With Peter*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2006), 746.

rendering trauma as a tragedy, read it “under the comic sign of the trickster”.<sup>62</sup> Trickster represents the comic, healing, magical, and unknowable in some Native cosmologies and has been borrowed by scholars such as Kamala Visweswaran and Donna Haraway in their reach for a post-empirical role model.<sup>63</sup>

Using magic imagines a space in between knowing and not-knowing. I actually did not intend to use magic in this project. It emerged from my commitment to creating a performative text, in which the form of what I am saying corresponds to the content of my claims. Turid Markussen identifies performativity as “a theory of how reality comes into being” as well as “a deconstructive practice” and “an emergent mode of working through social and cultural research” which achieves “transformations in the terms through which the real is constituted” and demands that researchers remain open to their own alteration.<sup>64</sup> I was not content to discuss the messy, irrational nature of knowledge production in general and trauma and recovery specifically in tidy, rational terms. Magic offered me a concrete means to show, rather than simply tell, this story to my reader, and resituated this project as a genuine exploration rather than an act of entirely conscious and calculated agency.

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<sup>62</sup> Gerald Vizenor, “A Postmodern Introduction,” *Narrative Chance* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 13.

<sup>63</sup> Visweswaran, “Fictions of Feminist Ethnography,”; Haraway, “Situated Knowledges”.

<sup>64</sup> Markussen, “Practicing Performativity, 329.

*Artistic*

The line between the social sciences and the arts is, at best, blurry.<sup>65</sup> Art can “bypass rationality” and hold “paradoxical truths”.<sup>66</sup> It succeeds through ambiguity or ellipsis, not didactic closure.<sup>67</sup> Rather than demystifying something, it “turn[s] an incident this way and that, throw[s] several kinds of light on it, surround[s] it with a certain mood - and then put[s] it back in its place, still unexplained”.<sup>68</sup> It offers productive ambiguity and a useful complication of understanding.<sup>69</sup> It thus fits precisely the demands for uncertain, multiple narratives emanating from postmodern epistemologies. It also serves the exigencies of trauma, which necessarily “defies, even as it claims, understanding”.<sup>70</sup>

Deploying the arts in scholarly discourses has become more common but is still a tricky business. Such work may need to be contextualized in order to overcome the incredulity or amazement of its audiences (hence this program).<sup>71</sup> However, this can be difficult or impossible to provide as creative processes are often primarily unconscious and the artist/researcher may not consciously ‘understand’ the coded metaphors within their own work until many years later.<sup>72</sup> Scholars risk “substituting novelty and

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<sup>65</sup> Mienczakowski, "The Theatre of Ethnography," 420.

<sup>66</sup> Lash, "You Are My Sunshine," 227.

<sup>67</sup> de Freitas, "Reclaiming Rigour as Trust," 265.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative: Storytelling in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Toronto: Anansi, 1999), 8.

<sup>69</sup> E.W. Eisner, "The Promise and Perils of Alternative Forms of Data Representation," *Educational Researcher* 26, no. 6 (1997), 8.

<sup>70</sup> Levy, "'This Dark Echo Calls Him Home'," 877.

<sup>71</sup> Eisner, "The Promise and Perils," 9.

<sup>72</sup> Jane Piirto, "The Question of Quality and Qualifications: Writing Inferior Poems as Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Studies in Education* 15, no. 4 (2002), 431.

cleverness for substance”<sup>73</sup> and dabbling in artistic genres without respecting the slow process of cultivating competency within them.

In this project, I use visual, poetic, and theatrical tools. I have some training and proficiency in all three, but see this work as “arts-based rather than full-fledged art”.<sup>74</sup> In the next few pages, I will provide a bit more background on the uses of each.

Visual methods have been used extensively in wide range of inquiries. Sarah Pink (2001) argues that images permeate our lives, work, conversations and dreams, and that their expressive ambiguity can be productively used alone or in combination with other methods.<sup>75</sup> In this inquiry, I use visual methods both as a method of data collection and as a means of representation. The resulting images offer a wide range of concrete symbols and content unexpressed by textual accounts. Because images are not necessarily narrative, there is less pressure to ‘keep the story straight.’ The images also establish a less mediated relationship between the readers and the participants.

