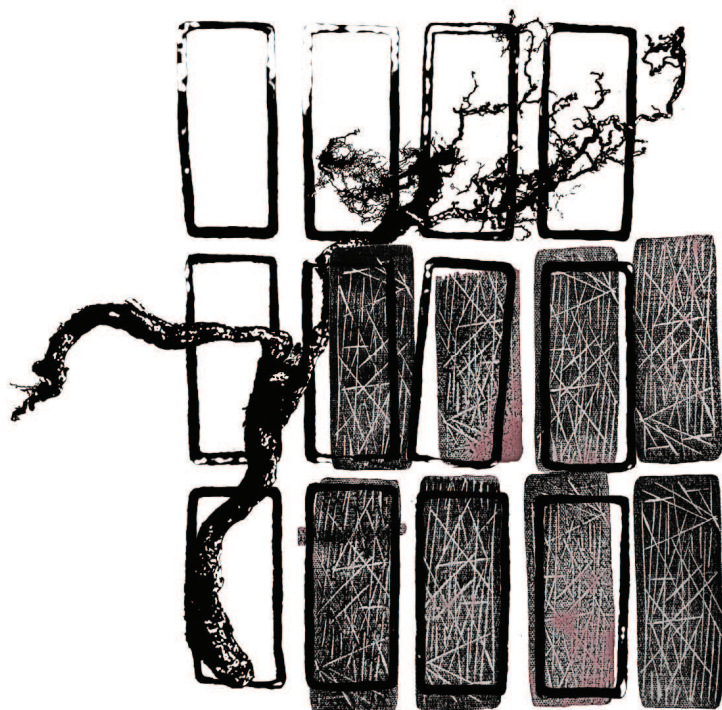# WRITTEN ON THE BODY

Narrative (Re)constructions of Violence(s)

Ed. Marta-Laura Cenedese

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Cover image by Abigail Fields, in collaboration with Eden Almasude for the Sensetrack project.

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Introduction.
Traces of Bodies: Writing and Reading Otherwise

Marta-Laura Cenedese

From meeting in Oslo to meeting Online

Written on the Body: Narrative (Re)constructions of Violence(s) was originally conceived as a week-long symposium, organized just outside of Oslo between the end of July and the beginning of August 2020. The second meeting of the newly launched Study Circle "Narrative and Violence" (which I coordinated with Helena Duffy between 2020 and 2022), the symposium was part of the yearly Summer Symposium of the Nordic Summer University,[1] a migratory, non-hierarchical group that offers a forum for experimentation and cross-disciplinary collaboration to members and participants from all over the world – within and outside academic and research institutions.

Both the topic of the symposium – violence "written" on bodies (a more detailed description of the theme will follow later in this introduction) – and the Call for Papers were crafted with particular care, attention, and even love. I believe that this thoughtful intention must have managed to seep through the net's invisible lines since people's response, in just a few days, was incredibly enthusiastic. Unfortunately, as a consequence of the still uncertain run of the Covid-19 pandemic, not long after the Call for Papers was

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[1] For more information about the Nordic Summer University, see here: https://www.nsuweb.org

published the board of the Nordic Summer University decided to cancel the physical gathering and to turn it into an online event. It was still a gathering, but one taking place in distant and dispersed formats of encounter, sharing and connection, which we called "traces". This meant that the symposium did not happen in person in that magical and intense atmosphere that many have had the chance to experience over the years. Yet – albeit with the acute knowledge that the alternative would have never made up for the missing synergies that the symposium usually inspires – its spirit lived on in a new, experimental, online format. Through the notion of traces, the Nordic Summer University board decided to try and make the most out of the current circumstances rather than collapsing under its restrictions, and thus to open a space for both traditional and unconventional collaborations, experiments, unusual meet-ups, creative interventions and other innovative approaches, in which documentation, accessibility and shareability were crucial. As coordinator of a study circle, I was in charge of facilitating the smooth running of the circle's different events as well as to invite the whole Nordic Summer University community (and beyond) to attend them. In the end, the "Narrative and Violence" Summer 2020 Symposium included Zoom performances, roundtables, a virtual exhibition tour, discussions, and exchange on work-in-progress through shared documents. Given that, at the time, I was completely unfamiliar with online presentation tools, the credit for the organization of such a wonderful "live" programme goes entirely to the participants.[2] This volume is my humble attempt at continuing the dialogues initiated remotely and collecting those summer experiments in a tangible, *traceable* and *shareable* form.

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2 Recordings of some of the events are available on the "Narrative and Violence" YouTube channel.

"Another review process is possible":
Peer-Feedback as Method

From the initial switch to the new format (the "traces"), through the work-in-progress we engaged in during the Symposium, and up to the creation of this volume, I have been very clear on the principles I wished to adopt regarding collaborative work. This was the result both of my own personal beliefs, but also in keeping with the spirit of the Nordic Summer University's collegial, non-hierarchical, and compassionate ethos. From different corners of the world we "gathered" to experiment with *working together differently* towards this publication, and thus we engaged in the practice of *peer-feedback* instead of *(blind) peer-review*. The latter is the established process of evaluation within academic publishing, and it certainly is a valuable tool to uphold quality standards. However, it is often inconsistent and, to a certain extent, it may be damaging in its ungenerous, pedantic criticism (*#reviewer2*). Therefore, peer-review did not seem to be the suitable pathway for this project, in which I aspired towards co-creating constructive and supportive interactions with (and among) the contributors, without hiding behind the mask of anonymity. Since this was originally conceived as an experiment in which a number of scholars invited a community of strangers to read their own work-in-progress (available on a shared platform over the course of the week) and to write comments in the margins, I was guided by a deep sense of the vulnerability that accompanied this offering, as well as the awareness of the exploratory nature of the writing process, in itself an experiment, a trial, a rehearsal of thoughts on a white page. The essays were in-the-making, the authors welcoming suggestions where their arguments seemed wobbly, advice when their evidence was faltering, praise when their words were beautiful. Peer-feedback, as theorised by Sevasti-Melissa Nolas and Christos Varvantakis (2019), allows us to recognise all of these aspects instead of focusing on the weaknesses only; it acknowledges the "gems in

the making" (4). What is more, peer-feedback also espoused, in the best way possible, the spirit of generous communication that is at the heart of the Nordic Summer University, one which seeks to foster the creation of a community thriving on open exchange, mutual learning and personal/professional growth. This type of community-building becomes even more essential at a time (summer 2020 and beyond) of unsettling uncertainty in which people have been suddenly severed from their community's (affective) materiality.

The choice of peer-feedback is also a conscious and political act against the toxic dynamics and aggressive competitiveness that is, unfortunately, encouraged by research institutions and research praxis. As coordinator of "Narrative and Violence", a research network that investigates narrative representations of violence(s) and the ways these violences can be counteracted, I cannot but refuse to contribute to the structural violence advanced by the neoliberal university, in all the insidious shapes and forms it takes. The choice of peer-feedback is, as Nolas and Varvantakis convincingly explain, "about nurturing collegiality, something which in the current academic moment often feels like a scarce resource, and therefore a political issue. To nurture, to care, to be concerned is also, like feminists have long argued, a distinctly political position, and one by which we are happy to stand firmly" (2019: 4). As they exemplify, *another review process is possible*, a process that highlights constructive feedback and encouragement, that connects rather than separates, and that makes individuals feel like members of the same community: "If we think about the review process as a form of communication and building of community, why not also point out and name what we think are the strengths and pleasures of a text or audiovisual composition?" (4), they conclude. A review process in which care, as well as "being of service" to one another – in the positive sense of providing help, assistance, benefit – are at the core, and the *fil rouge*, of our approach.

Violence Written on Bodies

As mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, the meeting planned for the summer of 2020 followed the conference that launched the three-year run of the Study Circle "Narrative and Violence", and which was held at the University of Gdańsk in February 2020.[3] During the three days spent in the Polish city on the Baltic Sea, we posed the question of how to make sense of violence in the digital age. After hearing excellent papers from the participants and keynote speakers and having had many thought-provoking conversations that spilled over from the university locales to city visits and dinners, we were collectively inspired to next direct our attention to the "bodies" that are subjects and objects of violence; bodies that, by simply "being", narrate their traumatic experience. But how do *bodies* narrate violence(s)? And what *bodies* are we talking about?

The understanding of a *body* that was put forward in the call was purposefully encompassing to include the human and non-human, the organic and inorganic, and their diverse (im)material corporeal forms. To consider the im/materiality of violence on bodies also implies attending to its trans-corporeal intersections and therefore addressing a body's inseparability from the "environment" – a network of relations (human and non-human), phenomena and spaces (e.g. the home, the land, the ocean, the neighbourhood, the city, the Internet, and the stage, to cite only a few) that foster, generate, perform, and ultimately bear witness to violence. We attune to the dialogic and hybrid relations that connect bodies and environments, and to the horizons of imaginative, future-worldbuilding possibilities that they open through acts of transmission, translation, and transfer.[4] Refracting to something *other* than the body's own physicality – to

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3 Many thanks to Miłosz Wojtyna for the wonderful partnership.
4 These notes are inspired by the works of Christina Sharpe (2016), Saidiya Hartman (2007, 2008, 2019), and Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015).

multiple (multidirectional) networks – the chapters in this volume map and weave an ecosystem of interlacing bodies that are human, animal, vegetal, natural and technological; that are both singular and collective (i.e. a social body); that are situated in both the physical and virtual space; that are mythological and ephemeral; and that express naturecultural entanglements (Haraway 2003).

This variety of conceptualisations and understandings of the body is reflected in the different contributions of this volume: here, we encounter the physical bodies of Marianne and Connor (Orlaith Darling), of Esch and her family (Eric Doise), of Yetu and Hiram Walker (Roxanne Tan), of the goddess Macha (Anna Walker), of the author's younger self (Anastassia Kostrioukova), of the nameless medic in Yamina Mechakra's novel (Abigail Fields and Eden Alma-sude), of the women interviewed by Jelena Nolan-Roll, and Macbeth's (Fin Walker). Yet each one of these physical bodies also mirrors (and is mirrored by) other bodies, structures and environments. In the texts analysed in this volume, violence is visible on bodies as much as it reverberates on something or someone other than the body itself – an abandoned construction site, water, dirt and mud, a dog, an old apartment, an image on the screen, the actor on the stage – and through ethereal space-time trajectories (a voice traveling through virtual space, Black noise, individual and collective memories, shared histories, (imagined) ancestries, etc.). Therefore, these physical bodies are also intersectional metonyms (Cielemęcka, Szczygielska and Sandilands 2019) of social and gendered bodies that grapple with the convergence of the systemic, symbolic, and subjective forms of violence done on them.

In their individual contributions, Darling, Doise and Tan draw on bodies of individuals that also represent social bodies to address systemic violence against groups. Whereas Darling's analysis of Sally Rooney's novel *Normal People* (2018) intersects gender and class in order to highlight the plague of neoliberal oppression in contemporary Ireland; Doise and Tan hold the space open for

thinking the Trans*Atlantic (Sharpe 2016) by addressing the after-life of slavery[5] in contemporary US-American Afrofuturist and Ka-trina fictions, such as Rivers Solomon's *The Deep* (2019); Ta-Nehisi Coates' *The Water Dancer* (2019); and Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2011). As a segue of the literary and cultural analyses of the first three contributions, we pause with Silvia Pierosara to reflect on the preservation of signs of violence on bodies. Writing nearby Saidiya Hartman's ethical interrogation on how to recount histories of violence without reproducing more violence (2008), Pierosara suggests that some narratives (open-ended, fragmented and fluid) are able to preserve vulnerable signs of violence at the same time as they resist and challenge it in an emancipatory move. Following this philosophical grounding moment, the volume moves to Anna Walker's critical narration of her own virtual performance-piece (also transcribed here) of the Celtic myth of Macha. Walker's re-telling of the myth, an endeavour of *future fictioning* (Burrows and O'Sullivan 2019), offers a space for reawakening and researching, through Macha's traumatic experience, the embodied afterlife (i.e. memories) of patriarchal violence. Next, Kostrioukova reflects on the archive as a body whose porous borders lie simultaneously at the crossroads of power, nostalgia, and creativity, the political and domestic, the inside and the outside. Kostrioukova's is a self-re-flexive, personal piece in which, not unlike the assemblage of a Russian doll, the author engages with the layered (and embedded) temporalities of *archives*, and with the unhomeliness brought forth by her own archive, an apartment in St Petersburg. Interrogating and "cracking open" the multilayered traces of the past, as well as the approach to it, is also at the centre of Fields and Almasude's contribution, although with/from a different trajectory. Fields and Almasude explore *how* – with what affect-critical modalities – *one*

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[5] Or, as Sharpe (2018, 175) phrases it: "The *longue durée* of Atlantic chattel slavery".

can read Tamazight Algerian author Amina Mechakra's novel *La Grotte éclatée* (1972), and also *how to write* about it. One way they respond to Mechakra's call (as there are indeed multiple overlays in their attempts to respond, and this volume only contains a fraction of them) is through a "Sensetrack", an experimental piece of embodied, multi-sensory and multi-modal criticism.[6] In their contribution to the volume, rather than explaining how the Sensetrack developed, they instead meditate together, in a conversation that invites us to envision an/other mode of reading, writing, and practicing literary criticism. Concluding the volume in a dialogic mode, the last two contributions transcribe (and thus archive) conversations about bodies and violence. Operating a creative adaptation of the narrative interviews she conducted with several women spread on several continents, Nolan-Roll maps the ways in which, after rape and abuse, women empower themselves. Refraining from providing any definitive answers, the map points to a variety of potential avenues and counternarratives for understanding, feeling, smelling, and screaming "empowerment". And finally, the last contribution is an edited transcription made by director and choreographer Fin Walker of two roundtable discussions urged by her ongoing work on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Exchanging with one of her actors, Nick Holder, and scholars Anna Walker and Iris Garrelfs, the conversation touched upon violence, ambition, intergenerational trauma, and how to attend, in the performing arts, to the embodiment of violent representations.

Overall, the ambition of this volume is to engage with imaginative and theoretical (re)constructions of bodies – be they human, non-human, more-than-human, social, natural and vegetal, technological, etc. – that express, perform or experience violences; with how they reproduce the intertwining of gender, power dynamics,

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6 Fields and Almasude's Sensetrack is available at www.sensingviolence.wordpress.com

and colonial-neoliberal-heteropatriarchal capitalism; to explore various practices of storying violence on *bodies* and to attend to "the wounds of the world". Finally, in addressing how *bodies* narrate violence, the contributors of this volume also wish to reflect on the implications and effects of such (embodied) practices and on the possible strategies to counter-act or counter-story them.

Writing in Different Ways

This volume also encourages testing and experimenting with different kinds of writing, and becoming undisciplined to our "narratively condemned status" (Wynter 1994, 70, quoted in Sharpe 2016, 13) as (western) academics. Rooted in feminist epistemologies, writing is here conceived as "a mode of enquiry" (Richardson 2000), that is, "something that is not separate from, but totally embedded in, the research process" (Lykke et al. 2014, 2) and therefore also inextricably linked to the collaborative framework of collegial, yet critical, exchange with generous partners/collaborators. Mirroring the suggestion (detailed above)[7], that the reading process – in this case for review purposes but also beyond them – can be done differently, the volume is structured so as to guide the reader along a route towards writing *otherwise*. The authors read and theorize diffractively (Barad 2007) in order to draw new, unexpected and creative engagements whilst writing intellectual critique. The aim of this volume is, on the one hand, to integrate academic and creative modes of writing under the same roof, experimenting with narrative voice, genre, multimodality and style; on the other hand, it hopes to offer an opening for reflecting on (and experimenting with) epistemologies, methodologies, ethics and politics of writing in academia. Thus, the volume is composed of essays that, at the same time as

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7 Section of this introduction titled "Another review process is possible…"

they are rooted in meticulous scholarly methods, may lean towards either the normative academic form or the unexpected, creative, discursive style. Among the latter, we find contributions that, following a disposition for affective resonances and embodied inquiry, merge creative writing, ethnographic research, visual artwork into "textual poems" (Nolan-Roll) or a "Sensetrack" (Fields and Almasude) or a virtual performance (A. Walker).

In the end, each one of the volume's chapters shows how one can write while thinking *with* stories (Frank 1995), whereby storytelling inspires and emerges from the creative and artful messiness of critical and affective encounters. Ultimately, this book strives to plot, map, track and archive some of the ways in which, *with stories*, we can resist, rupture, disrupt and reimagine how to *do* research.

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"There are worse things than getting beaten up": Neoliberal Violence in *Normal People*

Orlaith Darling

Moments of escalated and bathetic violence, both symbolic and physical, pepper Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2018), a novel deeply concerned with power and powerlessness. Throughout the novel, the main female character Marianne's relationships with men are characterised by microaggressions, psychological bullying and physical violence. In one scene, for instance, she requests that her boyfriend Jamie put down a champagne glass:

> He drops the glass on the floor and it shatters. Marianne screams, a real scream from her throat, and launches her body at Jamie, drawing her right arm behind her as if to strike him. Connell steps in between them, glass crunches under his shoe, and he grabs Marianne by her upper arms. Behind him Jamie is laughing. Marianne tries to push [Connell] aside, her whole body shudders… They look at each other and the rigidity leaves her and she goes slack like she's been shot… Connell turns Marianne's body around and steers her towards the back door. She offers no resistance (Rooney 2018, 178–179).[1]

Before this exchange occurs, the party of friends gathered outside hears Marianne's "raised voice coming from the house, almost a shriek", upon which Connell, Marianne's best friend and on-off love interest, rushes to her protection (178). In the quoted moment, then, Marianne's explosion is tethered to its symbolically charged background. Her reaction is both visceral – her "whole body" becoming

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[1] Further references will be provided as page numbers in-text.

a site of frenetic rage – and anticlimactic, easily defused by Connell, speaking to a general trend in which violence informs Marianne's daily interactions while remaining off-limits to her as a response.

I open with this scene to contextualise from the outset Willem Schinkel's contention that "violence has a tendency of being mis-recognised" (2013, 3); as in this instance, a nuanced understanding of submerged violence is required to fully interpret *Normal People.* Developing this idea of submerged violence, Slavoj Žižek argues that "subjective violence" with an identifiable agent is merely the most obvious form of a triumvirate of violence which also encompasses "symbolic" and "systemic" or "structural" violence (2008, 1–2). "Sub-jective" violence, Žižek contends, is a "perturbation of the 'normal', peaceful state of things" – an act of physical violence which punctures an otherwise pacifist context (2008, 1–2). However, this "normal", "peaceful state" elides the latent "symbolic" and "systemic" violence which is maintained as analogous to peace: in this case, the skewed gender dynamics of the above-cited scene as well as Jamie's role as a hostile character throughout. In line with Žižek's analysis, the con-text, environments and systems in which violence is born is clearly an area of interest for Rooney, who commented in a 2019 profile that "I am trying to show the reality of a social condition as it is connected to broader systems" (Collins 2019). Accordingly in the novel, Marianne muses that "she wasn't at all powerful, and she would live and die in a world of extreme violence against the innocent" (228), and Connell feels that his relationship with Marianne is mediated by some ubiqui-tous but unquantifiable force: "it feels at times like their relationship has been captured in a complex network of power… containing them both" (157).

Over the course of *Normal People* more generally, this sub-merged, "misrecognised" violence takes two expressions – gender and class violence – which overlap and converge on the two main characters, Marianne and Connell. While Marianne exists in a society which "rationalis[es] violence against women and other op-

pressed groups as necessary to the patriarchal status quo" (Higgins and Silver 1991, 6), Connell's experience is curtailed by his lack of means in recessionary Ireland. In this article I identify neoliberalism as the common denominator of the gender and class violence levelled against Marianne and Connell respectively, and, thus, as the "symbolic" and "systemic" violence underlying the eruptions of "subjective" interpersonal violence in *Normal People*. A primarily economic ideology, neoliberalism bloomed in the 1970s/80s under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher who championed financial deregulation, privatisation of public services and tax-cuts for the wealthy. Different perspectives on neoliberalism have emphasised its "extension of market-rationality to otherwise noneconomic domains of life" (Huehls and Greenwald 2017, 9); its emphasis on personal responsibility and the rampant individualism stemming from Thatcher's "there is no such thing as society" thesis (Brown 2015, 100); and its self-presentation as a "natural universal" reality rather than an ideology (Huehls and Greenwald 2017, 8). In promoting "individual solutions to myriad social problems" (Ong 2006, 2), neoliberalism exhorts subjects "to make sense of their individual biographies in terms of discourses of freedom, autonomy and choice – no matter how constrained their lives may actually be" (Gill and Scharff 2011, 5–6). As such, its emphasis on the successful "individual" obscures the systematic nature of both class-based and gendered violence, deracinating this violence from a recognisable framework of inequality and portraying it "not as a problem of society, but rather one that is specific and inherent within certain lives" (Taylor 2018, 151).

Neoliberalism's valorisation of independence and individualism over interdependence, and its disavowal of structural disadvantage, contextualises Connell's and Marianne's respective struggles with self-esteem and self-worth over the course of the novel: by disguising its own existence as an ideology, neoliberalism as a form of violence is "misrecognised" and essentialised in the victim, who is configured as a failure. However, while Rooney is attentive to the workings of

neoliberalism as both a form of and a breeding-ground for gendered violence as well as a type of submerged class warfare, *Normal People* is not simply a portrayal of these violences. Rather, the novel uses the relationship between Marianne and Connell to advance a vision of radical interdependence: while neoliberalism encourages the disavowal of human vulnerability and victimhood, I argue that Marianne's experimentation with masochism comprises a "rejection of hierarchy" (Walter 2012, 7) and an embrace of interdependence and contingency, thus challenging neoliberal privileging of the "independent and egotistical individual" (Ong 2006, 2). In this way, *Normal People* offers a tentatively optimistic reading of the possibilities of embodiment in rejecting the individualistic subjectivity of a society nonetheless teeming with systemic, symbolic and subjective violence.

Neoliberalism and Class

Both Marianne and Connell grow up in rural Ireland; in the small town of Carricklea, Co. Sligo, Marianne's strange family background (her dead father and icy mother) as well as her familial wealth mark her as different from her peers. From her adolescence, Marianne weaponizes her difference: she gets into "pointless arguments", "exercises an open contempt for people in school" and refuses to abide by gendered conventions like shaving her legs (3). She notes with mild disdain that her classmates enjoy the homogeneity of the educational system:

> [Her] classmates all seem to like school so much and find it normal. To dress in the same uniform every day, to comply at all times with arbitrary rules, to be scrutinised and monitored for their misbehaviour, this is normal to them. They have no sense of the school as an oppressive environment (12).

Connell, by contrast, is raised on a council estate by a single mother and is popular and universally liked. However, unlike Marianne,

his likeability is facilitated by his *lack* of a firm sense of self: his self-esteem is very much derived from what other people think of him and how he melds easily with the herd. Accordingly, in the opening section of the novel, Connell fears that being associated with Marianne would be of detriment to his social capital. However, there is a sense that Connell overestimates the importance of his social capital in the face of the material, economic discrepancies between him and Marianne. Tellingly, their association is discussed through a class lens by his friends:

> At lunchtime on Tuesday, Rob started asking questions about Connell's mother working in Marianne's house, and Connell just ate his lunch and tried not to make any facial expressions. Would you ever go in there yourself? Rob said. Into the mansion. Connell jogged his bag of chips in his hand and then peered into it. I've been in there a few times, yeah, he said. […] I'd say she thinks of you as her butler, does she? […] Does Marianne not have a little bell she would ring to get her attention, no? Rob said (23).

The importance of class which, in school, seemed secondary compared to Marianne's social exile, is paramount when Marianne and Connell move to Dublin for university, where everyone "just goes around comparing how much money their parents make" (217). The reversal of the pairs' social standing makes Connell painfully aware of his modest upbringing in comparison to people "destined for shareholder board meetings" (Lord 2020), whose fathers "not figuratively" caused the recession.

Trinity College and Dublin are, for Connell, sites of neoliberal violence: his personal insecurities are exacerbated by his socio-economic background, leading to his alienation from himself and to his depressive episodes. As Anastasia Baucina comments, "he overcomes the material barriers to his study, only to find that it is not enough to overcome the vast class differences which generations of wealth create" (2020). This class element is increasingly the propeller of the miscommunication which blights his relationship with

Marianne. That is, Connell's recalcitrant self-sufficiency makes him suspicious of everyone but Marianne, from whom he still reluctantly accepts favours despite feeling that she is "indulg[ing] an attraction to someone who could never belong in her world" (127). When he loses his job in a Dublin restaurant, he is too proud to ask to stay in her apartment; their lack of shared experience when it comes to class means that Connell assumes Marianne will infer that he wishes to stay with her, while Marianne's class comfort – alongside her gendered insecurity – means that she does not. When they break up as a result, and she starts dating the wealthy and abusive Jamie, Connell's self-consciousness about his lower socio-economic background introduces confirmation bias to his conclusion: "she wanted a boyfriend whose family would take her on skiing holidays" (125). Thus, while Connell commands plenty of social capital at home in Sligo, as the novel progresses it becomes clear that social capital and mobility are more tethered to economic capital than he previously thought. As the novel progresses, moreover, Connell's lack of socio-economic capital is increasingly played out on his body.

In his chapter for *Ireland Under Austerity*, Michael Cronin borrows Lauren Berlant's terminology to describe the state of "crisis ordinariness" engendered by the mammoth recession precipitated by the financial crash of 2007/8. Examining the media narrative of a resilient and obedient Irish population who – unlike the rioting crowds in Spain, Greece and Portugal – were "just getting on with it" in the face of extreme austerity measures, he echoes Žižek's reading of submerged violence:

> [T]he years since the onset of the recession in 2008 have been characterised not by passivity and quietism but by extreme violence... [but] this violence is endemic and routinely misrepresented (2015, np).

For Cronin, the fiscal and economic fallout of the crash were not limited in impact to statistics and data but had embodied, physical effects for the Irish population. In particular, he writes that those

lost to the increasing rates of suicide in the years following 2008 were "the inevitable victims of the relentless violence of a culture of fear" (2015, np). Other austerity criticism highlights how, although neoliberalism may be nebulous, it is "real" in its physical impact on disadvantaged bodies (Stuckler and Basu 2013; Negra and Tasker 2014).

There are two main instances of this in *Normal People*. Firstly, in the second half of the novel, Connell learns that his school friend, Rob, has killed himself. In the novel, Rob leaves school and moves to Galway to study Business. However, in the BBC/Hulu television adaptation, a scene in an early episode shows Connell returning to Sligo for a weekend and meeting Rob for a pint. Although he is supportive of Connell, it is clear that Rob is envious of his life in Dublin and that he feels left behind. He notes, for instance, that although his work is alright it is quiet. It is difficult not to link Rob's suicide to the radical increase in youth mental health issues and suicide rates in Ireland following the economic crash of 2008. *Normal People* takes place from 2011, thus encompassing some of the worst years of austerity. If the financial crisis became a "Year Zero" (Patterson 2020), it also erased the sense of a future to look forward to, especially among young people, for whom unemployment or emigration seemed the only options and to whom decreasing portions of dwindling state resources were allocated. As Jennifer Silva writes in her study of working-class youth during recession:

> Young men and women inhabit a *mood economy* in which legitimacy and self-worth are purchased not with traditional currencies such as work or marriage or class solidarity but instead through the ability to organise their emotions into a narrative of self-transformation (2013, 18).

In this context, Rob evokes "experiences common to young people under today's capitalism – the isolation and sense of failure for those who cannot move with economic tides" (Baucina 2020). Coming of age in a time marked by hopelessness and despair, Rob is a body

sacrificed to political economy; he is part of a generation for whom the Celtic Tiger[2] trend of upward social mobility enjoyed by his parents was unceremoniously reversed.

Correspondingly, Connell falls into a depressive episode and shares Rob's suicidal ideation, admitting on a counselling questionnaire that he has had "thoughts of killing [himself]" (202). Also like Rob, Connell embodies immobility: "Last night he spent an hour and a half lying on the floor of his room [...] somehow it was impossible to move either forwards or backwards, only downwards, onto the floor, until his body was arranged motionless on the carpet" (201). When he visits counselling, this immobility is tied to monetary concerns – he can only receive therapy because "it's free" (201). Although Connell's body is a receptacle of state-sanctioned neoliberal violence – through the imposition of austerity and the corresponding youth mental health crisis (Rice-Oxley 2019; Hornby 2017) – this violence is essentialised in Connell, painted as intrinsic to him. For example, as he sits in the waiting room, he notices that there is a glass screen between the receptionist and everyone else and realises that he is viewed as potentially violent: "Do they imagine that people like Connell pose a risk to the woman behind the glass? [...] Do they think that because Connell sometimes lies on his own floor for hours, he might one day purchase a semi-automatic machine gun online and commit mass murder in a shopping centre?" (202). Far from being a subject capable of inflicting violence, Connell sees his body as an object deserving of violence: "he fantasised about lying completely still until he died of dehydration" (203). The nexus of structural violence in which Connell is enmeshed begins

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[2] The Celtic Tiger refers to a period of rapid economic growth in the Republic of Ireland from the mid-1990s until 2007. It was largely rooted in increased multinational investment, a growing finance and banking sector and a property boom. The global crash of 2008 coincided with the bursting of the property bubble in Ireland and precipitated 5–6 years of austerity, unemployment, mass youth emigration and recession.

to converge on his body, with his suffering escalating from "chronic and low-level [anxiety]" to "major panic attacks: hyperventilation, chest pain, pins and needles all over his body" (206). This is not helped by the neoliberal culture of the novel, in which the external causes of mental health issues are not so important as the imperative to self-help. That is, the counsellor's conclusion – "we can't change your circumstances, but we can change how you respond to your circumstances" (217–218) – demonstrates the neoliberal "politics of personal responsibility" whereby everyone must be "autonomous, rational, risk-managing and responsible for their own destiny", and whereby victimhood is equated with "abrogating one's agency" (Phipps 2014, 24; 28; 34).

The second instance of this disadvantaged bodies theory occurs when Connell arrives at Marianne's flat after having been mugged: "his mouth cut and bloody, dark blood like dried ink" (143). The immediate violence of this scene – the mugging – is complicated by both class and gender dimensions. Drunk, Connell flirts with Marianne, only to be told that Jamie, her boyfriend, is in the other room. Connell's reply – "Maybe I'll just go back out and get punched in the face again, he says. It wasn't that bad" (145) – speaks to the violent antipathy he feels towards Jamie, who beats Marianne up:

> Connell had compulsive fantasies about kicking Jamie in the head until his skull was the texture of wet newspaper… Once, after speaking to Jamie briefly at a party, Connell had left the building and punched a brick wall so hard his hand started bleeding (163).

When Jamie calls Connell's mugger "fucking lowlife scum" and insinuates that he must have been a junkie, Connell internalises this insult despite knowing it is not aimed at him: "Who, me? Connell says. That's not very nice. We can't all go to private school, you know" (145). Emboldened by an act of overt violence against him, he feels empowered to address the class violence represented by Jamie who embodies the arrogant entitlement of his wealth.

This class aspect is exacerbated by the sexual capital Marianne introduces – Connell knows that Jamie is intimidated by him, and leverages this advantage by flirting with Marianne (127). The scene depicts something of the Oliver Mellors complex pertaining to Connell as a working-class male in an elite metropolitan university context. Marianne contrasts Jamie and Connell, noting the former's "ugliness", his receding hairline and "weak, jawless face", and concluding that "[b]eside [Jamie], even covered in blood, Connell radiates good health and charisma" (146). While Connell's blood emphasises his vitality, the linkage of this violence to money – firstly through his wallet being robbed when he is mugged and secondly through Jamie's classist interpretation of the mugging – means that it is almost by virtue of his *lack* of money that Connell is attributed with vitality and *manliness* by comparison to Jamie. Thus, Connell's sexual attractiveness is made contingent on his association with the "lowlife scum" who mugged him, implying a physicality which derives from his socio-economic status and recalling the fetishization of the working classes exemplified, for instance, in the contrast between Clive Chatterley and Oliver Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. In this scene, Connell's response to Jamie is described as "hostile" – with Marianne wondering "whether being punched in the face has put him in a hostile mood" (145) – a line of reasoning locating Connell's motives in an act of overt violence (being punched) rather than acknowledging the layers of violence underlying Jamie's commentary. As such, in this moment, the maelstrom of class-based, symbolic violence between Jamie and Connell threatens to spill out into the open. And yet, it does not.

This is because, much like Connell intercepts the moment of violence between Jamie and Marianne described at the start of this chapter, Marianne defuses the violence between the two men in this instance. Again echoing *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Marianne becomes a capital object to be fought over; that is, the two males mediate their economic-capital grievance through competition for Marianne's body as sexual capital. As Marianne tacitly sides with

Connell, telling the others to leave while she attends to him, he flirts with her and allows her to respond before telling her that he has a girlfriend. Upon hearing this news, Marianne is upset, and Connell dispels her emotion by drawing attention back to his injuries and, thus, his class: that is, as she asks him to leave her apartment, Connell reminds Marianne that he needs money, having been mugged. Marianne's self-deprecating reply – "Oh god, she says. In the excitement there I forgot you actually got assaulted" (151) – undermines her grief, and concedes that the violence aimed at her by both men – both Jamie's physical violence and Connell's using her as a piece of sexual capital when it suits him – are made secondary to the overt violence aimed at Connell.

Neoliberalism and Gender

Other commentators have noted the maelstrom of "fluctuating power dynamics in relationships, issues of class, privilege, passivity, submission, emotional and physical pain" at play in this scene (McAlpin 2019). The complicated interaction of these various strands is beautifully wrought in another, earlier scene on a "ghost estate" in Sligo. The "ghost estate" refers to one of the abandoned, half-built housing estates which littered the Irish countryside following the economic crash of 2008, wherein the previously booming construction sector collapsed. For years after the financial crisis, these half-finished housing estates served as physical reminders of how Ireland was literally a ruined land. As Connell and Marianne stand in the skeleton of one such house in the novel, questions of gender and class power are confused and overlaid. The abandoned house symbolises the dismantling of state protections like housing by the free market. Connell's exasperation that the abandoned houses are not given away "if they can't sell them", and the conclusion that it is "something to do with capitalism" (34), correlates with a later discussion of male privilege when Connell's terms are used to discuss

patriarchy. Like capitalism, patriarchy is presented not as a discourse, but as a system which simply exists; although Marianne acknowledges that men "control the whole social system", this simply "is what it is" (96). Thus, the capitalist system at play in the ghost-estate operates in a manner similar to male privilege.

Under both systems, Marianne is an embodied object and questions of systemic power are translated into questions of sexual power. Early in the novel, for instance, Marianne's garden is described as "more like 'grounds'" and as including "a large stone statue in the shape of a woman" (6), with the statue suggesting both the calcification of the female body in a domestic setting and a sense of gendered immobility. Similarly, the ghost estate illuminates how capitalism uses the female body as a site of deflection: in line with Ireland's cultural tethering of woman to the home in *Bunreacht na hÉireann*,[3] Marianne's body is symbolically bound to the abandoned house, whose dereliction insinuates the precarity of female status under capitalism. For Sinéad Molony, the Celtic Tiger idealised the house/home as both "the cornerstone of the neoliberal fantasy" and "a signifier of gendered morality", while austerity highlights the "disconnect between idealisations of home and embodied experiences" (2014, 188–189). Correspondingly, the capitalist excesses manifest in the abandoned house are refracted through the female body, with Marianne's evaluation, "[p]retty sordid", commenting on both the implications of sexual activity in the house but also the free-market economics which sees it abandoned and not "give[n] away" (34).

This diffuse, unnameable power associated with neoliberal capitalism – "It's something to do with capitalism" – is grounded in Marianne's body when she asks Connell, "If I wanted you to fuck me here… would you do it?" (35). The site on which this power is negotiated is at once Marianne's body (asking if Connell would "fuck" her) but also the dilapidated house as a symbol of capitalist violence ("*here*").

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[3] The Irish Constitution.

Moreover, the "here" of Marianne's question refers to a "mattress" in the house. "Stained badly with damp and what looked like blood", the mattress connotes loss of virginity, representing the female body as a site of pain specifically situated in the destabilised domestic sphere of the ghost estate (33). Indeed, when Connell muses that three of his houses would fit into the abandoned house, Marianne internalises his critique of capitalism, substituting her body. Cogitating that "she would have lain on the ground and let him walk all over her body if he wanted", she allows her body to absorb capitalism's wrongdoings and to function as a site on which Connell can exercise power (34).

Indeed, from her upbringing, Marianne is taught that her body is a site of violence. The detail that her mother deemed it "acceptable for men to use aggression towards Marianne as a way of expressing themselves" tallies with Marianne's willingness to be used by Connell as a site on which he can work out his desires and vent his ill-defined social frustrations (64). Connell's power over Marianne's body is part of a wider public claim on the female body and sexuality; although Marianne inhabits her body and cursorily "owns" it, bodily autonomy remains a myth for women. The ways in which the female body is tied to discourses of capitalism become clearer in Marianne's move to university, whereupon she slides easily into a socially legible status as a co-member of a monied class. Her value becomes located in the fact that these rich young men want to sleep with her. While, before, she was "an object of disgust", men now cat-call her in the street, openly and unashamedly staking a claim to her sexuality, leading, as one reviewer notes, her "intellectual and sexual capital [to] intersect with real money" (Collins 2019). Indeed, other off-the-cuff comments pertaining to money serve to muddle the distinction between monetary capital and social or sexual capital, in some ways physicalising the discourse of capitalism: at one stage, for instance, Connell ponders how "sexy" money is and marvels that "it was in [his] power to make [Marianne] happy. It was something he could just give to her, like money or sex" (105).

In a sense, Marianne herself comes to locate her value (or per-ceived lack thereof) in her body, internalising the structural gender violence aimed against her onto the sexed female body: she notes that the "things [that] happen to her" are "buried on the earth of her body" (241) and her forays into masochism are the logical ex-tension of this internalisation of violence. Indeed, Gilles Deleuze describes masochism as an effort to create "a counterpart of the world capable of containing its violences and excesses" (1989, 37); speaking to Marianne's method, by using her body as a receptor for violence, Marianne makes her body the site of violence and, thus, saves her self. This strategy, however, symbolises a capitulation to neoliberal ideology: under neoliberal norms, women must "*present all their actions as freely chosen*" and derive "agency" from absorb-ing the violence waged against the "self" (Gill and Scharff 2011, 7). Because neoliberalism disregards structural disadvantages, female subjectivity under neoliberalism necessitates the disavowal of female sexedness as a *vulnerability* in a society rife with (unacknowledged) gendered violence. Accordingly, for Marianne, masochism is a means of presenting herself as successful *despite* the violence aimed at her, because, through masochism, she now *chooses* violence; hence, for Marianne, masochism is a method of "presenting her actions as freely chosen" (Gill and Scharff 2011, 7).

This individuation of structural violence is clear in her seamless movement from the particular to the general as she describes her specific relationship with Jamie – "when she thinks about how little she respects him…[she feels] an overwhelming desire to be subju-gated" (138) – in the same terms as her general observation that "there's always been something inside her that men have wanted to dominate… all with the aim of subjugating some force in her personality" (192). Marianne wonders whether "every stage of her life [would] continue [with] the same remorseless contest for dominance" (192) while seeking to physically ground this structural violence through masochism. *Asking* for violence becomes a means

of internalising and neutralising its structural elements; masochism physically grounds structural violence in the body.

However, while masochism creates an illusion of self-sustain-ability, it also reinforces Marianne's body as a site of violence. In keeping with the idea that the body has become "increasingly individualised" in contemporary neoliberal society, "separat[ing] us from others" (Shilling 1993, 14), Marianne's waiving control of her body – "she experiences no more ownership over her body than if it were a piece of litter" (190–191) – is directly connected to self-preservation through the creation of bodily boundaries: "the outside world touches her against her outside skin, but not the other part of herself, inside" (188–189). While this separation is part of Marianne's coping mechanism, it also means that "the many con-flicts which used to occur *between* bodies now take place *within* the embodied individual as a rising demand of affect control" (Shilling 1993, 14). In line with this analysis, Marianne's body remains a locus of widespread violence aimed against the female:

> Sometimes in the middle of the day she remembers something Jamie has said or done to her, and all the energy leaves her completely, so her body feels like a carcass, something immensely heavy and awful that she has to carry around (113).

Here, we see Marianne's internalisation of violence through maso-chism, which allows her to ritualise the societal aggression aimed at women and thus preserve something of a "self" as distinct from her sexed, and therefore degraded, female body. Connell is cognisant that Marianne uses her body as a border of subjectivity, recalling when he saw Marianne in a bathrobe and inferred her momentary vulnerability:

> Marianne came downstairs in a bathrobe. It was just a plain white bathrobe, tied in the normal way, her hair was wet, and her skin had that glistening look like she had just been applying face cream. When she saw Connell, she hesitated on the stairs and said: I didn't know you were here, sorry, maybe she seemed flustered […] He knew she was probably getting dressed in her room, and whatever clothes she was

> wearing when she came back down would be clothes she had chosen
> to put on after she saw him in the hall (7).

The movement from being caught off guard to then consciously constructing herself for Connell means that, later in the novel, Connell's "undo[ing] the sash of her bathrobe" comprises a deconstruction of Marianne's built-up protections (93). While she may foster an appearance of being "independent and remote", Marianne is "not like that, not at all" with him (106). Her attempt to retain subjectivity through bodily debasement is foiled because Marianne's masochism is based on willingness to surrender control to Connell, as evinced when Connell reveals that he has a girlfriend and Marianne's body, the epicentre of her carefully fostered self-control, betrays her. In this scene, Marianne's shock "feels physical", and she seeks to ground her pain in the body: "the cup in Marianne's hand is too hot to hold, but instead of placing it down again she just lets the pain seep into her fingers, down into her flesh" (149–150). Nonetheless, Marianne's body reveals her emotional turmoil – "her back is turned but she feels her shoulders jerk upwards in a horrible involuntary spasm" – demonstrating her inability to separate her "self" and body when it comes to Connell. The fact that, when Connell tries to touch her, she jerks away "like he's trying to hurt her" (150) demonstrates the connection between the emotional and the physical for Marianne and the sense in which her "craving for certain acts" is inextricable from "a particular kind of emotional landscape" (Laing 2018).

While the basis of Marianne's masochism is, thus, derived from neoliberal dogma, as the novel progresses, Marianne's developing relationship with masochism subverts hierarchies of power and turns the body from a separatist unit into a vehicle of connection. For instance, in the scene in which Connell and Marianne confront their feelings for one another, the connectivity and vulnerability of masochism are linked to the assertion of desire. Wanting to "whimper", Marianne is like a "trained animal", "let[ting Connell] kiss her open mouth" and enduring a "sensation... so extreme she

feels faint" (235). For Marianne, masochism transitions from being "a simply passive or reactive form of desire" to:

> a complex, emergent and "in-between" phenomenon that throws into chaos such oppositional definitions as subject/other, normal/abnormal, and pleasure/pain and calls forth alternative modes of thinking about the embodied self and the relation of this self to others (McPhee 2014, 8).