Poetry is identified by Laurel Richardson as “a pleasing and credible way to write the postmodern”.<sup>76</sup> Poems, she argues, undercut totalizing truth claims in both the writer and the audience, welcome an embodied reading, and “concretize emotions, feelings, and moods... in order to re-create experience itself to another person”.<sup>77</sup> According to Eliot Eisner, poetry “was invented to say what words can never say”.<sup>78</sup> It is thus well suited to

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<sup>73</sup> Eisner, "The Promise and Perils," 9.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Barone, “Science, Art, and the Predispositions of Educational Researchers,” *Educational Researcher* 30, no. 7 (2001), 25.

<sup>75</sup> Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*.

<sup>76</sup> Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 140.

<sup>77</sup> Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 180.

<sup>78</sup> Eisner, "The Promise and Perils," 5.

unspeakables. Rishma Dunlop argues, “poetry confronts terror, makes it habitable knowledge, beautiful”.<sup>79</sup> The French poet and Holocaust survivor Celan explained that a poem

can be a message in a bottle, sent out in the (not always greatly hopeful) belief that it may somewhere and sometime wash up on land, on heartland perhaps. Poems in this sense are always under way, they are making toward something. Toward what? Toward something standing open, occupiable, perhaps toward a “thou” that can be addressed, an addressable reality.<sup>80</sup>

Poetry thus serves as a way to communicate experiences that defy narration and as a means of reconstituting internal and external witnessing.

I have used poetic transcription to present my research findings as a verse-form chorus.<sup>81</sup> My hope, as discussed in more detail in Act 3 Scene 2, is to foreground the harmonies and dissonances between the voices of my participants, and offer a sort of open analysis through juxtaposition.

The genre which I have drawn on most heavily is theatre. According to Gregor Campbell, “the magic of theatre is the magic of haunting...The long toil of human suffering hasn’t disappeared without a trace, but it is the task of theatre to make sure that the traces you do find are vocal and physical”.<sup>82</sup> Playwrights do not offer knowledge of trauma but rather emphasize their partial ability to represent it. Vivian Patraka suggests

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<sup>79</sup> Rishma Dunlop, “Scar Tissue, Testimony, Beauty: Notebooks on Theory,” in *Provoked By Art: Theorizing Arts-Informed Research*, ed. Ardra Cole et al. (Halifax, NS: Backalong Books, 2004), 95.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Felman, “Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,” 42.

<sup>81</sup> Corinne Glense, “That Rare Feeling: Re-presenting Research Through Poetic Transcription,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 3, no. 2 (1997), 213. For a full discussion of poetic methods see Monica Prendergast, “Poem is What? Poetic Inquiry in Qualitative Social Science Research,” *International Review of Qualitative Research* 1, no. 4 (2009), 541-568.

<sup>82</sup> Foreward, in Judith Thompson, *Perfect Pie* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1999), n.p..

they “write what could be called mystery plays, each presenting an enigma without a solution”.<sup>83</sup> Like Laurel Richardson, “in drama I found a way to ‘give voice’ to multiple positions, reflect upon and spoof my own, and thereby write pieces that *show* how openness and reflexivity *look* and *feel*, rather than simply talking about it”.<sup>84</sup> I offer this text as a dramatically scripted narrative, rather than actual theatre.

The theoretical field addressing the function and form of dramatic writing is rich and varied. In this project, my textual strategies have been heavily influenced by David Mamet’s discussion of the nature of art and the relationship between writers and audiences - that is, between me and you, my reader. He argues:

Artists don't wonder, "What is it good for?" They aren't driven to "create art," or to "help people," or to "make money." They are driven to lessen the burden of the unbearable disparity between their conscious and unconscious minds, and so to achieve peace.

When they make art, their nonrational synthesis has the power to bring *us* peace.