While, previously, desire was an ambivalent concept for Marianne – she "desires" to be abused by her paramour Lukas, "but she's conscious of being able to desire in some sense what she does not want" (190) – masochism allows her to realise the "punishing force of her desire". In fostering connectivity, Marianne at once surrenders her individual protections and asserts desire, which moves from being a confused, undefined notion to something Marianne can state with clarity: "I wanted you to kiss me", "I want this so much" (235–236).

Thus, Marianne's masochism initially comprises an internalisation of structural violence. Allowing her to "ask" for violence and use her body to contain it, masochism adheres to neoliberal narratives of personal agency and individualistic subjectivity. Marianne's relationship with masochism renders stark the violence and isolation of neoliberalism, but Rooney's conclusion is ultimately optimistic, with masochism becoming a means of foregrounding and subverting structural violence. Marianne gradually realises masochism as a rejection of regulated subjectivity and individualism; a "transgressive phenomenon... that questions, deconstructs and subverts normative cultural frameworks" (McPhee 2014, 2), masochism "destroys the self-contained character [individualism] of the participators" (Bataille 1962, 17). In a society "where the closed body is elevated to an ideal" (Carlstrom 2018, 218), and where "the ambivalent openness and exposure" of "intersubjectivity" is distrusted (Taylor 2018, 153), Marianne expresses complete personal surrender: "I would have done anything you wanted me to" (134). Her eventual rejection of individualism, and her embrace of porousness and interdependence, reveals the discourse of neoliberal individualism and refuses

to allow it to remain an unacknowledged assumption. Simply put, Marianne highlights Connell's structural gendered power by asking him to take it to its extreme. Finding Marianne telling him "You can do anything you want with me" pleasurable (237), Connell knows that "he has never been able to reconcile himself to the idea of losing his hold over her" (248), yet he won't say that Marianne belongs to him or hit her when she asks.

As such, Marianne's formalisation, through masochism, of her suffering "makes a claim" on Connell (Petherbridge 2018, 66–68). As the novel progresses, Connell's discomfort with his power begets the gradual realisation of Marianne's structural disadvantage. Eventually, Connell also rejects individualism, expressing his feelings for Marianne in terms of "suffering with her when she suffers" (162). Ultimately, realising that Marianne's lack of some "primal instinct, self-defence or self-preservation" has forged their mutual dependency, Connell reciprocates Marianne's self-surrender: "he would lie down and die for her at any minute" (247–248). Hence, by foregrounding her own vulnerability, Marianne highlights Connell's: her observation that "cruelty does not only hurt the victim, but the perpetrator also" (226) links to Connell's realisation that "the only part of himself he wants to protect" is the "part that exists inside her" (148). An "interactive ritual", masochism thus facilitates the overturning of the closed bodily borders of individualism, the rejection of "self-sufficiency", and the embrace of shared identity and the "multitude" of "one flesh" (Hardt and Negri 2004, 208).

Parsing the themes of dominance and submission throughout the novel, Helen Charman argues that Rooney "can never quite shake the suggestion that Marianne is somehow abnormal, or damaged" (2018). However, this assessment perhaps misses the point: *Normal People* moves away from ideas of inherent individual flaws, acknowledging them as decoys. In one devastating moment, Marianne admits that she did not reveal her brother's abuse because she "didn't want [Connell] to think [she] was damaged" (183), serving as

a perfect example of how systemic abuse such as domestic violence is internalised as personal failure under neoliberalism. When she and Connell reconcile in Sligo, Marianne's asking him to hit her during sex and his subsequent refusal speaks to Connell's awareness that Marianne's recourse to violence is a defence mechanism, that she seeks to formalise her vulnerability into violence as a preventative measure. This is in line with Marianne's prior admissions that "[m]aybe I want to be treated badly, she says. I don't know. Sometimes I think I deserve bad things because I'm a bad person" (133), and that "[s]ometimes I think I must deserve [her brother's violence]. Otherwise I don't know why it would happen" (182).

Towards the end of the novel, Marianne's brother's insistence that she stop seeing Connell, his throwing a glass bottle at her, and his breaking her nose, sees the violence she requested being fully realised. As such, Connell's insistence that "no one is going to hurt you like that again" (252) brings the violence with which she has been assailed from the beginning of the novel into the open and promises an end. Marianne's bleeding nose recalls Connell's after being mugged and brings the conversation on class and sexuality full circle, demonstrating that power has been established between him and Marianne as a reciprocal, open exchange. Marianne comes to foreground structural violence and dismantle it through masochism and openness so that her being "abnormal" or "damaged" is no longer relevant (Charman 2018): "she was in [Connell's] power" but "she knows he loves her" (262). In this sense, the realisation of "how strange to feel [oneself] so completely under the control of another person, but also *how ordinary*" (262),[4] highlights a relinquishing of the need to be in control and a willingness to trust, thus defying the insidious logic of individualism, if not neoliberalism in general.

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4 Emphasis mine.

Conclusion

Normal People revolves around relationality, viewing its main characters as "plants sharing the same pot of soil" (265). Marianne and Connell's relationship moves from its participants' separate, confused negotiation of life to becoming a deliberate, considered dismantling of neoliberal individualism. The gentle compromise between Marianne's need for vulnerability and Connell's reticence to physically hurt her epitomises mutual openness as opposed to this individualism:

> In bed he would say lovingly: you're going to do exactly what I say now, aren't you? He knew how to give her what she wanted, to leave her open, weak, powerless, sometimes crying. He understood it wasn't necessary to hurt her: he could let her submit willingly, without violence (258).

This scene is in complete juxtaposition to Marianne's earlier masochistic proclivity, where neoliberal and gendered structural violence was merely played out on her body. It is by this means that Marianne comes to express her personality in a more asserted manner: echoing and inverting the structural violence by which men wished to "subjugat[e] some force in her personality" (192), Marianne's openness with Connell "seem[s] to happen on the deepest possible level of her personality" (258). If Rooney notes the difficulties of overcoming the transactionality of the capitalist framework in personal relationships, then the novel's dismantling of power culminates in its somewhat vague conclusion – revisiting Marianne's earlier powerlessness when she knows "I can't make you do anything" (35), Connell bids her "say you want me to stay and I will" (265). However, Rooney ignores such balances of power: if "intercorporeality creates constitutive openness", potentially sparking "(social) change" (Petherbridge 2018, 71), Rooney's "most dazzling argument, her riskiest proposition, is for a sort of transcendence through interdependence" (Collins 2019), with the conclusion drawn that "people can really change one another" (266) and, thus, the system.

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"Like a Cut That Won't Stop Leaking": Environmental Racism's Impact on Human and Non-Human Bodies in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*

Eric Doise

"Bodies tell stories" (83). Esch, the narrator of Jesmyn Ward's National Book Award-winning novel *Salvage the Bones* (2011), opens the fifth chapter with this sentence, a focus on bodies that permeates the Hurricane Katrina narrative. Esch describes in detail, among other physical traits, the skin of Manny, the boy she has a crush on; the scars and other signs of physical injuries on her family members and friends; and her changing body as her secret pregnancy progresses. Critics like Olivia Laing (2011) have noted that "Ward is astonishingly attentive to the body," adding that "often this physicality lurches into violence" by and on the novel's characters. However, more critical attention to Ward's inclusion of similar signs on non-human bodies is due. In this article, I investigate these scars and wounds of the natural world and their relationships to the scars and wounds of the novel's characters, a mirroring that springs in part from the racist association of African Americans with dirt and dirtiness that has long been present in American culture. More specifically, I argue that these signs of environmental violence tell the story of racism's impact on the Pit – Esch's family's property – and its inhabitants through the ongoing consequences of race-based geographic and economic segregation. However, I close by noting that the novel locates hope for a new world in the aftermath of Katrina without romanticizing the apocalyptic destruction that event wrought.

Tendencies of Katrina Narratives

Salvage the Bones embodies many tendencies of Katrina narra-
tives, texts of any genre that tell fiction or nonfiction stories with
Katrina or its aftermath as a significant plot point. The novel
centers on Esch's family the Batistes – including her father Daddy
and her brothers Randall, Skeetah, and Junior – as well as their
friends. Daddy's wife, the children's mother, has already died due
to complications from Junior's birth before the novel's beginning. A
working-class, African-American family, they live in Bois Sauvage, a
fictional Mississippi town near the Gulf of Mexico on land that has
been in the family at least since Esch's grandparents. Daddy has no
steady employment, instead picking up odd jobs like cleaning up
after hurricanes and scavenging. Their property reflects the latter
as it hosts multiple vehicles in disrepair and other items considered
junk by most standards. The novel's focus on a rural-dwelling Mis-
sissippi family is not common in texts about Katrina, which, like
most media coverage of the event, are more likely to highlight New
Orleans narratives. This favoring of urban stories mirrors the fact
that most scholarly work on environmental racism focuses on the
city, as evidenced by the central concerns of Carl Zimring's *Clean
and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States*
and the similarly-focused articles I reference throughout this essay.

The novel's focus on Black characters, on the other hand, is
much more common among Katrina narratives because the event
disproportionately affected Black people. Isaac Shapiro and Arloc
Sherman (2005) point out that according to census data, about 33 %
of the people who lived in one of the areas hit hardest by Katrina
were Black, compared to the 12.5 % of the US population that was
Black at that time. The centrality of race, segregation, economic
violence, and environmental disaster is both specific to Katrina and
Esch's family and representative of larger patterns in the US and
worldwide. Likewise, the Batistes' tendency to work and play with

dirt points to the racist argument that posits Black people as inherently in need of cleansing. Black people being especially vulnerable to environmental disasters because of segregation and economic violence is not specific to Katrina, as we will see with the case of another hurricane, but is a long-standing condition in the US brought about by white supremacy that the hurricane laid bare. Thus, like some other Katrina narratives such as Spike Lee's documentaries on the event, the novel calls attention to the systemic racial violence that Katrina made harder to ignore (Doise 2020, 433).

Violence against Black Bodies and/as the Non-Human

Some scholars have written about the violence against nature in the novel. For example, Christopher Lloyd (2016) looks "closely on the overlaps, relations, and connections between humans and animals to see what kind of creaturely, throwaway, and precarious life is represented in the contemporary South and how literary presentations of animality might skewer, or at least question, such biopolitical regulations" (250–251). Similarly, in his article "What Comes to the Surface," Christopher Clark (2015) emphasizes, among other issues, the landscape "in order to chart the ways in which Ward represents the South through a typically regional mode of address, whilst challenging pre-conceived notions of who is affected by the storm, and how" (341). Neither Lloyd nor Clark ignore the impact of race in the novel and Katrina, but for both arguments, systemic racism plays more of a supporting role. Annie Bares (2019), on the other hand, argues in "'Each Unbearable Day'" that "the novel's characterization of Bois Sauvage as a neglected, racially marked landscape makes visible the mutually reinforcing character of debility inflicted on human bodyminds and on more-than-human nature" (25). While Bares does connect the exploitation of the land to the exploitation of Black bodies, among other concerns, I wish to trace more explicitly the association of dirt with those bodies as

a powerful force in the heightened precarity in which Esch and her family find themselves.

The inattentiveness to the violence against non-human bodies in some literary criticism of the novel marks a peculiar absence given that Ward frequently compares the characters' appearance to the natural world and vice versa. Esch's hair looks "like a Doberman come [sic] out white" (Ward 2011, 7). A newborn puppy is born "chanting and singing like the New Orleans Indians" (12), the African-American social groups that frequently parade in the city in the guise of Native Americans. Moreover, these figurative comparisons often carry with them associations of trauma. Esch's youngest brother, Junior, for example, was born "purple and blue as hydrangea" (2), the color of asphyxiation a nod to his violent birth that ends with his mother's death. Near the beginning of the narrative, which is told in twelve chapters organized sequentially by days, Esch's father begins preparing the family's house for hurricane season, foreseeing an especially active year for the storms: "'Makes my bones hurt,' Daddy said. 'I can feel them coming'" (7). While thinking of hunting for eggs with her late mother, Esch remembers "that when she bent to pry an egg from a hidden nest, I could hardly see her, and she moved and it looked like the woods moved, like a wind was running past the trees. So I followed behind her by touch, not by sight" (22). These comparisons call to mind racist associations of African Americans with animals, savagery, and other dehumanizing categories (Clark 2015, 349).

These figurative connections to nature stem in part from a history of segregation and economic violence. Esch explains, for example, that each storm reaches "the twenty-six-mile manmade Mississippi beach, where they knock against the old summer mansions with their slave galleys turned guesthouses before running over the bayou, through the pines, to lose wind, drip rain, and die in the north" (Ward 2011, 4). The hurricanes, first greeted by structures built to hold slaves, escape northward, as if fleeing to freedom. The

storms' pathways, then, parallel those of runaway slaves. In so doing, Ward appears to reinforce the association of Black bodies with the non-human;[1] however, as Clark (2015) points out, her characters are "more complex than a simple set of stereotypical perceptions […] overturning and investigating these figurations of animality and savagery" (349). So although we can read the hurricane as a metaphor for the runaway slave's route to freedom and, therefore, as revenge for the racial violence that made slavery possible and persists, it is also an extension of that racial violence, for Katrina is no respecter of persons. Katrina wipes out whole swaths of the White-owned property likely built on the backs of slave labor or related resources, but it also destroys much of the Black-owned property and nearly many of the African-American characters, in part because of the violence already enacted against their property, which I will document below. The hurricane, then, exacerbates the violence against nature even as it is nature's violence. It avenges the Black characters and their ancestors even as it also attacks them.

Ward's foregrounding of slavery and the related savagery associated with African-Americans is crucial to my analysis not only because of the economic and physical violence it references but also because of the racist association of Black Americans and dirtiness that slave labor established, a connection that has maintained in US culture because of its adaptability. The fact that most slave labor was agricultural in nature helped originate this affiliation, but its persistence can be chalked up to the multiple ways in which it resurfaced after slavery was deemed illegal. Zimring (2017), in his history of environmental racism in the US, notes that

> since the end of the Civil War, American sanitation systems; zoning boards; real estate practices; federal, state, and municipal governments; and makers and marketers of cleaning products have all worked with

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[1] Many thanks to Marta-Laura Cenedese for pointing this out and for her insightful editing throughout.

an understanding of hygiene that assumes that "white people" are clean, and "non-white people" are less than clean. This assumption is fundamental to racist claims of white supremacy, a rhetoric that involves concepts of "race pollution," "white purity," and the "dangers" of non-white sexuality as "miscegenation." (217)

The connection to dirt reinforces the rhetoric behind the idea of racial pollution. Esch's family illustrates how this pattern continues into the present day. Explaining how her family's land came to be called "the Pit," she notes that when her grandparents were still alive, they sold loose dirt from their property to White people, who used it to build their homes. As Zimring (2017) finds, this enterprise is part of a larger pattern of White people post-Civil War avoiding dirty work such as garbage collection and scavenging in favor of cleaner industries as a means of strengthening their whiteness. The resulting job stratification along racial lines stigmatized such work but also opened up opportunities for People of Color: "If the rhetoric of 'clean and white' marginalized non-white people into dirty work, it also unwittingly provided economic opportunities. In some cases, the white revulsion to handling waste allowed marginalized people to become entrepreneurs" (135). Zimring's work focuses primarily on cities, where occupations like garbage men were more prominent. In the novel's rural setting, though, Esch's grandparents are relegated to quite literally working with dirt, likely due to being excluded from other occupations, but in doing so, they profit from White people's aversion to such work. Just as, as Peter Newell (2005) notes, "impoverished communities generally lack the financial and technical resources necessary to resist environmentally hazardous facilities" (76), Esch's grandparents likely lacked the economic opportunities and thus economic resources to justify turning down the income from selling their land.

For African Americans living in urban areas, this fear of racial pollution leads to an increase of exposure to environmental pollution. This aspect of environmental racism is well-documented and

has been for decades. One report, for example, finds that White Americans are more likely to live within no toxin-emitting facilities than Black Americans, while the latter are more likely to live within two miles of three such facilities (Perlin, Sexton, and Wong 1999, 29). Ihab Mikati, et al (2018) write that on average, African Americans endure a $PM_{2.5}$[2] burden 1.54 times greater than the overall population, a disparity that holds when controlling for poverty and in areas with a predominantly White population. Similarly, Christopher W. Tessum, et al (2019) note that this burden exists even when adjusting for consumption practices such as purchases and energy use, behaviors that are the most likely to lead to $PM_{2.5}$ production in the United States. They find that Black Americans face 56 % greater exposure to such particulate matter than their actions cause while White Americans experience 17 % less exposure than their actions cause (6001). Additionally, Newell (2005) explains that poor communities – and I would add often communities that are predominantly made up of People of Color – face these circumstances because they are so under-resourced financially, legally, and politically that they cannot resist the facilities emitting these particulates (76).

As a rural family, the Batistes do not face this particular environmental risk but do suffer from the racist logic that undergirds it. Consequently, the aforementioned damage to the land places the family at a greater risk of flooding. We know that Esch's grandfather stops selling his land because he "thought the earth would give under the water, that the pond would spread and gobble up the property" (Ward 2011, 14), a risk mirrored by the grandfather's death from mouth cancer, his oral cavity consumed from within. The land excavation results in a higher threat of destruction at the hands of that

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2   The United States EPA website defines $PM_{2.5}$ as "fine inhalable particles, with diameters that are generally 2.5 micrometers and smaller," which is 30 times smaller than a human hair. This category of particulate matter is especially harmful to humans because its size allows it to more easily evade the body's defense mechanisms.

very piece of land, a risk that materializes with Katrina's landing. Notably, as Bares (2019) argues, "Esch's description of the Pit's debility does not characterize it as improperly functioning; instead, it focuses on the racialized economic conditions that have historically produced debility" (26). Put another way, the Pit is not improperly functioning. Rather, the economic and political system that created an environment conducive to its debility has functioned properly. As Bares (2019) notes, contrary to racist cultural narratives, Bois Sauvage's Black people do not depend on White people for financial support. Rather, White wealth in *Salvage the Bones* has been built by Black labor and, literally in this case, on Black land. The novel, thus, "reorients focus to the ruthless logics of racial and environmental dominion that produce debilitated and debilitating environments" (Bares 2019, 27).

The economic violence against the family requires that the family scar the land, which in turn heightens nature's risk to the family. That threat is realized when the pit overflows with the arrival of the Katrina storm surge, completely submerging Esch's home as her and her family escape it. The catastrophic flooding the Batistes must survive indicates a larger trend involving People of Color and flood risk in the United States. Geographers Jeff Ueland and Barney Warf (2006), in their study of 146 southern cities, find a strong correlation between race and the altitude of residences. They note that White residents are much more likely to live at higher heights, the only consistent exception being coastal properties. This discrepancy is likely due to "the perceived amenity of beachfront property that has the highest risk of surge, but in many locales commands the highest prices" (Logan and Xu 2015, 148). While Ward provides us little information on the altitude of the Pit compared to surrounding areas, we do know that after the storm, many St. Catherine residents stayed with family in Bois Sauvage "for fear of what the hurricane would do to the towns on the beach" (Ward 2011, 248). The implication here is that the property Esch's family owns is not beach-front and thus

worth less money. Although St. Catherine suffers its own share of destruction, as we will see, it seems to fare better in terms of flooding, Esch observing that the bordering bay "came in and swallowed Bois, swallowed the back of St. Catherine" (252). Thus, despite being farther away from the coast, the Pit fares worse than St. Catherine's as a whole because of the marks it bears from economic racism.

Moreover, the impact of the floodwaters compounds this financial racial discrimination. As Jejal Reddy Bathi and Himangshu S. Das (2016) argue, those with the fewest resources are not only more likely to occupy the most environmentally vulnerable areas, they also are more likely to live in "the oldest, most poorly maintained buildings, which results in the greatest physical impacts such as casualties and property loss during a disaster. The poor are less likely to have the income or assets needed to prepare for a possible disaster [...]" (4). This trend holds with the Batistes, who have to salvage discarded materials on their property and take apart the dog coop in order to board up their home. Unlike their materials, at a nearby White family's property, "the boards of the house are more even, more secure. They are not a patch-up of boards of different sizes like our house; there is no glass left peeking through cracks, only plywood closed smooth and tight as eyelids" (Ward 2011, 208). The simile reminds us that although these differences are on the bodies of buildings and not people, they have ramifications for the latter. Although it is true that natural disasters and other catastrophes do not see race, their effects do tend to play out along the lines of racial inequities.

Matter Out of Place

The correlation between African Americans and dirt plays out in other ways in the text. For example, anthropologist Mary Douglas writes that dirt is "matter that is out of place" (qtd. in Zimring 2017, 1), and we see that Esch, her family, and Black friends are decidedly in "their place" because the vast majority of the novel features a con-

spicuous absence of White people. This lack is punctuated by the few cases in which White people surface only to quickly disappear. Their peripheral existence reflects a history of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation. As Zimring writes, the latter was realized through practices like red-lining, which was introduced with the National Housing Act of 1934 and gets its name from the red lines that were drawn on maps around less desirable neighborhoods, marking housing in those areas as too risky for mortgages. These neighborhoods were overwhelmingly populated by People of Color. Consequently, "residential settlement patterns in the United States were more segregated in 1965 than they had been in 1920" (205), the market achieving what the law had previously effected through legal segregation and the forcible resettlement of Indigenous People. The fact that the town bears the name Savage Woods, utilizing a common slur used against Native Americans, communicates the discrimination that led to its creation. The moniker also signifies that "the natural is capable of taking away as well as providing resources. Coupled with the sociological conditions deeply entrenched in the southern Mississippi landscape, Bois Sauvage becomes a marker for both the natural and cultural hardships that the residents face" (Clark 2015, 344).

The long-reaching violence of these practices surfaces in the novel in matters like economics and school zoning. For example, two of the few White people who appear in the book live in the aforementioned home a mile through the woods. Their presence is so striking that Esch makes a note of it: "White people live there" (Ward 2011, 64). The couple owns a field full of cows, fencing, and a big barn in addition to their home. Egrets populate the area, and what technology is present does not infringe on the peacefulness of the scene: "a pickup truck slid soundlessly out of a shadow in a gap in the woods […]" (64). We do see violence against nature in this space: "the pines had been cut brutally away so that stumps dotted the field beyond the fence like chairs that no one would ever sit on" (64). However, this particular elimination of the natural world is

more orderly, carried out not as a means of financial survival but in the name of convenience. This White household chooses to damage nature for convenience's sake, a contrast to the Batistes selling their land out of necessity. Moreover, as Clark (2015) writes, "the black family is literally lost in the woods, trapped in the lowlands that are susceptible, and will succumb to, flood damage, whilst the white family evokes the American fantasy of the 'city upon a hill'" (346). This scene calls to mind the serenity and comfort typical of an idyll, unlike the Pit's ravenous mouth, but also the colonial and racist violence upon which that peace is founded.

Despite its proximity, the location of the White people's property points to the segregation found throughout the town. Esch describes their place as "that house on the edge of the black heart of Bois Sauvage" (Ward 2011, 65), on the other side of an internal boundary marked by color. This racial separation is geographic and economic. To recall, the Pit formed through the loss of dirt from Esch's grandparents selling earth. Her grandfather came to see the consequent excavated site as a threat to his family and the rest of his property. Esch and her family, then, face the possibility of displacement in the sense of the word that Rob Nixon proposes in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Nixon (2011) writes that "instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, ["displacement"] refers rather to the loss of the land and resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable" (19). Although Esch's family does not rely on the resources beneath the land like a farming family might, their past economic reliance on it as financial resource not only strips their property of its value but puts at risk the very existence of the rest of the dry land. Bares (2019) notes that this dynamic and others in the novel "characteriz[e] Hurricane Katrina as one in a string of ongoing disasters wrought by global, contemporary forces, such as anthropogenic climate change, while also connecting the effects of such violence to histories of

racial subjugation" (22–23). Should the Pit, in fact, gobble up the rest of the land, it would be transformed into something akin to a lakebed, the desperate act of giving away the land rendering the rest of the land also inaccessible. The damage from Katrina is not that of a singular event but a compounding of wounds already inflicted on the land by a history of white supremacy.

Esch's rides to school reveal that this economic precarity is not exclusive to Bois Sauvage's African-American residents. Recalling the year when the school bus picked her and her siblings up first, Esch remembers that "we rode up and out of the black Bois that we knew and into the white Bois that we didn't" (Ward 2011, 70). Her recall of this newly discovered space indicates that white supremacy's economic violence extends not just to Bois Sauvage's Black residents but also to its White residents who were not quite white enough. They occupy "the trailers, the long low brick homes, small wood shacks that looked slapped together, that couldn't be bigger than two rooms" (70). The residents of these homes likely qualify as "White trash," a term that surfaced in 1830s United States and became especially prominent after the Civil War. It "implied a racial aspect to cleanliness. While whites were ostensibly superior, poor whites joined blacks and Indians in being described as dirty and immoral" (Zimring 2017, 40), their status as "trash" weakening their whiteness and its accompanying privileges. Unlike the couple, whose violence against the land is tidy, these homes are roughhewn, displays not so much of superiority over the earth as of a struggle for survival. Their haphazard appearance marks their inhabitants as not fully White, their economic suffering a blemish. They are not quite Black: if they were able to elevate their economic status, they would likely shed most or all of the stigma associated with being poor and become fully White. Additionally, Esch has to ride "*up* and out of the black Bois," meaning that even these not-fully-White residents occupy safer land than her family and friends. However, because these White residents have yet to be granted full member-

ship to whiteness, they carry the same stigma surrounding dirt and dirtiness, albeit with less severe consequences.

After the Storm

The impact the association between Black people and dirt has on the Pit is especially apparent in Bois Sauvage post-Hurricane Katrina. After the family escapes rising waters in the attic of the house and then cuts a hole in the roof to avoid drowning, a series of events told repeatedly in journalism about survivors of the storm, Esch observes that water "swirl[s] and gather[s] and spread[s] on all sides, brown with an undercurrent of red to it, the clay of the Pit like a cut that won't stop leaking. [...]. It is trees and branches [break], [pop] like Black Cat firecrackers in an endless crackle of explosions, over and over and again and again" (Ward 2011, 230). The first half of the sentence calls back to her description of the Pit before the storm as "the color of a scab" (15) and is part of Ward's tendency to present the land "in terms of the body, particularly injured bodies and waste" (Clark 2015, 344). The Pit functions as a sign of the physical trauma inflicted on the land and the metaphorical embodiment of the absence many trauma scholars discuss in regards to psychic wounds. This void nearly consumes Esch with the help of the floodwaters Katrina ushers in. She falls into the water and "kick[s] my legs and palm[s] water, but I can barely keep my head above it. It is a fanged pink open mouth, and it is swallowing me" (Ward 2011, 234). The environmental violence threatens to subsume its human inhabitants, another manifestation of racial hostility, and also calls back to her grandfather's cancer.

The novel reinforces this aggression as a result of environmental racism. After Esch walks through Bois Sauvage post-Katrina, she notes that "the houses stand, and are ripped and torn in some places, [...] some of them leaning tipsily, like ours, half drowned. Here, there is too much sky" (Ward 2011, 249). The last sentence repeats a

description of St. Catherine's decimated trees and homes. Both echo Esch's description of the White couple's land pre-Katrina, where so many trees were removed that she was "startled at the way the sky opened up at the field, the way the land looked wrong. There was too much blue" (64). In connecting Katrina's destruction with that by the couple, Esch reveals that the violence in both cases comes from the same force: white supremacy, but because Katrina similarly impacted the White community, we can read the storm as simultaneously opposing white supremacy. The aforementioned path through former slave-holding structures is relevant here. However, we can also read the storm's unwillingness or inability to choose its victims as the far-reaching consequences of that violent, racist ideology. Systemic violence, after all, may be more intensely directed at some groups, but it can never be fully controlled. This fact is no more evident than with environmental destruction and climate change, which may more quickly and intensely impact People of Color and the poor but cannot be cordoned off. We see this ambivalence in Esch's pet and fighting dog China being swept away by the flood-waters while Esch survives. Clark (2015) writes that "this recalls the movement of whites away from areas affected by the storm, but also offers the removal of an oppressive white culture, symbolized in the violence of a fighting pitbull" (356). If we remember the racist association of Black people with "savage" animals like pit bulls, the many possible takeaways from this moment contradict one another because of the wide expanse white supremacy affects.

Ending with a diegetic world ravaged by Katrina and the ensuing floodwaters, *Salvage the Bones* seems to leave little room for hope. The novel ends with the Batistes' and others' homes destroyed. Her father survives but only after losing fingers. The environmental impact is evident in Esch's description of her post-Katrina surroundings: "We knew where the road was by the feel of the stones wearing through the blacktop under our feet; the trees I had known, the oaks in the bend, the stand of pines on the long stretch, the magnolia

at the four-way, were all broken, all crumbled" (Ward 2011, 241). In this post-apocalyptic world, the usual paths are hidden; nature has been transformed. Esch thinks, "suddenly there is a great split between now and then, and I wonder where the world where that day happened has gone, because we are not in it" (251). As Bares (2019) notes,

> the novel's ending, although climactic, does not provide a clear resolution to the primary problems that it poses, nor does it leave its readers with a clear idea of what has or will happen to Esch and her family in the wake of the storm. Rather than aiming to reform or restore Esch to the false ideal of independent humanity or Bois Sauvage to an impossible state of environmental purity, the novel's narrative ruthlessness refuses to pity its characters or comfort its readers with a neat or redemptive resolution. (32)

However, the post-Katrina world in *Salvage the Bones* is a new world where new potentialities exist. Esch repeats to the reader a story told to her by her English teacher Ms. Dedeaux that 1969's Hurricane Camille, the US Gulf Coast's most infamous hurricane before Katrina, did what the US Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* could not: desegregate the area schools. She explains that "people were too tired finding their relatives' uprooted bodies, reburying them, sleeping on platforms that used to be the foundations of their houses, under tents, biking or walking miles for freshwater, for food, to still fight the law outlawing segregation" (Ward 2011, 140). Like Katrina, Camille brought the death and destruction of a post-apocalyptic world, but in that world, one aspect of racial oppression was diminished. While Esch's received history indicates that the destruction and trauma caused by Camille is wholly responsible for this shift, it seems likely that the unhygienic conditions also contributed. After all, handling dead bodies, being rendered homeless, traveling by foot, and losing access to clean water would all result in a considerably dirtier environment and thus dirtier people. Considering that White residents were more

likely to have access to burial services, stable housing with reliable indoor plumbing, and automobiles, the gap between their level of cleanliness and their Black neighbors would have been reduced or completely eliminated in a post-Camille world.

Similarly, a post-Katrina world offers new opportunities in the midst of tragedy. Upon learning of her pregnancy, family friend Big Henry reassures Esch, "This baby got a daddy, Esch. [...]. This baby got plenty daddies" (Ward 2011, 254). Similarly, Esch thinks that she will tell the story of Katrina thusly: "She was the murderous mother who cut us to the bone but left us alive, left us naked and bewildered as wrinkled newborn babies, as blind puppies, as sun-starved newly hatched baby snakes. [...]. She left us to learn to crawl" (255). In so doing, "*Salvage the Bones* generates alternative configurations of kinship among humans and between humans and more-than-human environments" (Bares 2019, 35). Despite the inconvenience of Esch's pregnancy and despite the total destruction Katrina wrought, both carry the hope of new life, of new opportunities, of a new world, the building of which begins before the novel ends. Big Henry and his family take in Esch and her family, growing both families in a time of great loss. Residents of and around the Pit care for each other and even residents of St. Catherine. Esch fosters a new life, and she closes the book thinking that China "will look down on the circle of light we have made in the Pit, and she will know that I have kept watch, that I have fought. China will bark and call me sister. [...]. She will know that I am a mother" (Ward 2011, 258). Just as China was, she will be mother to a new life for a new world. However, the comparison extends to Katrina as well, a fierce circular storm revolving around an eye above. This analogy illustrates Bares' (2019) observation that "the novel's ending presents narrative ruthlessness and the uncertainty it poses as starting points for creating new forms of engagement and entanglement between planetary inhabitants" (36). In an interview, Ward (2016) explains that her personal experience of Katrina and its aftermath taught her

that "if you survive, you rebuild. People rebuild. They clean up, they attempt to make new homes and new communities. Things change. These awful events doesn't [sic] necessarily mean that there won't be any community or any home at all, anymore. You just have a new home, a new community." Certainly, we should be skeptical of any one event's ability to restore and repair the damage of the United States' long history of white supremacy. Hurricane Camille, after all, may have cleared the way for school integration, but racial inequities persisted. Ward's statement, however, does lay out what is necessary if this new post-Katrina world will bear any new fruit: work to create new communities. Bodies tell stories; in doing so, they can create new ones.

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Wounded Bodies in Narratives: Understanding Physical Violence and Trauma through (African-American) Fiction and Creative Non-Fiction

Roxanne Tan

Contemporary African-American fiction, slave narratives, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) discourse and stories of oppression from other communities share the common thread of discussing physical violence and trauma through narrative techniques. However, these lived experiences cannot exist outside of their spatial context. Attempts to discuss the lived experience of the corporeal existence tend to become muddled if we do not pay sufficient attention to the space within which such experience exists. While the bodies that suffered trauma are inscribed with narratives of violence, the production of space begins within the body and spills into the spatial context of the narrative. The body itself can be perceived as space within which an identity is constructed, and the sense of entrapment felt by the violated body is experienced internally while also extending outwards and existing in the physical space. In the imagined spaces of fictional worlds created by Black authors, the Black body is brought into existence: its lived experiences are thus re-imagined and re-presented through fictional stories.

The analysis proposed in this chapter focuses on Rivers Solomon's novella *The Deep* and its original source, the song of the same title by the group 'Clipping,' and on Ta-Nehisi Coates' novel *The Water Dancer*. *The Deep* can be further linked to the electro-techno

duo Drexciya,[1] and Paul Gilroy's seminal work *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). Considered together, alongside the slave narrative tradition (particularly, Harriet Jacobs' biography), these texts establish a narrative ecosystem that continues to develop through the participation of many contributors, who create representational worlds of imagined spaces where oppression can be overcome.[2] Throughout this chapter, I will also explore other narrative forms that have links to this narrative ecosystem, both directly and indirectly, as part of an expansive narrative tradition that transcends temporal space, format, genres but also (ultimately) racial, cultural and national boundaries.

Space, Narrative Ecosystem, and Multidirectional Solidarity

The theorisation of space, as well as of space in narratives, has been made by various scholars across different disciplines. Joshua Parker (2016), for instance, states that "speaking about 'narrative space' makes little sense without considering the places within it and our relationships with them. It is, after all, our own sense or understanding of spaces and places from which we create narratives about them, or project narratives onto them" (74).[3] Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth

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[1] Drexciya (1969–2002) was an electro-techno duo whose identities were concealed but later revealed to include members James Stinson and Gerald Donald. They produced an album titled *The Quest* (1997) which developed Drexciya, a mythological underwater world populated by direct descendants of pregnant African women who were thrown overboard ships of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

[2] Nettrice Gaskins notes that the amalgam of Black culture in Gilroy's use of the ship imagery represents "authentic Black culture" and that the cultural exchange between different African cultures coincided with the "commodity exchange that defined the transatlantic slave trade and thus, Black culture" (Gaskins 2016, 71).

[3] Parker (2016) puts together a comprehensive account of the various theorists who have discussed space and narrative, or space in narrative, and its variations, which I will not explore in detail. The discussion here will be limited to

E. Foote and Maoz Azaryahu (2016) have also explored the regular patterns across multiple types of narratives and the role of geography in it, focusing their analyses on narrative and space in the non-metaphorical sense (such as street names, landscape and museums). They further explain that "space is an essential part of the mental act of narrative world (re)construction, since the imagination can only picture objects that present spatial extension" (16). Narrative space is created through textual narratives of fiction or non-fiction, as well as through online narratives and discourse, and these narrative spaces can be seen as an extension of our real world. In his theory of space, Lefebvre mentions a representational space that he conceptualises as experienced through "complex symbols and images" (1991, 33). Building on Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and highlighting the importance given to "representations of bodily, lived experiences of space," Eugene J. McCann (1999) fosters a pivotal discussion in the conception of public space in relation to race and identity (179). He uses the concept of representational space to refer to published political cartoons that depict the racial segregation of the community, and thus he is able to highlight the exclusionary nature of public spaces that are drawn along racial lines.

In the works that are discussed in this chapter, the bodies which exist within these narrative spaces (whether historical or fictional) are marked by cultural memory and trauma. It is within these spaces that negotiations of cultural memories, the healing of trauma, and the "act of multidirectional memory" (Rothberg 2009, 134, 252) foster the symbiotic relationship between oppressed groups through the shared discourse of collective trauma. As with the prevalence of online narratives and negotiations of identities occuring in cyberspace, physical bodies extend into textual manifestations of online narratives: according to Brooks (1993, 8), it is the repetition of the

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the lived experiences of bodies marked by trauma and their relation to space where necessary.

wounded bodies in narrative that brings the stories of these bodies into meaning.

The pain which an individual experiences takes place – as though on another plane of existence – within an interior world, contained within the body of the sufferer. Elaine Scarry (1985) considers the "inexpressibility of physical pain" and explores how pain is not only resistant to language but also how it effectively destroys it (3–5). However resistant it may be, it is imperative to try and express pain, even if in fragmentary ways. Indeed, Scarry notes that "[t]hough there are very great impediments to expressing one's sentient distress, so are there also very great reasons why one might want to do so, and thus there come to be avenues by which this most radically private of experiences begins to enter the realm of public discourses" (6). Activism against the administration of torture crucially relies on the ability to convey experiences of physical pain to those who are free from torture. Embedded in the narratives of pain and trauma, thus, is "the assumption that the act of verbally expressing pain is a necessary prelude to the collective task of diminishing pain" (9). The remembrance of a cultural memory (i.e. collective trauma) begins within the body which suffers the pain. The pain, through iteration of the sufferer, is then immortalised through textual narratives. It becomes transferred onto the spatial form of the text, whether the page of a book, the words on a blog post or an onscreen reenactment.

The textual narratives mentioned in this chapter are not confined to literary texts, but instead include a vast range of formats and genres, such as experimental hip hop music and works of music that have acted as catalysts for literary fiction, thereby allowing a narrative tradition to expand across different media. This multimedia constellation of stories that narrativise the experiences of trauma constitutes parts of an ecosystem. I use the term 'narrative ecosystem' to describe the exponential growth and also the benefits of an immersive experience in a web of narratives that supplement

and build on one another. This ecosystem is not closed: rather, it is open, and the porous boundaries between the various narratives and the surrounding discourses facilitate the creation of solidarity and the construction of a depository of multidirectional memory.

According to Michael Rothberg (2009), multidirectional memory rejects the hierarchical positioning of collective traumas suffered by communities. For Rothberg, multidirectional memory focuses on the "dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance" (11). By further opening up this "webbed network" (Eshun 1998, n.p.) of narrative into an expansive ecosystem, the concept of multidirectional memory supports a mutualistic relationship across racially, culturally, and socially different communities. Indeed, the desire for liberation from oppression in different locations can be seen through an eagerness for coalitionary efforts, as seen in the letter written by co-founder of the Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton, in support of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam "against American imperialism" (Newton 1970, n.p.). As I will show later, this multidirectional coalition continues today through and across cyberspace.

Rivers Solomon's *The Deep* and the Roots of its Narrative Ecosystem

In the speculative historical novella *The Deep* (2019) by Rivers Solomon, the protagonist, Yetu, suffers both physical and mental anguish as a result of her role as a Historian for her people, the Wajinru.[4] The Wajinru is a group of underwater people who are direct descendants of enslaved pregnant African women who were thrown overboard as

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4 The Historian is the bearer of the Wajinru's past. This collective memory is passed on from one Historian to another, as there is only one Historian at a time. The Wajinru also have a ritual, the Ritual of Remembrance, which allows the Historian to share those traumatic memories with the whole people, in order for them to remember their past. After the ritual, however, the memories remain only with the Historian.

"sick and disruptive cargo" (Solomon 2019, Loc. 1806). In *The Deep*, the Historian is the chosen one who bears all the memories of the ancestors, including the physical pain and trauma they experienced. Through Yetu's constant experience of pain, she becomes the only body onto which the trauma is mapped. The pain of the entire race is bottled into one vessel – the Historian – who embodies the realities of all the traumatising events suffered by their ancestors and, by (re)living them, is thus able to bear witness to them. The pain and suffering experienced both mentally and physically by a Historian are the manifestation of intergenerational trauma, which conceives that trauma can be passed on across generations. The physical and mental torment the Historian suffers through is allegorical of the perduring trauma of Black lives. I read the figure of the Historian as a "generalised body," a notion that seeks to conceptualise a metaphorical and collective body that experiences and becomes inscribed with a community's cultural memories and traumas. Such reading is possible if, first, we pay attention to the genealogy of the novella itself and, secondly, to the dramatization of the act of sharing a collective traumatic past (i.e. the Ritual of Remembrance).

Indeed, Solomon's novella *The Deep*, published in 2019, can be traced to several origins. As previously mentioned, the novella is a short tale of the underwater race 'Wajinru'. The imagining of this underwater race builds on and continues a narrative tradition that weaves music by the groups 'Clipping' and Drexciya, together with Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993). The narrative continuities between the texts are clearly visible in the lyrics of the song *The Deep*, which acts as the narrative premise for the novella: "With cannons, they searched for oil beneath our cities / Their greed and recklessness forced our uprising". In fact, this intertextual genealogy is also evident in the naming of the hip-hop group members as co-authors of the novella. An awareness of the musical track is therefore essential to an immersive understanding of the novella. In turn, the song *The Deep* is itself rooted in the mythology of Drexciya,

which is therefore the ostensible original ancestor to the narrative space developed by Solomon.

The Deep – and its multi-authorial narrative origins – strongly suggests that Black speculative historical (or Afrofuturist) narratives can become strategies for the community to envision alternative futures. Such future-envisioning is accomplished by engaging with the Atlantic Slave Trade in order to counter its traumatic repercussions and present-day legacies (Brooks 2018, 103). This is also evident in the creation and growth of the Drexciyan realm. A spokesperson of the recording label Underground Resistance,[5] Cornelius Harris, has been credited as being the likely author of an essay from which the conceptualisation of the Drexciyan race is imagined. Without acknowledging nor denying his participation as another author, he said:

> The thing about mythology is, it does take on a life of its own. […] There are other folks who contributed towards the mythology, […] I think why the mythology is so dense is that even though a lot of it came from [James Stinson], it wasn't *all* from [Stinson]. And I think that's kind of how you build a world: you've got a lot of people in that world, a lot of people contributing to that world. (Eshun 2012, n.p.)

Much in the same way studies of psychological, neurobiological and genetic changes affecting future generations demonstrate the real and undeniable effects of intergenerational trauma (Jackson, Jackson, and Jackson 2018), the mutation/evolution of Black bodies into a post-human race (whether Drexciyan or Wajinru) can be seen as a narrative representation accounting for the lasting effects of corporeal and systemic intergenerational violence and trauma. The creation of a mythology and the employment of science fiction or Afrofuturist genres effectively function as vehicles that carry a political role critical of many issues, including but not limited to the problematic narratives of history, systemic violence and the brutalisation of Black bodies.