The words of the rational mind have no power to bring us peace through art.<sup>85</sup>

What the rational mind produces is melodrama - “anxiety undergone in safety” - or the problem play, which “offers indignation”. Both forms of false drama “indulge a desire to feel superior to events, to history, in short, to the natural order”.<sup>86</sup> Each line and scene leads to a “right” conclusion and good inevitably prevails. Problem plays temporarily relieve anxiety but because they present a false struggle, the anxiety reasserts itself quickly, and we cast about for "another oppressed people to ‘free,’ so we can reassure

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<sup>83</sup> Patraha, "Feminism and the Jewish Subject," 169.

<sup>84</sup> Richardson, *Fields of Play*, 73.

<sup>85</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 50.

<sup>86</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 15.

ourselves, again, of what we know to be untrue: that we are superior to circumstances (that we are, in effect, God)".<sup>87</sup>

False dramas thus seem to perform something akin to the “god trick” in research, which, as Donna Haraway observes, is unethical and must be forbidden.<sup>88</sup> Both Haraway and Mamet invoke the imaginary and non-rational as the means to avoid this trap. Mamet explains, “what comes from the head is perceived ... as manipulative. And we may succumb to the manipulative for a moment because it makes us feel good to side with the powerful. But finally we understand we’re being manipulated. And we resent it”.<sup>89</sup>

False dramas “may be diverting” but he warns they have a cumulatively debilitating effect.<sup>90</sup> “Dramatists who aim to change the world assume a moral superiority to the audience and allow the audience to assume a moral superiority to those people in the play who don’t accept the views of the hero”.<sup>91</sup> He argues that he has “never met an audience that wasn’t collectively smarter than I am” and that trying to change your audience is both presumptuous and a form of abuse. “They are not being ‘changed,’ they are being forced”.<sup>92</sup>

The best plays, he suggests, may be upsetting or unusual or intricate and leave you unsure, but they stay with you,

because they aren't clean, they aren't neat, but there's something in them that comes from the heart, and, so, goes to the heart. Tragedy is a celebration not of our eventual triumph but of the truth - it is not a victory but a resignation. Much

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<sup>87</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 20.

<sup>88</sup> Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 34.

<sup>89</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 21.

<sup>90</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 20.

<sup>91</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 25.

<sup>92</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 25.

of its calmative power comes, again, from that operation described by Shakespeare: when remedy is exhausted, so is grief...

We live in an extraordinarily debauched, interesting, savage world, where things really don't come out even. The purpose to true drama is to help remind us of that. Perhaps this does have an accidental, a cumulative social effect - to remind us to be a little more humble or a little more grateful or a little more ruminative.<sup>93</sup>

The strength of the hero in a true drama comes from their "power to resist. They resist the desire to manipulate, to 'help'".<sup>94</sup> These plays "do not deny our powerlessness, but through its avowal they free us of the burden of its repression".<sup>95</sup> They do so by airing conflict, not by rationalizing it.<sup>96</sup>

I have quoted from Mamet at length because he offers a provocative critique which may be usefully applied to both the instrumental use of creative tools in presenting research, and our attempts to instruct our audiences. He seems to be offering a detailed description of what Lather (2007) is reaching for in her call for practices of unknowing and messy texts. My project - which I have barely begun in this dissertation - is to learn to produce scholarship which meets Mamet's criteria for art.

### *Personal*

Mamet argues that "the power to resist makes the hero journey affective. And for the audience to undergo that journey, it's essential that the writer undergo the journey. That's why writing never gets any easier".<sup>97</sup> Work in this representational mode is thus profoundly emotional and personal. While academic discourses have traditionally been

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<sup>93</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 21.

<sup>94</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 17.

<sup>95</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 15.

<sup>96</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 16.

<sup>97</sup> Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife*, 19.

suspicious of open emotionality, Ron Pielas argues that research which fails to consider the heart omits our source of power and leaves us “spiritually and ethically bankrupt”.<sup>98</sup> Many scholars have pointed out that emotions are an essential component of our work and deserve an open and nuanced treatment.<sup>99</sup> I have thus offered no pretext of dispassionate rationality in this project, but rather endeavored to bring our felt and physical experiences into play.