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5 Underground Resistance are a musical collective and recording label for Drexciya.

Through continuous acts of political narrative creation, an eco-system of fictional worlds/spaces takes shape. This can be seen in Drexciya's myth and the various narrative genres which were born out of it. Both the music and textual narratives titled *The Deep* fall within the Afrofuturist genre for their creative projection of possible worlds and futures. Thus, *The Deep* remains firmly rooted in the origin of the Middle Passage and the Atlantic Slave Trade. The use of the term 'narrative ecosystem' is therefore useful as a metaphorical concept to imagine the connections shared among narratives that, while diverging from one another, are nonetheless still closely related (and relatable).

Within the physical spaces and locations of *The Deep*, Yetu's body and mind cannot escape the horrors and violence inflicted directly onto her ancestors and which, as the Historian, she is destined to suffer. Yetu's role as a Historian constructs a space which is initially inaccessible to others and exists only at an individual experiential level. Yet, her physical body turns into the locus where individual consciousness merges with collective experiences, whereby both her body and mind become the frame onto which narratives of collective violence and trauma are projected.

In the final chapter of *The Deep*, despite having physically left the Womb and her people after the Ritual of Remembrance,[6] Yetu's body is still mapped with the signs of violence and torture as she continues to physically feel the pain caused by the memories. The complex depiction of Yetu's pain stems from the nature of Historians, whom the author(s) designed as vessel-like existences within which trauma and pain are contained. The release of memories, however, is not catharthic but instead seems to engender further pain, further scarring and, all in all, represents the violence within acts of accessing traumatic memories. Indeed, Solomon described

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6   The Womb is an underwater architecture which the Wajinru temporarily construct each time they hold the Ritual of Remembrance (see note 4).

the process of conducting a Remembrance in metaphorically visual gore:

> She had to slit herself open and spill herself out. Yetu gave her whole being to the ocean the way the ocean had given all of itself to her, giving the Wajinru the spark of life, showing them that if only they knew how, water could be breathed. (Solomon 2019, Loc. 1645)

The transfer of memories and collective traumas from Yetu to her people performs the inception of the generalized body, as represented among the Wajinru. Eventually, this metaphorical body reaches a final point when the Wajinru decide to collectively bear the burden of their cultural memory by changing the tradition of having only one Historian bear the trauma of the entire race. Having performed the ritual and emptied herself out of the History,[7] Yetu leaves the Wajinru in order to escape the responsibility of having to bear the pain individually. However, she eventually returns and the Wajinru decide that each of them should carry a part of the History, and not place the entire burden on an individual Historian. Here, then, the concept of a generalized body can be helpful to understand this turn in the novella. Understood as a metaphorical body which stands in for a collective group, this corporeal existence within narrative and as narrative is not intended to replace the unique experience of the individual. Rather, it signals that, on a social level, collective trauma and experiences (both positive and negative) are inscribed onto a general body called "Black identity," which is then defined on the basis of belonging to specific histories and memories. Thus, Yetu's initial disposition to leave her people can be read as engaging with the position that calls against the emphasis on Black history and, particularly, the history of slavery as the generative story of contemporary African-American people. In this way, albeit only temporarily,

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[7] History, here, refers to the concretisation of cultural memories and trauma wherein they occupy the space of the body and can be transferred from one to another through the Ritual of Remembrance.

the novella addresses and engages with the popular counter-narrative that advocates for freeing Black aesthetics and culture from that part of history.

Slave Narratives and *The Water Dancer*: Rebuilding through Contemporary Fiction

At the centre of online discourse as well as a number of narratives by African-American authors is the desire to completely abandon slave narratives. Charles Johnson made calls to this move, in order to leave behind "group victimization," which includes "abolish[ing] slavery as the master trope for African American identity" (Tillet 2012, 2). While there are authors who second the need for African-American literature to populate the literary space with narratives that move forward from the history of slavery, most contemporary African-American literature may prove otherwise. Indeed, contemporary works by authors such as Solomon and Ta-Nehisi Coates continue to address not only the importance of a shared history but also of intergenerational trauma. By engaging with slave narratives, these authors highlight enduring forms of oppression, including present-day microaggressions and systemic racism that have not been successfully dismantled by abolition. Thus, contemporary fiction continues to build the historiography crucial to understanding present-day phenomena.

In Ta-Nehisi Coates' *The Water Dancer* (2019), the protagonist Hiram Walker is a slave[8] who had the fortune of receiving an education and of obtaining certain privileges no other slaves on

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8 In the novel, Coates refers to slaves using the term "Tasked". Coates spoke about his choice of using this word as an authorial intention to create another world that is located within actual history while at the same time it deliberately aims to prevent the conjuring of specific images that are tightly linked to slave narratives written primarily for the abolition movement (Coates 2019c; 2019b).

the plantation could have. Nevertheless, he is never allowed to be free. From his vantage point of view, Hiram is able to observe what slavery reveals about the making of America's supposed greatness, and also the process of un/making of brutalised Black bodies: "Slavery was the root of all struggle. For it was said that the factories enslaved the hands of children, and that child-bearing enslaved the bodies of women, and that rum enslaved the souls of men" (Coates 2019, Loc. 3664). Hiram's sentence points to the inseparable link between the labour of enslaved people and their bodies as both a commodity and means of production; that is, slave bodies are both the commodity traded in the economy and the means to produce more tradeable commodities, including chattel slaves (Kelley 2018). Thus, the corporeal existence of enslaved people could not be separated from the products (crops, objects, humans) they were forced to labour for.

Coates' narrative is a means to communicate a plethora of issues and the rich albeit dark history etched into the ancestry of African-Americans. The enslavement of Black people succeeded by means of keeping them bound to a place: Hiram, for instance, as the illegitimate son of his own master, is tied to the plantation by his own blood. By narrating the rape of Hiram's mother (hence, the tale of his conception), Coates also highlights the enslavement of Black women through their own bodies. This is most powerfully expressed through the words of the slave Lucy: "You done forgot? You don't remember what they do to the girls down here? And once they do it, they got you. They catch you with the babies, tie you to the place by your own blood and all, until you got too much to let go of to go" (Coates 2019, Loc. 2674).

Lucy's remark illustrates the added violence experienced by women: enslaved women were subject to sexual harassment and sexual abuse, they were raped and often gave birth to mulatto children, only to suffer further abuse by jealous mistresses as well as by witnessing their children's violation. Harriet Jacobs' biography is a

testament to the different ways female Black bodies were inescapably reduced to mere property and doubly commodified:

> Even if Ned[9] and I married, Ned wouldn't be able to protect me from Flint, who still would be my master. Some slave men fight to protect their wife and daughters from their master's abuse and boldly protest to their master. But many – whipped into submission – voice no objection. In fact, some purposely stay away when the master wants sex with their wife or daughter.
>
> Any children born to Ned and me would be Dr. Flint's property because children have the same legal status – enslaved or free – as their mother. (2004, 124)

Indeed, the production of crops would not be the only produce that could be sold to sustain the extravagant lives of plantation owners (Freehling 1972, 85). Chattel slavery, as the word encapsulates, renders Black bodies as mere personal possessions or property. Thus, when the female Black body bears children, the child conceived is unable to attain freedom unless they are given freedom by their master. The Black female body is made into a reproductive tool that fits the capitalist agenda, as the children were automatically and legally assets belonging to the master.

In another excerpt of Coates' novel, Hiram makes an observation whereby readers are able to see the way architecture (the master's house) becomes a metaphor to reveal the ways in which Black bodies were used and abused, and reduced to being mere objects. Hiram muses upon how the slaves are engines that power the house, which appears from an external eye like an engineering marvel, although such "marvel" is based on the slaves' hidden labour: "one could imagine that we were not slaves at all but mystical ornaments, a portion of the manor's charm" (Coates 2019, Loc. 545). The great Southern house was built on the literal bodies of Black enslaved people and continued to function on those bodies. Its mechanisms

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9 Ned is Jacobs' love interest who was a free man.

run on invisible bodies that are kept hidden within and underneath the house. Black bodies were deliberately tucked away from the white gaze, reduced to a cog in the great machine of the impressive, luxurious house of the slothful slave owners.

Contemporary fictional narratives such as *The Water Dancer* foreground the workings and repercussions of slavery, and point to the failure of emancipation. They participate in the reimagination of Black bodies in history and in the present; they create spaces within which realities and experiences can be examined, and they offer a platform upon which conversations can be initiated and continued. In Afrofuturist fiction this history is reinterpreted and reimagined within the narrative spaces that allow the enslaved people to have more agency over their past and future. Through his novel's protagonist, Coates builds a world in which the processes of liberation are reinvented. In the novel, Hiram possesses a supernatural power which allows him to teleport; this power is called 'Conduction'. In the novel, Coates recreates the historical figure of Harriet Tubman, who was an Underground Conductor who helped slaves to escape (McGowan and Kashatus 2011, 36), and who is here made to have the same supernatural power as Hiram, which they both use to "conduct" people out of slavery.

Social Media and The BLM Narrative

It is fundamental to understand, however, that the narrative framework within which Black bodies are constructed exists beyond fiction (Heavey 2015, 432). The metaphorical concept of the general Black body that occupies the literary space (ranging from slave narratives to contemporary African-American literature, as well as any form of literature that includes Black bodies) provides a useful framework to analyse mainstream online narratives, especially social media narratives. In his essay "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" (1975), Roland Barthes stated: "There are countless forms

of narrative in the world. […] there is a prodigious variety of genres, each of which branches out into a variety of media, as if all substances could be relied upon to accommodate man's stories" (237). Following Barthes, we can affirm that a variety of storytelling practices, including abolitionist slave narratives, fictional works such as Solomon's and Coates's, as well as online discourse which includes grassroot community voices, are all constructing the BLM narrative. In order to further understand the building of the narrative ecosystem and its ramifications in combating histories of oppression in the present, it is worth analysing some of the most prominent BLM narratives.

The BLM narrative is a counter-narrative to the master narrative which has long dominated mainstream media.[10] This counter-narrative began at grassroots level through online discourse and social media which enable individuals that do not have access to media outlets (or are underrepresented) to broadcast their message. For example, George Floyd's name became a symbol in the BLM narrative of 2020 due to the highly circulated image of a policeman kneeling on his neck: the footage of his murder was repeated in chains of shared posts across platforms. In such a way, George Floyd's body and the brutal violence inflicted upon it entered the narrative stream of social media discourse and began to challenge mainstream white-privilege consciousness by connecting the dots of violence against black bodies under the hashtag BLM (Garza 2014). While awareness raising was mostly of violence against Black *male* bodies, the campaign "Say Her Name" emerged from grassroot efforts to voice the names of brutalised Black *female* bodies that had been sidelined by mainstream media.

Counter-narratives possess the ability to build solidarity across different communities that face oppression and share similar strug-

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[10] (Dominant) narratives hold great influence in society and can negatively affect groups with the perpetuation of stereotypes and discrimination (see Hasford 2016; McDowell et al. 2021).

gles (Bell 1999, 345). In this chapter, I have explored a few examples of contemporary African-American fiction: by making visible in my analysis the lineage of *The Deep* and *The Water Dancer* and an ecosystem encompassing abolitionist slave narratives and Drexciyan mythology, I highlighted a meaningful process of building a narrative network that is carried on by different individuals belonging to one or many communities that bear a shared trauma. The mutualistic relationship between several communities promotes the formation of alliances: acts of remembering and narrating become collaborative actions across space and time, and foster the creation of movements built upon solidarity and empathy – thus rejecting the fight within a "hierarchy of suffering" (Rothberg 2009, 9). Much in the same way abolitionist literature had functioned to vividly illustrate the horrors which enslaved people had suffered, today the BLM narrative does the same through various vehicles. Whether videos, photos or textual accounts of experiences, they come together to form a wider structure that is part of the Black community's narrative ecosystem. Due to the borderless nature of social networks, participation in the development of this narrative goes beyond the African-American community and therefore beyond any geographical, racial, gendered, linguistic, or social borders, to include People of Color and racialised minorities from other regions of the world.

An Afterthought: Support of the Need for Multidirectional Narratives

The solidarity found in #BLM has reached many shores across the globe. While some may attribute this to the connectivity afforded by the internet and social media, it has also been pointed out by a Singaporean writer that this is not exclusive to the internet era. A case in point: in an Instagram post, journalist Sa'at shared images taken during a political rally in 1960s Singapore (now kept at the National Archives of Singapore). One of these photographs showed

a banner stretching across the stage of the rally that featured the image of Patrice Lumumba. Written in Chinese on both sides were the slogans: "Learn from the great democratic hero, Lumumba" and "Strive to completely remove colonialism". As this example shows, despite having no internet connectivity at the time, Singaporeans were "able to imagine global solidarity and comradeship, able to intuit how some struggles were shared" with the Congolese people because of a shared history of colonialism (Sa'at 2020).

Global solidarity can be based on shared struggles, a common history of violence – whether it is due to colonialism or police brutality. However, this solidarity does not seek to equate the traumas and conflicts of different communities and regions. Instead, these acts of transnational solidarity should be viewed as commemorative actions that produce mutual understanding (Rothberg 2009, 11). Rothberg's model of multidirectional memory seeks to understand the participatory nature of remembering across different groups or communities, and for that reason it is particularly apt to understand contexts of pro-BLM advocacy across globalised minority communities. In Hong Kong, for instance, peaceful opposition against interference with Hong Kong's autonomy and sovereignty were met by institutional violence, which led to further protests against police brutality. It is clear that within the question of global solidarity there are networks of narratives which serve to inform, educate and paint a clearer picture for those others who may show solidarity. Once more, we return to the purpose served by narrative as a tool that places a people's identity, their suffering, their trauma – their *bodies* – within the more specific cultural and historical context and location. The images of the young bodies of Hong Kong students subjected to police brutality, the accounts of stinging pain from tear gas and the reports of the lethal wounds caused by rubber bullets functioned as vehicles of narratives about a community's struggle against structural violence (BBC 2019). In Hong Kong, two male police officers used knee-on-neck restraint on a 16 year-old female

student protester (Ho 2020), as it had just been witnessed in Minneapolis, and many other American cities before it. The parallels between such a grotesque image from Hong Kong with the one that exhibits the death of George Floyd evoke a sentiment of sameness and solidarity across borders, however, the need for further narrative work is essential for sustaining such cross-cultural bonds and engagement, as Samuel Chan and Alex Chow explain:

> The complicated nature of Hong Kong's political situation has required countless Hongkongers to educate, illustrate, and translate information for foreigners, so that they will be moved by the city's struggles. It is difficult to explain to outsiders why many Hongkongers decided to support both peaceful protestors and militant frontliners through discussing the original extradition bill alone; only through explanations of post-Handover histories of dissent and resistance, as well as the failures of other attempts at political reform, do outsiders begin to grasp the origins of Hong Kong's struggles. Similarly, only examining the current protests against George Floyd's murder may not be enough for Hongkongers to have a full understanding as to why protesters in the U.S. have adopted radical tactics. (Chan and Chow 2020, n.p.)

For Chan and Chow multidirectional narration is fundamental: the act of storytelling demonstrates the power of narratives for the formation of alliances across different communities. While at times these alliances may seem as unlikely coalitions, particularly due to distances in location and culture, two seemingly separate discourses have the power to meet and interact within the narrative blocks of a shared ecosystem.

A narration and reimagination of a community's histories, struggles and traumas that reject the monopoly of a dominant narrative – the re-envisioning of past, present and future – constitute "acts of multidirectional memory" (Rothberg 2009, 134). The processes of remembering similar yet uniquely particular experiences of collective trauma become the bonding factor which allows different communities to weave together experiences and to build coalitionary solidarity. Online discourses surrounding racial violence and politi-

cal repression, as well as (non-)fictional slave narratives, become representational spaces with which "intellectual, cultural, and political history" are renarrated in what Rothberg calls a "revisionary gaze" (2009, 309). Rothberg also considers instances in which multidirectional memory fails to provide a truly inclusive perspective, nevertheless, he explains that "[t]he model of multidirectional memory posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites" (11). Ultimately, multidirectionality, whether through fiction, non-fiction or online narrative discourses, aims at greater empathy and sensitivity.

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Enforcing Vulnerable Signs of Violence through Narratives

Silvia Pierosara

> I wrote down silences; nights;
> I recorded the unnameable.
> I found the still point of the turning Earth.
>
> Arthur Rimbaud

Preliminary Remarks

In this chapter I explore the theoretical assumptions and conditions that allow for the preservation of memories relating to bodily violence; in order to do so, I take a theoretical approach based on ethics that, for the purposes of this publication, intentionally avoids using case studies or examples. My main argument is that some types of narrative representation, rather than being tools that legitimize violence, can actually serve the objective of preserving vulnerable signs of violence. First, I discuss the concept of vulnerability in relation to "exposure" and "precariousness." "Exposure" here refers to the relationality and interdependence inherent to us, which leave us exposed to harm inflicted by others; this also applies to memories, which can be affected or harmed by our relations to others' memories or removals. "Precariousness" refers to the structural uncertainty of our survival, which is related to human interdependence with and dependence on the environment. After providing an ethical and philosophical definition of vulnerability, I extend the reflection to the vulnerable signs of violence, or its ephemeral traces that can disappear over time and through death. Second, I

pose some ethical questions about issues surrounding irrepresent-ability, transience, and resistance: among these questions, the one of greatest importance asks how representation is a fundamental moral duty for resisting transience, restoring justice, and bringing about emancipation. To this end, I first explore how certain kinds of narratives – i.e., those striving to teleologism, narrative closure, and coherence at all costs – can be ambivalent, opening themselves up to criticisms of being tools that legitimize violence. Third, I show how other kinds of narratives – i.e., those which are open-ended, fragmented, and susceptible to reinterpretation – represent violence without being tools of legitimization and justification thereof, and how they interact with images. Fourth, and lastly, I propose a reading of narratives as a way to escape a double risk – that of horrorism and victimization as a cage.

Vulnerable Traces

From an ethical and philosophical standpoint, I would like to re-consider "vulnerability" and "precariousness" against a backdrop of human transience. These two issues are examined not only because they are qualities inherent to humankind, but also because of their relationship to the traces that violence leaves on our bodies, minds, and souls. The vulnerability of these traces, even the corporeal ones, is as transient as human existence. Therefore, tools for preservation and remembrance are needed in order to face and resist violence. Vulnerability has long been analyzed as, and is too often assumed to be, an intrinsic and unchangeable characteristic of every human being (see, for instance, Goodin 1988; Ferrarese 2018; Laugier 2015; Laugier and Vallaud-Belkacem 2020). In this respect, the socio-eco-nomic, cultural, racial, and gendered conditions that may worsen it, and which may be compared to the circumstances that open and deepen a wound, are systematically ignored or inadequately addressed by policies. Moreover, those who are over-exposed to vul-

nerability are rarely, if ever, given a voice. Over the past few years, a number of women philosophers have made attempts to redefine vulnerability by creating a taxonomy and stressing awareness of certain kinds of avoidable vulnerabilities that can be mended, protected,[1] or at the least contained. According to such views, vulnerability is interpreted as a relational dynamic. Catriona Mackenzie states:

> There are two main philosophical approaches to conceptualizing vulnerability. The first links the concept of vulnerability to its derivation from the Latin *vulnus*, meaning 'wound,' and to the universal capacity to suffer that is inherent to human embodiment. The second approach focuses on the contingent susceptibility of particular persons or groups to specific kinds of harm and threat by others. (Rogers, Mackenzie, and Dodds 2014, 3149)

Additionally, Rogers, Mackenzie, and Dodds (2012) created the following taxonomy of vulnerability: *inherent, situational*, and *pathogenic* (24). According to them, vulnerability has several meanings, and the existence of an innate type does not preclude the existence of a situational, context-linked one. And, last but not least, vulnerability is also pathogenic: policies aimed at relieving the vulnerability of some groups (e.g., Indigenous Peoples, the mentally or physically disabled, the working poor, single mothers, racial and ethnic minorities, etc.) often have the opposite effect and "exacerbate existing vulnerabilities or generate new vulnerabilities" (25). This occurs when the policies neither promote nor foster agency, but further establish the conditions that deepen dependence and reinforce stigma. Nevertheless, agency, even when it assumes and recognizes a certain degree of inherent vulnerability, is possible. Furthermore, vulnerability serves as the starting point, because ethical action is borne out of concern for such fragilities. This recognition, in turn, cannot become

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[1] This term may evoke a sort of paternalism that is very far from my intentions here. I use the term "protection" to mean preservation, or a response to the need for shelter.

an excuse to stigmatize vulnerable people, as their situations arose from the particular conditions and events that led to them.

Inherent vulnerability can be compared to, and to some extent equated with, what Judith Butler defines as precariousness. In fact, she considers vulnerability a "more or less implicit or explicit feature of our experience" (Butler 2018, 149). Furthermore, according to Butler, precariousness should be distinguished from precarity, which is not only vulnerability to violence but also exposure to others who can injure one's body. She believes that "vulnerability to destruction by others that follows from a condition of precarity in all modes of political and social interdependency" can be seen as "an irreducible fact of politics" (Butler 2012, 148). Butler explicitly devotes these considerations, which may also apply in the context of vulnerability to violence, to the notion of precarity. To summarize, we may claim that, certainly, every human being is inherently vulnerable, the state of which is referred to as our "precariousness"; however, there is another kind of vulnerability that depends on our interpersonal relations and the historical, social, cultural, and political context. The possibility of, and exposure to, violence prompt the following ethical responses: resistance, refusal to surrender to it, and recognition of it as inevitable. Viewed thus, vulnerability is vulnerability to violence. As Ferrarese shows, vulnerability means being at another's mercy:

> A vulnerability only ever arises as the hollow side of a power to act. It materializes only vis-à-vis a power that either threatens to act or, on the contrary, fails to do so. To speak of vulnerability is to speak of another's (or of a pronouncement's or a structure's) power to act, and clearly does not exclude finding a power to act on the side of the vulnerable subject too. What effectively illuminates the notion of vulnerability is thus the idea of "being-at-another's-mercy." (Ferrarese 2018, 1)

Here, vulnerability is a relational event that transpires in the space between subjects, consisting of many partially overlapping layers. As Luna (2009, 2019) contends, when the layers metaphor is applied to vulnerability, the labeling of vulnerable people and the presumption

that they have impaired agency, is precluded. Though it is clear that the various layers of vulnerability can overlap and influence one another, there is more to consider. For when it comes to suffering violence, another kind of vulnerability emerges, and that concerns the traces left by violence, which must be highlighted as well. Therefore, the vulnerability of the traces of violence should also be taken into careful consideration. A method to combat transience and oblivion must be devised; otherwise, violence, far from disappearing, risks becoming a form of unconscious removed content that is perpetrated out of a "compulsion to repeat" (Freud 2015, 30). In light of this, it is not only necessary to guarantee people the right to have their voices heard in order to denounce violence and foster hope for a life free of oppression and domination, but also to find ways of keeping score of the wounds caused by violence, scars that are otherwise destined to pass on with the bodies.

Thus, the representation of bodily violence should become a way to care for and honor those injured by history's winners. To properly acknowledge and resist the vulnerability of traces, something must be created that will endure and act as a warning. But, what if the traces are so faint that they are barely recognizable? In addition, what if witnesses cannot be relied upon? How can narratives and other forms of representation account for the disappearance of traces? With regard to this, Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay (2016) have notably expressed that wounded and therefore *vulnerable* bodies can also be vehicles of resistance rather than symbols of "victimization and passivity" (1).

Recognizing the Risks of Legitimization and Justification Inherent to Representation

This section aims to defend the need to represent bodily violence against its detractors while recognizing the fairness of some of their critiques. In order to preserve and scaffold the vulnerability of traces,

my first objective is to warn against the dangers of representation that may resemble justification. By "representation" here, I mean specifically narratives as ways of representing. Nevertheless, my considerations could, at least in part, also apply to photographs, movies, and, more generally, pictures, to the extent that they can be also considered narrative representations. My second objective is to explore forms of representation that resist the transience of and temptation to compose works with, and to somehow resolve and reconcile, fragments, scars, wounds, suffering, and pain. Bodily violence and suffering must be condemned and decreased, and the question of *how* needs to be addressed, for this is imperative both ethically *and* aesthetically. The issue at stake here is how to audit those signs and find forms of representation that do not veer into composition or portrayal. Moreover, meaning and meaninglessness demand to be seen. In particular, the sense of meaninglessness of violence, its occurring for no reason, does not imply capitulation to becoming invisible and disappearing. Instead, meaninglessness demands justice and to be shown and shared.

While true that many forms of representation aspire simply to composition, it is just as true that this outcome is not a necessity but a contingency, which recalls a debate that took place following the Holocaust and other World War II atrocities (see Henry 2019). The question raised by many philosophers was whether and how the experience of violence could be represented, or if it was perhaps beyond the scope of representation. Having a conception of art with a foundation of harmony and composition, many thinkers considered it wrong to encapsulate the radical evil of violence into a structure or composition that could be regarded as a form of *Sinngebung*, or the attribution of a meaning, and thus a justification, to something unreasonable. Adorno (2019) warned against the possibility of a "lighthearted" art: "The statement that it is not possible to write poetry after Auschwitz does not hold absolutely, but it is certain that after Auschwitz, because Auschwitz was possible and remains

possible for the foreseeable future, lighthearted art is no longer possible" (501). Many other thinkers have applied this ethical imperative to all attempts at representation, stipulating that some events are definitively unrepresentable (Lyotard 1989; Wajcman 2001).

While some argue that representation should not indulge in forms of composition that could be mistaken for justification, other philosophers highlight that not every kind of representation entails legitimization and justification. Jacques Rancière, in particular, addressed this point insightfully:

> Representation is not the act of producing a visible form, but the act of offering an equivalent – something that speech does just as much as photography. The image is not the duplicate of a thing. It is a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and the speech, the said and the unsaid. It is not a mere reproduction of what is out there in front of the photographer or the filmmaker. (Rancière 2009, 93–94)[2]

If representation means reproduction, it is hard to disentangle from the feeling that representation is an accomplishment endowed with meaning. If, however, representation is typically already something problematic, partial, and in need of interpretation, and that concerns the relationship between the visible and invisible, then it can be useful for narrating violence and revealing the consequences of violence. Violence, therefore, is difficult, but not impossible, to represent.

In other words, there is some scepticism about representation, since it is often conflated with reproduction. The former implies a

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2 In an essay entitled "Are some things unrepresentable?", Rancière maintains that the attempt to grasp the unthinkable is not a limit, but rather the condition of the possibility of representation: "It is then the peculiarity of a new mode of art – sublime art – to record the trace of the unthinkable" (Rancière 2007, 111). According to him, the need to represent is constantly relaunched due to a structural discrepancy between exhibition and signification: "Discrepancy with the representative regime. It expresses the absence of a stable relationship between exhibition and signification. But this maladjustment tends toward more representation, not less" (137).

freedom and creativity that the latter does not; representation leaves room for a dynamic relationship between the visible and invisible, and is itself an ongoing attempt to make sense of and inhabit this space. The semantics of reproduction is usually connected to the maybe illusory neutrality implied by the repetition of images similar to one another, with the aim to obscure and nullify the personhood of the subject reproducing the pictures (i.e. the one choosing the scenes, lighting, and characters). Additionally, representation indicates a link between the one representing and the one being represented, and this is an already ethical relationship. The person representing shoulders the responsibility of providing a representation worthy of the represented content, and of ensuring coherence between the signifier and the signified. If signifying a relational event, representation calls to mind vulnerability, since the latter can also be interpreted as relational. The vulnerability of traces calls for a representation charged with the duty to remember and to keep track, without acquiescing to transience. Representation becomes an act of care, with a sense of responsibility toward and desire to censure suffering, and aims to restore agency.

Second, many philosophers recognize narrative as a form of representation (Carr 1986, White 1980). However, the task of narratives is twofold: to represent and interpret. In the words of Paul Ricoeur, they can not only *configure* but also *refigure* (Ricoeur 1984, 12, 54): they elicit interpretation, since they are events occurring among persons, and their meaning is not definitively stated or achieved. The ambivalence of narratives is completely encompassed in this dual endeavor of representation and interpretation. In the case of signs "written" on the body, their significance, or their meaninglessness, becomes an issue to be addressed. Are signs considered symbols and can they be tied into a story? What kind of representation matches the need to underscore the vulnerability to transience while still denouncing, and avoiding the legitimization of, violence through composition and portrayal?

Representation in narrative form runs several risks of aiding justificatory practices. Among the features and traits of narratives that can lead to a sort of legitimization, the following bear mentioning: teleologism, narrative closure, and coherence at all costs. First, let us look at teleologism, which means an automatic attribution of meaning. This definition emphasizes the "teleological-retrospective" (Heller 2019) nature of narratives. As a matter of fact, teleology in narratives is intimately linked to their retrospection: "All autobiographical narratives are retrospective, [as] they are told from a teleological perspective" (109). When such a feature becomes automatic, leading almost compulsorily to a meaningful conclusion, teleology becomes teleologism, and narratives act as an inevitable path toward the meaning of every story and historical account. The risk of transforming teleology into teleologism is also a result of issues relating to narrative closure.

Now we turn to narrative closure, which can be defined as "a matter of finally answering without remainder all of the presiding questions the story has raised" (Carroll 2007, 7). Carroll elaborates further on the link between his definition of narrative closure and what he refers to as "narrative connection":

> The sorts of questions that are generated by the causal networks that contribute to connecting the past, present, and future in stories warrant being called narrative questions because of their intimate relation to an essential feature of narrative, and furthermore answering said questions provokes the phenomenological condition that deserves to be called *narrative* closure because the questions at issue have been generated narratively. (13)

It is precisely this feature of narrative that Carroll does not consider to be a necessary condition; that is, a narrative does not necessarily need *closure*. This theory is further developed by Andrea Westlund, who approaches it from an ethical perspective, with reference to victims' stories:

> I suspect that victims' stories often do *not* achieve narrative closure, moral or otherwise. I do not, however, think that we should see this lack

> of closure as a defect. I will suggest that the absence of narrative closure may be central to the power of victims' stories [...] In remaining both narratively and morally open, victims' stories invite – indeed, demand – our participation in bringing about appropriate moral resolution. (Westlund 2018, 28)[3]

The absence of closure calls for further investigation, at least to the extent in which it is a far cry from retreating into silence. The fact that a story can have no meaning does not necessarily preclude the possibility of narrating; on the contrary, it calls for further narration, albeit non-canonically. There is neither sense nor meaning, and it is claimed that signs of violence are narrated and endlessly re-narrated simply because they call for a moral resolution that is highly difficult to reach. If fixity, or the need for stable meanings, roles, and patterns of behavior or forms of social life, cannot be excluded (even partially), then being open to reinterpretation, elaboration, and reworking is only morally fair:

> Because we cannot do without fixity altogether, we must sometimes take the plunge and (provisionally) impose it. But we must also be able to achieve some distance from the narratives we construct, open ourselves to alternative interpretations, and take responsibility for working and reworking our stories as our lives continue to unfold. (Westlund 2015, 93)

If being prone to reinterpretation is true of autobiographical narratives as forms of representation and self-interpretation, then it is even truer of narratives that concern others and the violence they have undergone, since the issue of meaning within such a historical and relational context is more controversial than it is within everyday experiences.

Third, the risk of acquainting ourselves with violence through narrative representations, and somehow normalizing it by presenting it in a logical and chronological order (that is, by configuring it),

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[3] Westlund comments on Diana Meyers (2016) here.

brings up the issue of coherence, which can jeopardize the duty to preserve vulnerability. To be sure, protecting vulnerability from the transience of bodily signs does not mean concealing fragmentation and insisting that stories of violence be coherent at all costs. Thus, incoherence is a prompt, and narrative coherence can obscure the fragmentation caused by the pain of being doomed to oblivion. In order to protect the vulnerability of the traces of violence, narrative incoherence must be maintained:

> We invoke cases, for instance, where the storytellers do not necessarily comply with the often implicit norms of narrative theory – persons that are not able bodied or that have severe communicative disabilities; or stories that are told in circumstances and settings that severely constrain the telling; or telling about experiences that do not allow the use of conventional narrative forms. In all these cases people tell stories that are often fragmented, disorganized or where the narrative text is superseded by the performance of the story. In order to be able to listen to these stories, it is important that researchers, as well as all other listeners, suspend their preconceived narrative norms and rather treat these stories as invitations to listening in new and creative ways. (Hyvärinen et al. 2010, 2)

This concept is further explored by Westlund in the context of violence: "Victims' stories are often fragmentary, ambiguous, disconnected, and (self-consciously) vulnerable to distortions of memory" (Westlund 2018, 31). Incoherence is the battlefield where transience faces the tenacity of traces, and the latter is victorious. The ideology of coherence often buries fragmented stories and silences damaged identities.

As narrative representations, images also run the risk of being mistaken as legitimization. In fact, the risk is even higher with images than with words insofar as composition, harmony, and beauty – or what is commonly referred to as the "aestheticization of violence" (Miller, Vandom, and McBrewster 2010) – may anaesthetize people to violence. One plausible explanation is that the immediacy of images can encourage an addiction to violence instead of a proper

ethical reaction (see Sontag 2003). It is worth mentioning Butler's reading of Sontag's view on photographs and violence, in which she states:

> Sontag argued that although photographs have the capacity momentarily to move us, they do not allow the building up of an interpretation [...] What photographs lack is narrative coherence, and it is such coherence alone, in her view, that satisfies the needs of the understanding [...] Nonetheless, while narrative coherence might be a standard for some sorts of interpretation, it is surely not for all. (Butler 2016, 67)[4]

Indeed, if exposure to violent images can inspire a sort of voyeurism, it is equally true that

> media-mediated images of pain are, precisely, a particular instantiation and reification of that moment of ethical encounter where only perception but not immediate action is possible, because we are too late, too few, or too distant, or we lack the resources to do what is necessary. Ethical life is strewn with these situations, with moments of paralysis, incapacity, and complicity. (Bernstein 2012, xiii)

Indeed, both photographs and narratives can simultaneously serve as ways to resist the transience, and enforce the vulnerability, of traces, and agitate people to act in order to restore justice.

A Plea for Imagination and "Critical Fabulation"

If narratives run the risk of legitimizing bodily violence through its representation, then forms of narrative representation can exist that are, at least potentially, free from these risks, even if the form of

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4 In her discussion of Susan Sontag's critique of photographs, Butler notes that from *On Photography* (1977) to her latest book, *Regarding the Pain of the Others* (2003), Sontag's opinion bent towards a more pronounced ambivalence in her assessment of the capacity of photographs to move people into action. In Butler's view, the boundaries between photographs and narrative are blurred: both can haunt, "invoke responsiveness" (Butler 2016, 69), mobilize, and they are both acts of interpretation. The reference to narrative coherence in Butler is meaningful for the critique of this concept provided above.

narrative alone is insufficient and does not automatically prevent stories from becoming incubators of violence. In particular, it is important to stress the fragmentation of the accounts, as well as the possibility of pluralizing them, multiplying the voices, and accepting narrative forms that do not demonstrate but rather invite interpretation, thereby freeing themselves from the slavery of information and explanation. Indeed, Walter Benjamin has previously noted this distinction between storytelling and information telling:

> Every morning, news reaches us from around the globe. And yet we lack remarkable stories. Why is this the case? It is because no incidents reach us any longer not already permeated with explanations. In other words: almost nothing occurs to the story's benefit anymore, but instead it all serves information. In fact, at least half of the art of storytelling consists in keeping one's tale free from explanation. Extraordinary, miraculous events are recounted with great precision, but the psychological context is not forced on the reader. He is left the freedom to interpret the situation as he understands it, and the story thus acquires a breadth that information lacks. (Benjamin 2019, 54)

What available tools can help us avoid the risk of legitimization and use narratives to denounce, resist, and protect, in the sense of preserving, vulnerability? Here, I suggest two possible paths that may be taken. The first is "narrative imagination," which can be seen as an inherently moral practice, as Honneth (1998) and Kearney (1995), among others, have asserted, and the second is the idea of "critical fabulation," as defined and practiced by Hartman (2008, 2019).

In light of the moral import of narrative imagination, let us start with a reconsideration of it. As theorized by Bakhtin (1981), the ethical trait inherent to narrative imagination is related to its dialogism, double-voicedness, and heteroglossia.[5] According to the Rus-

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5 In Bakhtin (1981), the term "dialogism", as well as "double-voicedness", indicate a plurality of perspectives within a narrative; the term "heteroglossia" means the multiplicity of voices, styles and viewpoints typical of a narrative as well. These traits contribute to enforcing openness to different interpretations that could be transferred from a narrative level to an ethical one.

sian philosopher, dialogism, an inevitable dimension of narrative discourse, is exposed to contamination by meanings and influences.

The ethical aspect of dialogic imagination stems from the embeddedness of at least two people speaking to (or reading, or viewing) each other. Richard Kearney, commenting hermeneutically on Ricoeur (1972), highlights that creating new worlds is not only about poiesis but also ethics. Indeed, if narrative imagination is to be ethical, it should circumvent the pitfall of being a projection of the subject's imagination with reference to the other. In fact, according to Kearney, "the schematizing-synthetising-fictionalizing impulses of narrative imagination run the risk of reducing otherness to selfhood (individual or collective)", if not correctly controlled and directed (1995, 186). Opening up new worlds through narrative or literary imagination is the quintessence of moral reasoning, as it provides the possibility of detaching from reality, seeing things from different angles, and experiencing events that restore our agency. Narrative imagination is connected to the sense of the possible, and can open up radically different ways of representing and forging social and political bonds (see for instance, Meretoja 2015, 2018). To understand how narrative imagination can foster agency in a transformative way, it is crucial to focus on the radical novelty of the worlds it opens up. Narrative imagination, even when it concerns the past, is always open to the future and is deeply rooted in the historicity of experiences and their meanings. When applied to bodily signs of violence, this can include remembering how they were acquired, rejecting victimhood, and chronicling from the perspective of those wounded bodies.

In turn, narrative imagination that opens up ethical issues and moral reasoning comes from human creativity, which always involves humans in search of shared significance with one another. The power of imagination, as the Greek thinker Castoriadis symbolically states, consists of its capability to be radically novel, challenge the status quo, and enable change: "The position of meaningful figures or of figured meaning by radical imagination leans on the being-thus of the subject

as a living being, and is always found (down to an unfathomable point of origin) in a relation of reception/alteration with what had already been represented by and for the psyche" (Castoriadis 2005, 369–370). Imagination and the radical imaginary, to use his words, do not denote (in the sense of reproduce) but connote. This applies to both radical individual imagination and imaginary social significations:

> The imaginary social significations do not exist strictly speaking in the mode of representation; they are of another nature, for which it is of no use to seek an analogy in the other spheres of our experience. Compared to individual imaginary signification, it is infinitely larger than a phantasy [...] and have no precise place of existence [...] They can be grasped only indirectly and obliquely [...]. Imaginary social significations – at any rate, those that are truly primary – *denote* anything at all, and they *connote* just about everything. (143)

According to this view, narrative imagination, when used to represent violence, is not a mere act of reproduction; that is, imagination not only provides images of experiences, but also offers an alternative way of thinking and transforms signs of violence into opportunities to restore agency by refiguring them within a radically different future where they are preserved against oblivion and used as tools for resistance instead of tools of justification and excuse. Narrative imagination, therefore, is not simply a way to reconstruct what happened in order to explain the wounds and tell the story that led to the violence. Rather, and more profoundly, it is a method of continually reiterating the nonsense of evil and violence as fragmenting forces through resistance of images and words that compel signification when faced with an absence of meaning.

It is worth noting that scholarship in narratology has recently shifted its attention to issues of complexity. This is useful here, since the risks of legitimization and justification in narratives are often derived from an oversimplified reading or interpretation of reality. This anti-reductionist approach also applies to narratives that do not surrender to the banalization of evil, which renders it a

quasi-natural fact of life. According to Pier (2017), who transposes various findings from theoretical physics to narratology, complexity involves "nonlinearity", "positive feedback", and "bifurcations". In short, if juxtaposed with narratives of violence, complexity allows for the possibility that people can be freed from the rigidity of pre-determined plots, both in life and narrative. Indeed, "narrative hermeneutics" (Meretoja 2018) fosters the possibility of reading the events of a story, or of history, in radically new ways, giving rise to new courses of action that include the necessity for narratives of violence. It awakens consciences in order that violence not be perpetrated or repeated by means of preserving the story to which it can be traced.

"Critical fabulation" is the second issue at hand (Hartman 2008, 11). This kind of narration departs from "reproductive slavery" (Angelucci 2013, 39) and frees the imagination from domination through the cause of emancipation. Fiction becomes synonymous with subversion rather than mystification. Hartman's definition of "critical fabulation" unites the imagination of something absent with the complexity and divergence of accounts and the potential function of narratives as tools of emancipation. Fabulation undergoes, and is directed by, criticism; this explains its use when traces are absent, as a result of incomplete archives, whose deficiencies are used as an instrument of power. Rather than resigning, using critical imagination can be a powerful way to resist.[6] Hartman states:

> The intention here isn't anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather laboring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration. (Hartman 2008, 11)

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6 To Hartman, these subjects are not theoretically but practically unrepresentable because of the conformation of archives.

This quotation is critical, since it firmly grasps the failures of representation as reproduction, which would be impossible in the absence of traces in the archives. At the same time, it recognizes that narration does not mean resignation, but rather giving voice through narrative imagination, in order to achieve a higher-order adherence to the past, and the power that comes from that. In other words, narrative imagination is a creative means, after having recognized the absence of the traces of violence, to imagining, hypothesizing, and representing something hitherto unrepresentable due to the lack of testimonies. This allows for a higher-order faithfulness to the past; while it may be impossible to be completely faithful to the way the events occurred, it is possible to be faithful to the legacy of suffering, one which, oblivion notwithstanding, exists and thereby deserves a place within the cultural imagination of contemporary society.

Hartman continues:

> The method guiding this writing practice is best described as critical fabulation. 'Fabula' denotes the basic elements of a story, the building blocks of narrative [...] By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done. (11–12)

Free imagination, when applied to pain and suffering, can promote collective reflection as well as personal and public agency. It can also denounce violence and redirect our attention towards the signs that it produces and whose traces must be kept. Of course, Hartman is rather careful to delineate the limits of the author, but this by no means implies disposing of memories and not attempting to find ways to express suffering. In the above-quoted article, Hartman argues that "The loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them. So it is tempting to fill in the gaps and to provide closure where there is none. To fabricate a witness to a death not much noticed" (8). Free-

dom of imagination is not aimed at producing falsification; rather, it is a tool to enact "the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration" (11).

This section aimed to illuminate ways of narrating signs of violence that do not compose or justify it; the authors I referred to above are unified in their plea for an imagination that is free from causal mechanisms that tend to legitimize or, conversely, resign to transience. Imagination can be a powerful ally to fabulation that is critical, ethical, emancipative, and faithful to the complexity of which reality is only a part.