This means that the project is also inescapably personal. According to Lois Presser, "the researcher's goal is not to emancipate the authentic story of the narrator - none exists - but rather to expose as much as she can of the relations that influence the construction of the story that is told".<sup>100</sup> As I am by far the most influential factor, much of what must be exposed has to do with me. To do so, I have borrowed from the genre of autoethnography. Autoethnographers “willfully pollute rarefied academic discourses” with the literary and personal voice in order to produce evocative, “thick” accounts of the complexity of everyday life.<sup>101</sup> At its worst, this form of scholarship can

“read” a little like morning talk shows where individuals discuss family secrets, personal crises, traumas, desires, and experiences, to countless anonymous others for purposes which are not altogether clear. In some cases ... writers are so desirous to be ever more self-reflexive than others about subjectivities, private stories, and idiosyncratic departures that they effectively evacuate the sociological from their account, and produce texts which are narcissistic, incomprehensible, or self indulgent.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ronald J. Pielas, *A Methodology of the Heart: Evoking Academic and Daily Life* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004), 10.

<sup>99</sup> See, for instance, the work of Carolyn Ellis.

<sup>100</sup> Lois Presser, “Negotiating Power and Narrative in Research: Implications for Feminist Methodology,” *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 30, no. 4 (2005), 2007.

<sup>101</sup> Foley, "Critical Ethnography," 484.

<sup>102</sup> Gottschalk, "Postmodern Sensibilities and Ethnographic Possibilities," 209.

When well done, however, autoethnographic work can offer insightful, relevant, nuanced, and beautifully intimate revelations of how the social constellates within us. I have taken up this genre in response to the exhortation to “write what you know” and the ethical obligation to be reflexive. Given how closely I am implicated in my work, it would seem neither ethical nor practical to position myself outside of the frame. This sort of vulnerable scholarship is terrifying and often embarrassing to produce but it creates the possibility of movement. These are the stories I can tell.

### *Conclusion*

While this slippery project can only pretend to offer solid arguments and true findings about the post-abuse process, the hybrid methods I have used to produce this mixed-genre work may stand as a contribution to our collective scholarly effort to find new ways to work productively in what Patti Lather calls the ruins of inquiry.<sup>103</sup> It is difficult to sit in a ruin, to resist the overwhelming urge to start tidying up, sorting things out, rebuilding something to replace the crumbled structures of meaning. It is hard for us, as readers and as survivors, to sit with our desire for smooth stories and solid answers, the comfort texts and progress narratives that we crave even though we know they’ll let us down. Our ability to be patient in the soot and confusion of our epistemic losses comes from the hope, slim as blades of grass, that new ways of speaking and thinking will emerge. Thank you, reader, for sitting here with me, on the upturned stumps of knowledge, playing cats cradle with these narrative threads, waiting for something to grow.

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<sup>103</sup> Lather, *Getting Lost*, 2007.

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Alexa - Is teaching herself how to paint.

Alice - Plays soccer.

Amery, Jean. "Torture." In *Art From the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology*, edited by Lawrence Langer, 119-36. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Andrews, Molly. "Feminist Research With Non-Feminist and Anti-Feminist Women: Meeting the Challenge." *Feminism & Psychology* 12, no. 1 (2002): 55-77.

Angel - I still wish we could talk.

Anna - Has grandchildren.

Anne - Raises horses.

Arendt, Hannah. *Life of the Mind*. Vol. 1, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978.

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Belinda - Made a great Halloween costume.

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Jen - Can make a cup of coffee last a long, long time.

June - Likes ballroom dancing.

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Margo - Teaches fly-fishing.

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Ruth - Likes deep talks long past tuck-in.

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Sarah - Is brilliant and has two spaniels.

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Shawn - Is extremely ticklish.

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Shirley - Loves her garden.

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Tahirih - Bumps into lots of things.

Tammy - Has gone back to school.

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