In Lieu of a Conclusion: The Representation of Violence as the Basis for Restoring Agency, Not for Celebrating Pain and Victimhood

Representing violence through narrative can be the first step toward emancipation only if victimization and victimary logics are kept at a distance, and if the irreversibility of the violence is viewed as a promise to preserve the traces, rather than taken as an excuse not to represent and, by extension, forget. Returning once again to the reflections of Saidiya Hartman, we maintain that the aim of narrating violence is to free people from violence and imagine other ways of inhabiting social bonds. The creativity that stems from this narrative gesture also intends to grasp freedom as "waywardness",[7] whereby each narrative becomes a challenge to the predetermined oblivion upon which archives are structured:

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[7] It is worth specifying that there is a crucial difference between the approach that Hartman embraces in "Venus in Two Acts" and in *Wayward Lives*: in the former, she is very critical of the possibility of retrieving the lost stories, while in the latter she imagines the "possible developments" of the lives of the women. Nonetheless, it seems to me that in the development of her thought there is a *fil rouge*, since even the impossibility of retrieving stories does not result in the impossibility of narrating, in silence, or in resignation to injustice.

> Waywardness is a practice of possibility at a time when all roads, except the ones created by *smashing out*, are foreclosed. It obeys no rules and abides no authorities. It is unrepentant. It traffics in occult visions of other worlds and dreams of a different kind of life. Waywardness is an ongoing exploration of *what might be*; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dictated, where there is little room to breathe, when you have been sentenced to a life of servitude, when the house of bondage looms in whatever direction you move. It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive. (Hartman 2019, 228)

Representations of signs of violence, both visual and narrative, must keep us safe from "horrorism"[8] and victimization, which, far from empowering people, relegate them to positions of impotence. Victimization and pity can halt action and create "addiction", instead of fostering agency. Narratives should not intensify a sense of paralysing victimization, but, rather, foster agency and responsiveness, and overturn the condition of vulnerability, as a starting point for emancipation. The (narrative) representation should enable the victim to be an individual, not merely a subject identifiable as someone who has endured violence, which Girard refers to as the "victimary mechanism" and "sacrificial logic" (see Girard 1978). Rather than domesticating the absurdity of violence, narrative representation should counteract against such violence. The issues concerning victimization and victimary mechanisms are closely linked to vulnerability, since the latter is often used as a cage to which victims are confined without the possibility of being anything else. Freeing people from the cage of imposed vulnerability is possible through narratives that, instead of celebrating pain as a moral sacrifice that defines victims as

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8   This expression comes from Adriana Cavarero's book *Horrorism. Naming Contemporary Violence* (2011). According to Cavarero, contemporary violence can be traced to horror, not simply to terror. Horror is felt when faced with the risk of disintegration that comes from exposure and helplessness to vulnerability. Cavarero also comments on the excess of images of horror that risks anesthetizing people to violence and transforming the helpless victim into an unresponsive, inert subject.

good *qua* victims, aim at promoting agency and preserving another kind of vulnerability: that which is attributable to traces of violence.

Far from being easy to protect and preserve, this vulnerability is far and away the most highly exposed to the falsification of memories, and cannot be repaired unquestionably, that is, overcome. One fragile and precarious way to take care of it is to continue narrating and, by doing so, to elude interpretations of victimhood as a cage or, on the contrary, as martyrdom, but rather as something that could have been avoided and should not happen again. Narratives can catalyze resistance and transform the *status quo*. In those rare, precious cases which are not to be taken for granted whenever we narrate, preservation of the bodily and mental traces of violence through narration means using them as tools that facilitate the rise, and eventual prevalence, of justice.

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Macha's Body in Pain

Anna Walker

Macha is known as both the goddess of battle and of fertility, for without death there can be no rebirth. There has been much discussion by scholars of Celtic literature about the authenticity of the various Machas (Toner 2010). The story I have composed here, *Macha's Body in Pain* (Walker 2020), story, performance[1] and event, is a combination of: first, Macha, one of a trio of war-goddesses, a manifestation of the deity who gave her name to *Eamhain Mhacha*, capital of the ancient province of Ulster; and second, Macha, the wife of Cruinniuc who outruns the horses of the king of Ulster while she is heavily pregnant. My version of this myth was compiled from translations of the *Book of Leinster Tain* (1160), translated by Thomas Kinsella (1969),[2] Philip Freeman's book, *Celtic Mythology* (2017), and WM Hennessey's sacred text, *The Ancient Irish Goddess of War*, from 1870.[3] The intention here is not to analyse the authenticity of the myth of Macha or explore its historical accuracy.[4] Rather, it is to conceive of her as a liminal space to research, through Macha's experiences, how bodies narrate the violence of trauma that is so deeply embedded within us.

Briefly, the myth is about the call to war – a frenzy whipped up by the Morrígna[5] – and the healing after the battle. Macha splits from

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[1] https://vimeo.com/471871358
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Leinster
[3] https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/aigw/index.htm
[4] For a full analysis, see Toner 2010.
[5] The Morrígan, Morrígu, Morrígna or "Phantom Queen," was a fearsome Celtic deity, an Irish goddess of death, battle, and fertility. Sometimes depicted as one goddess, or as a trio of sisters, able to transform to and from crow. The sisters were also the keepers of fate and purveyors of prophecy.

her two-sisters to become a wife and a mother, only to be subjected to humiliation and abuse at the thoughtlessness of her husband. At which point, she curses the men who subjugated and ridiculed her, before dying in childbirth and transforming once more back to crow and goddess.[6]

Macha's Body in Pain (Walker 2020) was told virtually in July 2020. Both the myth and its telling function as a narrative to give voice to pain and address the lineage of trauma, providing a framework to discuss a complexity of issues, from the trauma of war and domestic violence to loss and forms of grieving. It reveals new material expressions and understandings on the ways the body, society, knowledge systems and space-time interact and transform. Through the use of storytelling, I am considering alternative methods of narrating the future in line with David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan's (2019) concept of *future fictioning*. Stories are a way of making sense of the world and the traumatic events that happen to us and around us, by organising information in a way that can be meaningful and memorable. The myths and archetypes embedded within stories, some thousands of years old, allow for a return to familiar and shared beliefs, a sense of home coming. They support us to revisit a deeper part of ourselves to reimagine and instigate transformation. My intention, as an artist, storyteller and researcher is to reawaken that wisdom, knowledge and curiosity where metamorphosing and shapeshifting bodies become objects of knowledge or, in Donna Haraway's words, "material-semiotic generative nodes" (1991, 201). Boundaries dematerialise and re-materialise in social interactions, constantly shifting from within, producing moving relational enquiries and practices, where meaning is a multi-faceted process of sensing and listening, the semiotic and the material.

Celtic and Nordic myths and legends are replete with shapeshifters, where identities dissolve and reform, ideologies are dismantled,

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6 A full transcript of the story accompanies this essay.

and worlds destroyed and reinvented. *We*, storyteller and audience, must attune ourselves to this world in order to follow the narrative. Anthropologist Kathleen Stewart describes the value of attuning oneself to the forms and forces unfolding in scenes and encounters. Anthropological objects, she writes, are to be "walked around, approached from precise angles," or seen as states of being, "emergent, or suspended in potentiality" (2019, 1). The objects here are the myths and legends we have inherited; they take place within a world outside of reality, a generative, compositional worlding, which turns "potentiality into a threshold to the real" (Stewart 2011, 4). It is through this "atmospheric attunement" (4) that we are alerted to the sense that something serious is happening. With this in mind, the telling of the *Macha's Body in Pain* (Walker 2020) is an invitation into the in-between space, to consider the *affect* of trauma, while allowing a discussion of alternative realities. For as Donna Haraway suggests in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), in the midst of spiralling ecological disaster and the ensuing suffering, we need to find new ways to reconfigure our relationship to the earth and to each other (38).

To further understand the role the body plays in *Macha's Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry's seminal book, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), is an invaluable ontological and phenomenological resource to revisit and reframe the relationship between the body, trauma and violence. In her book, Scarry posits an unmaking of the world through silencing, and annihilating the other through the inhumanity of war and torture, rather than the making (or *re-making*) of the world through understanding, imagining and voicing pain, creative acts and cultural reckonings. Scarry navigates an understanding of the difficulty of expressing physical pain, the political issues that arise from that difficulty, and the verbal and material expressions of pain. Her book is a storying of violence on individual and multiple bodies, while attending to the wounds of the world.

Fig 1. Artwork by Anna Walker, 2000

Macha's Body in Pain (Walker 2020) is a storying of violence done by and to an individual body, one which transforms through, and because of, the violence. My telling of Macha's story begins with *keening* (the anglicised term for *caoineadh*, while the keening woman is *bean chaointe*), heralding the beginning of an important and ritualised rite of passage. Keening is an honouring of space through an outpouring of grief, ranging from heartfelt expressions of sorrow emitted as songs, chants or moans. Traditionally carried out by women, keening is a form of divine madness, a crying of and for the dead, both for the individual and the community. It is both a voicing of the pain of loss, and an invitation to cross the threshold into the space where life becomes death. Thus begins the journey, alerting me, the storyteller, and the listener to where the story may be heading. Together, we proceed through this gateway to the edge of the borderland and into the story of my mother keening, my memories, my imagination, stepping into a larger cultural memory, with

universally shared themes. We arrive at a battlefield, of no fixed time or place, "and that is where my story begins" (Walker 2020), hinting that everything that came before this statement is true, and that the story that is to proceed is also 'my' story, blurring the boundaries between the imaginary and the real.

That all of this takes place virtually, in the midst of pandemic lockdowns, brings another complex and interesting phenomenological perspective to translating and understanding *Macha's Body in Pain*. The myth lends itself to a virtual telling, as the goddess Macha battles with what it means to be embodied. The tale begins in my living room before entering a shared communal virtual space and the listener's living spaces; participants gather from all around the world to be present. Here, the virtual space exemplifies the place of crossover and of transformation existing both within us and outside of us. The screen is perceived as both an extension of the body and a separation from it, where my physical gesticulations are a means of transferring not just a story and language but culture, ideology, and history, in Brian Massumi's words, movements that are "atypical expressions":

> […] the very nature of the content-expression articulation itself: how bodies and words couple and struggle; whether or in what circumstances they might pass into each other, as in expression's performative passing into content; how their mutual immanence must be lived, experienced most directly and intensely. (2002, xxiii)

As the storyteller, I am received as a disembodied virtual being, a voice out of time. My voice as it moves through the digital space, in its dislocated state, highlights Steven Connor's notion of the "vocalic body", and the "convivial deathliness of the half-lives emitted and reanimated by recording technology", evoking a kind of quasi-corporeality (2012, 5). My voice leaves me to be absorbed by the technology and spills into another space thousands of miles away. This disconnect of the voice from the body creates a vocal space outside of the self. I have no control over how I am heard or received. My voice is a divorced entity existing in its own right. As Connor explains:

> Voices do not merely drift apart from their origins [...] nor are they inadvertently lost: they are ripped or wrested. A voice without a body suggests some prior act of mutilation: for every unbodied voice, it seems, there is always some more-or-less violently muted body. (2012, 1)

The online platform I use to communicate through is Zoom. The listener is muted. Rectangles with disembodied heads and shoulders, or names across the centre of the rectangle flicker before me. And as I catch a glimpse of myself telling, I am not just separated from me, I am in dialogue with myself, reverberating in a loop of performative transformation, which only seems to "summon [...] the phantasm of some originating body, effect convening cause" (Connor 2012, 1). I experience the hearing of my voice, as a part of me that has been disembodied but still retains life as a way of "being me in my going out from myself" (Connor 2000, 4). My image is interrupted a couple of times by a viewer who loses connection and then re-joins unmuted. It separates my voice further from my body, as a man in a mask on a train replaces me, for brief moments in time.[7]

In *Immaterial Bodies* (2012), Lisa Blackman writes about the paradoxical voice that is neither entirely inside nor outside, self or other, material or immaterial: "It is neither fully defined by matter nor completely beyond it" (138). It is matter in circulation. Listening, also, is not confined to the interior. We are both inside and outside in the process of listening. To paraphrase Mark Peter Wright (2017), there is a listening out for information and a listening in to "ethico-spectral becomings" (25). Listening brings us into proximity with the other and vice versa. It connects us and establishes the interconnected space of relation. The sound of my words, layered with my breath breaches the divide and connects me to the other, to the breath and memory of the other who listens. Wright goes on to describe a *Noisy Nonself,* "a chimeric figuration" and asks, "what are the consequences of hearing our own monsters?" (2017, 25). He further suggests:

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7   I edited out the interruptions for the final video.

> The Noisy-Nonself is "more-than-reflexive." It is a diffractive agent that brings about categorical crisis and horrific self-revelation. Listening out for the Noisy-Nonself is an apophenic search riddled with uncanny hauntings that "arrive to recount a lesson in the complexity of temporality. History is a tangle, full of loops and doublings-back." (35)

As I bring Macha into being, into the performative space, she stirs a memory deep within, a memory barely conscious. As the story emerges, so does she with all her *Noisy Nonself*. As I tell her story, I am both within her and outside of her, witnessing and being. She has travelled across time, thousands of years to be present in the space of telling and as she emerges, I am also aware of me, of the inner monster within, as old as time itself, and I feel I have no choice but to listen. It is in and through the listening that her story moves into the liminal space created between the one who performs and those who receive.

There is an art to listening, and *Macha's Body in Pain* with all its complexities, demands a listening that goes beyond hearing *just* words. Listening well is to be actively engaged with everything outside, locating oneself in the surrounding space, while being aware of sounds' penetration, the transition across the porous borders of being, and the affective response as the sounds and the voice move through the body. Listening can be hurtful, but it can also be a blessed relief: the story of Macha is both. Hundreds of years old, the myth carries universal themes, it is a story that exists both inside and outside of us, and to make sense of it all, we must choose to step into Stewart's space of "atmospheric attunement" (2019, 1). Macha endures long after the story has been told, she hovers in the in-between place of storyteller and audience before returning to the realm of myth that existed before this event (*Macha's Body in Pain*) began and which continues to exist long after the event is over. We are all bodies that have evolved from a lineage of myths, stories, and legends. The original stories were told and shared thousands of years before people could read or write, so it is impossible to pin down

exactly how old these stories are. Jack Zipes has written extensively on the evolution of story:

> Genres of storytelling and tale types originated from the application of storytelling and stories to social as well as biological life – that is, daily occurrences. Those tales that became relevant for families, clans, tribes, villages, and cities were retained through memory and passed on as traditional verbalisations of actions and behaviours. (2012, 8)

Stories create change to our thoughts and feelings, and therefore our actions. They affect our physical and mental makeup on many levels, enabling us to invent and reinvent our lives, and though linked to one another, stories are also distinct in how they function personally and socially. For Arthur Frank (2010), "Stories work with people, for people, and always stories work on people, affecting what people are able to see as real, as possible, and as worth doing or best avoided" (3).

It has been well documented how language-processing parts of the brain are activated through being told stories, and how the brain releases oxytocin and/or triggers mirror neurons as we identify with the characters of the stories (Conde et al. 2019). But what I am interested in through telling *Macha's Body in Pain* is how story triggers memories that we don't know we have. "What is 'remembered' in the body is well remembered", Scarry writes (1985, 109), as she describes a body that is politicised before it is born, a political body that is both a cultural imposition originating from without as well as from within:

> But it [the presence of a learned culture] must at least in part be seen as originating in the body, attributed to the refusal of the body to disown its own early circumstances, its mute and often beautiful insistence on absorbing into its rhythms and postures the signs that it inhabits a particular space at a particular time. (1985, 109)

Scarry expands to the concept of the body's self-immunizing antibody system as a memory system: "the body, having once encountered certain foreign bodies, will the next time recognize, remember, and release its own defenses" (1985, 110). DNA, RNA mechanisms,

and genetic conditions are all passed down through generations, like family heirlooms. But that is not all that is passed down, trauma too can be inherited. So, resurrecting this ancient evolutionary legacy through Macha's story, is to stir a memory of a traumatic time that existed thousands of years before we were born. Macha comes forth to remind us how and why bodies transform. It is through the art of listening that we not only hear how it was in the words, but we embody it through attuning to the words and remembering *who* we were before we were made physical.

I navigate my way through *Macha's Body in Pain*, fully cognizant of the legacy of the ancient stories, the trauma that has preceded my birth and my cultural inheritance. As I describe the trauma of the battlefield and continue to the language of the dead and the arrival of the Morrígna, I am also aware of the monstrous inheritance that resides within me, and the relationship between my body and the political forces that I navigate. To paraphrase Scarry, my body is not apolitical, neither does it become political when faced with the concept of war, rather the political is a stored memory, and as I re-count the story of Macha's body transforming from crow to goddess, through war, pain, and healing, I follow her journey on a somatic level, one not wholly conscious. The Celtic deities I bring to life – led by Morigan, *The Phantom Queen*, a title acknowledging her relationship with the dead, followed closely behind by her sisters, Babd and Macha – each fulfil contradictory roles, stirring up the rage of war in different ways and healing the community and the landscape thereafter. This contradiction points to a conflict embedded within us all, a complexity that becomes part of an interstitial space where traumatic remembering exists on the borders of exposure and concealment. I would argue that this paradoxical place both relies on and benefits from fiction to reveal its existence, in this case *Macha's Body in Pain*, and that it is through listening *well* that storyteller and audience consent to engage in a shared traumatic remembering, and, at the very least, to recognizing Scarry's embodied principles that are

just beyond the grasp of consciousness (1985, 110). This unspoken (or spoken) agreement then begs the question, what are the repercussions for the consenting body, and thereafter its responsibility?

For example, as I tell the story, I wonder where *Anna* has gone. I am not so immersed in the activity that I lose myself completely, but there are moments where I watch myself in the corner of the screen feeding my gestures back to me. I am still a body, my voice could not exist without it, but I am altered. It is as Slavoj Žižek writes,

> When we see ourselves "from outside," from this impossible point, the traumatic feature is not that I am objectivised, reduced to an external object for the gaze, but, rather, that *it is my gaze itself which is objectivised*, which observes me from the outside, which, precisely, means that my gaze is no longer mine, that it is stolen from me. (2009, xiv)

My voice leaves me and is lost in transmission, telephonically fed back in delays, and now my random gestures leave my form never to be recaptured. They are out there, moving across the corner of a computer screen, recorded for posterity, forming part of an indelible archive of data. Žižek argues that there is no escape from this disembodiment, that direct contact with reality is impossible because we cannot get away from the sensory transformations created by the media. He believes the only way to cope with this situation is to embody, to internalise and anthropomorphise media objects (2009, xiv), an interesting hypothesis especially for these lockdown times, where most of our communication is happening across screens and online platforms.

There is a parallel, *in Macha's Body in Pain*, as the goddess separates from her sisters to seek a more embodied existence. This, she creates with the widower Cruinniuc, interrupting his grieving for the loss of his wife, and quickly installing herself into his home as his lover, and as a mother to his two boys, eventually to become pregnant with twins. It is a display of carnality through which the living can reaffirm their continued bodily existence, a means of separating from death and from those lost to war. It is a signal that life goes on,

albeit temporarily, for traumatic events are known for their repetitive nature. As Laplanche and Pontalis (2006) note, it always takes two traumas to make a trauma, where one event is only registered through another in deferred action, which is occasioned by events and situations or by experiences that allow the subject to gain access to a new level of meaning (Walker 2017, 152; Laplanche and Pontalis 2006, 112). Repetition happens when the original traumatic event is too overwhelming to be *real*. The event is experienced as a missed encounter and can only be represented through its recurrence. Freud discusses "repetition compulsion" as the subconscious desire to return to the traumatic moment, to integrate what was beyond *belief* at the time of *impact* into memory schemas. As he writes: "Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defence measure" (1920, 301).

The story of *Macha's Body in Pain* re-enacts Freud's notion of a trauma that is not yet complete, where this war and its deaths are not fully healed, and perhaps may never be healed. So, we wait for what comes next: how does this traumatic narrative continue? In war, cultural traumas operate alongside psychological trauma in a unified process of social construction of individual experiences of trauma. Macha's *body* functions on multiple levels of representing trauma: as deity, she creates trauma through her instigation of violence; as a woman she holds the trauma of the generations that have come before her deep in her womb – intergenerational trauma (Yehuda and Lehrner 2018); and finally, in her later subjugation at the hands of men, she becomes the traumatised. It is a repetition of trauma played out in its various guises and, as the story indicates, one that is passed down for at least nine-generations as she curses the Ulster men for their cruelty. The further away in time that the trauma is from its original site, the more embedded it becomes. It is as if the trauma takes up residence, becomes a way of being in the world without consciousness. To explain further, sociologist and

philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1977) writes of the passing down of cultural "manners" from one generation to the next: these are principles that are so embodied to be beyond consciousness, and therefore untouchable by voluntary or deliberate transformation. He writes:

> [...] nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and therefore, more precious, than the values given body, made body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden pedagogy, capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as "stand up straight" or "don't hold your knife in your left hand." (Bourdieu 1977, 94)

Embedded within these hidden social requirements lurks something far more sinister that points to something even more traumatic, the ghostly remnants of narratives from the past, that predispose us, as individuals and communities, to how we perceive our world and how we move through it.

Macha's race with the King of Ireland's horses moves the story back into its mythical origins. Her speed is that of goddess, of a super being from another world as she races neck to neck with his horses, their breath on her skin. The King lashes out at his horses, and for fun whips her too. Here we glimpse a world of abuse done to women and animals by men. Horses are beaten to win and women are treated as subservient, forced to fight for their power. It is a world ruptured by violence and male-dominated power. In her book *Gender Violence in Ecofeminist Perspective* (2020), sociologist Gwen Hunnicutt draws links between our relationship to nature, gender, patriarchy, and violence. She discusses the ideological and structural entanglements between humans and the environment to create a deeper understanding of gender violence. White male dominance is a worldly dominance over all living beings. In our post-industrial society, the role of women and animals is to serve and be served up. For Lori Gruen it is a constructed connection that has been created by the patriarchy as a means of oppression (1994, 61). *Macha's Body in Pain* is an intervention to disrupt the narrative of male

dominance. Her story moves beyond the physical edges of the body – both mine and the listeners. It crosses boundaries, moves through the ambiguity of the virtual and disturbs. Welcoming Macha into the performative space is to embrace her goddess skills of transformation, thereby shifting our sense of reality to address the monsters who perpetrate the violence and the monstrous within each of us. Through the storying of Macha, we create a space for change. She travels from goddess to crow, to woman, to birthing stillborn twins, before finally succumbing to death and transforming back again to crow and goddess, where the cycle begins once more. In her final throes, she cries out in pain at the agony of childbirth and the terrible emotional grief of the loss of her children while the Ulster men look on. Her giving birth to stillborn twins, a boy and a girl, can be read in multiple ways – as a symbol of what is still to be born in each of us, or as a warning you can't be goddess and human without consequences, for to be human is to experience pain, suffering and death.

Though we will never feel Macha's pain, through listening *well* we can sense it, and *know* its intensity. Scarry describes the intensity of pain as world-destroying (29). Pain causes the disintegration of signification; merging with the pain, the body is outside of the world. It is an *unworlding*. The tortured body, swallowed up by the pain, unable to articulate it, fades into the background, and the world and all we know of it fades too. For Scarry, speech, language and narrative embody, or give shape to, the self: "Through [their] ability to project words and sounds out into the environment, a human being inhabits, humanises, and makes [their] own space much larger than that occupied by the body alone" (Scarry 2017, 49). *Macha's Body in Pain* brings pain and suffering into view while keeping it at a distance. As the story crosses from my body into the virtual, it becomes articulate as a narrative and inarticulate as an experience. The virtual lends itself to this *other* understanding of pain, outside of the body. One could argue it is therefore outside of signification – a place of ambiguity, where to make sense of something we have to return to the

place of origin, i.e. our bodies, and so the virtual is the forging of an experience into something other than itself, into an interpretation.

Macha's story speaks beyond the everyday experience to speculate on the impossible, the metamorphoses of goddess to crow, to human, and through death back to goddess. It is a story that navigates the unknown to find what is bigger than oneself. Paraphrasing feminist theorist Karen Barad, it is a specific material configuration of the world's becoming, an immanent enfolding of matter with meaning: it is "agential realism," whereby "knowing, thinking, measuring, theorizing, and observing are material practices of intra-acting within and as part of the world" (Barad 2007, 90).

Within the enfolding of matter with meaning the potential exists for something new, something different, something other. It is the *other* that is of interest, it is the *other* that *Macha's Body in Pain* brings to the forefront. Through the action of summoning Macha, the crow-goddess, I am researching, in Haraway's words, methods of staying with the trouble of living and dying together on a damaged earth. Macha qualifies as *SF* – "a sign for science fiction, speculative feminism, science fantasy, speculative fabulation […] and also, string figures" (Haraway 2016a, 10). The virtual platform through which her story is transferred requires the listener to embrace a form of knowledge beyond knowing in order to question what it means to be human; it is *affective attunement*. It is a world, Haraway proposes, that functions beyond the boundaries so that we recognise our space and place in the world – our situated/ness. For Haraway "situation is never self-evident, never simply concrete [but] always critical" (1994, 6), and always in the making. Bodies in the making are never separate from their apparatuses of bodily production. In Macha, it is this production from goddess, to crow, to human that allows for multiple realities to be considered, and *re*-considered, and for storyteller and listener to entertain the notion that we can embody qualities of being animal and goddess. Indeed, the story of Macha asks us to consider Haraway's commitment to living and dying with

response-ability, where mourning is intrinsic to cultivating and understanding this entangled shared living. "Outside the dubious privileges of human exceptionalism, thinking people must learn to grieve-with" (2016a, 38) because we are all part of this undoing. And she continues, "[w]ithout sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think" (39). Macha, and the keening that frames her story begins to answer what it is to grieve. Whether goddess or monster, Macha's otherness brings a necessary complexity to understanding ourselves globally, culturally and individually. She is a speaker from the dead, one who seeks and releases the energies of the "past, present, and future Chthulucene, with its myriad tentacles of opportunistic, dangerous, and generative sympoiesis" (2016b, 168). Through the telling of Macha, a chain of transmission and a shared store of narratives that connects generations is activated.[8] Through her cycle of transformation, the narrative reminds us of our ability to recover, change, and adapt despite the trauma. Storytelling depends upon, incites even, persistent acts of reinterpretation in new contexts. Telling gives voice to the universality of some narratives, including those of violence, and within these narratives there exists the potential to disturb buried memories of the past while cultivating conditions for *ongoingness*.[9] It is important to carry these stories as a practice across boundaries, virtual or otherwise, to share not only the trauma, but also strength, courage and perseverance. As Zipes writes:

> To know who we are, where we are, and where we are going, we need sto-
> ries and storytellers to attain self-consciousness – but not just ordinary

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[8] Haraway's creation of the term "Chthulucene," from the title of her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), is derived from the Greek: "chthon," meaning "earth" and all things that dwell in or under the earth. It encapsulates the concept of *reworlding* as a process of composting, or living on, through the chthonic powers as we collect up the waste of the Anthropocene and the "exterminism" of the Capitalocene (Haraway 2016b).

[9] *Ongoingness:* the continuation and adaptation of narratives, across time and space.

stories and storytellers. We need storytellers who are consciousness raisers and stories that are consciousness raising. Otherwise, living in the world is but an illusion and delusion. (2012, 7)

Macha teaches us what it is to be female in all her many guises. From crow, to goddess, mother, wife and athlete. She points a way through the journey of life, its trials and traumas, and gives us permission to be angry, to weep, to care and to love. Her story encapsulates what it means to be both human and other, i.e., goddess, animal, and in so doing raises and expands awareness beyond the parameters of the ordinary to consider and/or reconsider what it means to be human at this time of existence. The mound where she raced, gave birth, and then died upon, is called *Eamhain Mhacha* (the twins of Macha) (see fig. 2 below). Macha and her story is a 40-metre mound that is now part of the landscape and the history of Ireland, blurring the boundaries between history and myth, questioning what is real and what is illusory, what is of this world and what is not.

Fig 2. Walters, Mark. 2018. Image of Navan Fort. Copyright Mark Walters and David Hymans. (Permission granted by David Hymans at https://www.airchaeology.org/2018/09/25/navan-fort/)

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Macha's Body in Pain

Written and Performed by Anna Walker.

https://vimeo.com/471871358

Keening

Noun: keening, the action of wailing in grief for a dead person. "The keening of grieving mothers tore into an otherwise silent afternoon", an eerie wailing sound, "the keening of the cold wind."

Adjective: keening

Prolonged and high-pitched, typically in a way that expresses grief or sorrow.

Keening, a wailing sound.

My grandmother taught my mother how to weep. And she would drag us to funerals of complete strangers, and she would stand in the front pew and she would plant her crooked feet, and these unearthly sounds would move up and through her body and up through the rafters. Her eyes were always closed, and her cheeks were wet with tears. And she believed that she was guiding the soul of the deceased from this world to the next.

And that is where my story begins.

The battlefield lay strewn with the dying, the wounded and the dead. The earth was sodden with the red of war. Widows keened as they moved through the bodies of their loved ones. Overhead the sky darkened with thousands of clicking clacking cawing crows, and out of the blackness three forms took shape their long wings turning into cloaks as black as thunder.

The Morrigna, the war weavers, sisters as one.

The first to alight was Morrigan, also known as the Phantom Queen. Phantom because no one quite knew why or how the battle had begun. She placed her gnarled foot between the bodies, pulled back her hood to reveal a harrowed wizened face, heavy with the sorrows of thousands dead. She sniffed the air, spied a widow and moved towards her. The second to alight was Babd, not quite yet human. She puckered up her lips and cawed into the ear of a widow. And the third, Macha, hovered above. Releasing the enchantments that she had placed on her favourite warriors.

Morrigan pulled a thread from the widow's hood and split it into three and together the women wove a cloak of healing and peace. Morrigan straddled the bracken river and moved through her body and out through her legs the blood of the dead, turning the waters crimson. She slapped their garments onto her thighs, cleaning them and bringing them back to the purity of whiteness. Babd sucked the juice off from the eyeballs of the heads on steaks and then stripped the bones of all their flesh licking her lips as she fed. And Macha pounded down the earth, where she pressed and where she touched heather grew back, and lavender and shamrocks.

When their work was done, they looked out beyond the horizon, and Badb and Morrigan took flight and the sky emptied of the darkness. Macha remained behind. She shook her head free from her hood, her long dark mane of hair falling down over her shoulders. And then something stirred inside her. Something moved up through her body. Something rippled and she turned on her heels and she began to run, faster and faster and faster. She ran as fast as the wind, up over hill over dale over, up over crag, and crook and cliff, until she reached a high brow on the boarders of Ulster. There, she looked down into the valley and there was a holding. A holding that belonged to the widow of Cruinniuc who was still grieving for

his wife. His two sons hungry from all the sorrow. She made her way down the hillside and knocked at the door. It was the night of the Samhain where anything can happen, where two worlds collide. Cruinniuc opened the door, gazed into her dark eyes looked upon her fair skin, took in her shapely body and her long dark hair and was enchanted.

Not a word was uttered, and she moved into the kitchen and quickly put everything in order. She cleaned and fed the boys and kissed them on their forehead and put them to bed. The whole kitchen smelled of baking it was clean and spotless and the larder was full. And when she had completed her work, she crooked her finger and called Cruinniuc to her. And she led the way, shed her clothes climbed onto the bed, spread her bosoms, spread her thighs and welcomed him into her. She crooned and moaned and gurgled all night long and he knew he had brought her pleasure. And so it continued day in day out. The children began to laugh and giggle as they played. Cruinniuc had a permanent smile on his face. The sheep and other livestock returned to the fold and the crops grew tall and strong. And Macha ran hither and thither and it wasn't long before her body swelled with life. Cruinniuc looked upon her with eyes of love.

Conchobar, the King of Ireland was renowned for his prowess both on and off the battlefield. His pride and joy were his horses, which he would race annually and win all the competitions. He welcomed all to the feast: noble men, jesters, wise men, druids, servants and fools. Cruinniuc was called to attend. He wrapped his arms around Macha in the doorway before he departed and she held him tight and she leaned into him, and whispered into his ear: "please, don't boast about me. Don't reveal who I am for if you do, I will not be able to remain here with you and that will break my heart."

His chest puffed up with pride and defence: "Of course I wouldn't do that to you, why would I do that to us?" And off he set.

The crowd was plentiful as usual. Men jostling and cheering, drinking, brawling and racing. But Cruinniuc, Cruinniuc couldn't help it. He leaned into the man next door, the way his wife had leaned into him and he whispered into his ear: "My wife can outrun any man and any horse." As soon as the words were out, he knew he'd done wrong. It didn't take long. The gossip moved from ear to ear to ear to ear. Until it reached the ears of the King, he hauled Cruinniuc in front of him and shook him. "Are you a braggard or a liar? Prove it!"

A messenger was dispatched to Cruinniuc's house. A knock on the door sent a shudder through Macha, she knew what had happened. She opened the door and protested. No no no. She pointed to the children. She pointed to her belly, but the messenger insisted and said: "But if you don't, if you don't, it will be his head."

Heavy, heavy with the weight of pregnancy she put one foot in front of the other. Dragged herself up onto the cart and prostrated herself in front of the King: "please don't do this", she said. "Please don't do this" she pleaded. "Just wait, wait until I've given birth. Wait! You'll be sorry if you do this. Don't do this." The king scoffed and to add insult to injury he stripped the chariot of all its ornamentation, he knocked the charioteer out of the way and took the reins himself. His horses strained at the bit. She turned and looked at the crowd. They were jeering and stamping and punching the air. She sought out Cruinniuc but couldn't see him, for he was making his way, pushing and shoving through the crowd, but all the men closed in front of him, blocking his way.

They laughed. They jeered. They shouted. They screamed. They ridiculed. She was dragged to the start line. The horses ground their hooves into the earth, marked their territory and then, boom, they were off. Conchobar took his whip slapped the horses behind and they raced ahead. Macha wrapped her arms around her belly, picked

up her legs and began to run, heaving her heaviness before her, moving faster and faster. Until she was abreast of the horses. She shook her head and her hair flared out behind her. Conchobar hit harder and harder. The horses picked up speed. The heat of the horses' nostrils hit Macha on the side of the face and then Conchobar he took his whip and he slapped her behind and the rage moved up inside her. And something stirred, something moved, she began to flap her arms beside her body and her feet left the ground, up, just above the ground she travelled. It was as if she was flying. She strained her neck, her body now weightless moved up and ahead of the horses and she stuck out her head and she stuck out her chest, with tears pouring down her face and she crossed the finish line before the horses and fell onto her knees. And then, her waters broke. A wail took hold of her, agony wracked her body, she arched as the labour pains took hold and as she cried out in pain, the crowds stilled.

She gave birth. She gave birth to twins. Still born.

She looked down upon them and then she climbed up on to her knees, looked out over the silent crowd and barely above a whisper she said: "I curse you Ulster men. I curse you for nine generations. I curse you for shaming me. I curse you for humiliating me. I curse you that on this day, for 5-days and for 4-nights, when you are most needed, most wanted, when you are called to battle, you will all find yourself on your knees in the agony and pain of childbirth. You will find yourselves with tears pouring down your face, weeping and wailing and vulnerable as vulnerable as a woman in childbirth." And with that she lay down on her side. She wrapped herself around her still born children and she died. The only sound that could be heard from the crowd was Cruinniuc's tears.

The sky darkened with thousands of clicking clacking cawing crows. And out of the blackness two figures took form. Their long wings,

their long wings turning into cloaks as dark as thunder. They alighted either side of their sister's body. Barefoot they bared their chests and they beat.

The sounds of keening

They beat and they bowed their heads.

The sounds of keening

They spread their cloaks wide. They gathered up their sister and the twins and they disappeared with the darkness of the crows leaving behind a thick and heavy sky.

The Ulster men now silenced turned and left the field without a murmur.

The mound where she died was called Emain Macha and was the scene of many battles to come. But Macha's curse held. She was true to her word and when the Ulster men were most needed, most called upon to defend their territory, they could be found on their hands and their knees weeping with the agony of pain and labour.

The last time I heard keening was at my father's funeral. My mother stood in the front pew and we were all lined up. She planted her crooked legs and this unearthly sound moved through her body and moved up and beyond the church rafters. Her eyes were closed. Her cheeks were wet with tears and she lifted her hands thus, as she guided and carried my father's soul from this world to the next.

Story told by Anna Walker

Here Is My Archive.
The Place of the Uncanny or Coming to Terms with the Vanishing Self.

Anastassia Kostrioukova

In step with his overarching impulse of deconstruction, Jacques Derrida doubted that there is one stable concept behind the term *archive:* "Have we ever been assured of the homogeneity, of the consistency, of the univocal relationship of any concept to a term or to such a word as "archive"?" he asks in his famous 1994 lecture, *Mal d'archive* (Derrida 1995, 26). Certainly not. No, we cannot state with any certainty what the archive is. Yet, if you were randomly approached on the street and asked to define the term *archive*, it is quite likely that you would describe it as a place where historic documents are preserved; there exists a common conception of the archive as an institutional storage of materials relating to the past designed for a hermeneutic practice by future generations. We are used to conceiving the archive as a place out of which law is made and history is interpreted. But it is also a place where stories are censored. Thus – a place of power and privilege.

The less perceived story of the archive is the story of weakness and fear. The archive is born out of fear – a fear of being forgotten, misinterpreted, exploited, or overthrown. It is constructed by need – a need to be remembered, to remember, and to secure one's presence beyond death. Driven by our weakness, vulnerability, and fragility, the archive produces a shield against the immanent presence of aggression, death and finitude. A towering fortress, a large army, or a strong nuclear weapon might signal the might and wealth of a state or a city, but even more so, they point to experiences of fear and the

subsequent need for protection: the larger the guns, the stronger the insecurity. Similarly, our shared yearning for a *hypomnēma* – a memory apparatus – only points to the constant threat of obliteration under which we and our memories exist. Fragility and fear are on the other side of power's coin. Derrida's term "prosthesis" used to define the *hypomnēma* points to an original impairment, displacement, and loss located at the nucleus of the archive's essence.

The story of the archive then, is also the story of pain, violence, and longing. For if the archive is conceived of as a prosthesis for memory, it is first and foremost about amputation – a cut, a dismembering, an irreplaceable loss. The "prosthesis" is not only an imperfect replacement for the original amputation. It is also a constant reminder of this violence done to your body and the irreversibility of time. The archive puts origin into question. It not only restricts our return to the original lived memory through establishing a one-directional synecdoche (when the viewing of the object is made to represent the whole of the experience of the past); it also puts under scrutiny the very idea of the origin's existence.

In this case, the other story of the archive becomes the story of futility and failure – the archive's inability to preserve wholeness and its impotence to resurrect a lived memory. The past traces, which an archive attempts to inscribe, store, classify and fossilize, are only fragmentary reminders of a once lived time. Therefore, any attempts to genuinely restore these traces into a coherent whole provoke imagination, storytelling, and nostalgia rather than memory.

And thus, the story of the archive, despite its doom and gloom, is also about potentiality, creativity, and fiction. But *not necessarily* a lie: producing fiction in an attempt to trace the ghost of origin does not automatically imply falsifying or fabricating. Rather, perhaps a "romance with one's own fantasy, […] a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life" (Boym 2001, xiii). This observation by Svetlana Boym about nostalgia can speak to Derrida's text on the archive.

For while Derrida etymologically connects the concept of the archive with the place – the *arkhēion* – a home, an address, a domicile, he nonetheless establishes this place *as a relation* rather than a singular delimited space (Derrida 1995, 9). The archive, then, is a correlation of two places – an inside and an outside: "*There is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside*" (Derrida 1995, 14. Emphasis in original). The "outside" has various manifestations in the "geological" construction of the archive. Like a series of concentric circles, various levels of exteriority form a boundary to the inside.

Therefore, the archive is inevitably also a story about dualism and displacement – both temporal and spatial, "real" and illusive. It is then also about a transition, a process, a dynamic rather than a static space. A dynamic between several points – an impulse provoked by various displacements and by our terrifying finitude. It is what happens at the borderline between the inside and outside, or rather in the new forms that appear from the double exposure's overlaps. The archive then, is about liminality – a sphere of ambiguity, new meanings, overlaps, a sphere of no-longer but not-yet. Or rather, a sphere of no-longer with an impulse of not-yet, but a reality of never-to-be.

As long as we don't collapse the *hypomnēma* with the *mnēme,* prosthesis with the amputated limb, and recognize the potentiality of arriving, through a creative path of remembering, at a new knowledge or a re-found knowledge rather than the lived memory or a potentially dangerous restorative nostalgia that disguises itself as "the truth", the archive also becomes a sphere of possibility, creation, and emergence of new forms (Boym 2001, xviii). This potentiality of the archive, however, renders us ethically responsible subjects. For the one with the power to interpret and re-imagine the archive (and therefore, to lay down the law) is at risk of turning fiction into constructed deceptions, creativity into tools of dominance, and potentiality into static dogmatism. But perhaps this is a subject for another paper altogether…

This paper is a second attempt to write about my special place that I call my archive – an apartment in St. Petersburg that still belongs to my family and stays empty all year round, until I revisit it each summer. Perhaps referring to this place as an archive can raise a few eyebrows: a rather strange designation, considering that no conscious effort has been carried out to name, catalogue, classify, and preserve the things found there. In light of this, the things in this archive remain to be things and not objects; they are not fully nameable or chosen to be categorized. Diana Taylor insists that "what makes an object archival is the process whereby it is selected, classified, and presented for analysis" (Taylor 2003, 19). Yet, I insist – after all, as the sole visitor of this place, I hold the nomological power of the Archon – that this place is my archive for reasons that I will discuss below. This second draft is also an attempt to theorize the particularities of a *domestic archive*: what are the unique principles (if any) of its relationship to power, fear, displacement, nostalgia, and futility? Finally, this draft is an attempt to re-read my own writing – to re-archive the archive that I have already instituted by writing the original draft.

It is in the second draft that I hope to explore the creative potentiality of an archive. How would these two texts – one embedded into the other – reveal a new form from the double-exposure? As I reread what I have written several months ago, I felt that those words reflected my inner sense of hopelessness that I experienced somatically and mentally during that time. I have come undone in that writing: I dismembered myself through thinking about remembering. I replaced every part of my body – my hair, my growth spurts, and my inner life – with a prosthesis. I looked at myself as a completely fractured and broken being, to whom her place of comfort and home unraveled nothing but gaps, pieces, specters, or total absence. I envisioned myself as the Prince of LaMancha, tilting at windmills, never reaching that place where myself aligns and accords with the self(ves) of the past. This draft is not an attempt to piece myself together, for that is bordering on the impossible. Rather, this

text is an attempt to build myself out of hopelessness and, in some way, out of the impotency of the previous conclusions. Therefore, I am looking to find sources of potentiality in weakness – and create new forms from the superimposition. How can the archive, as the story of weakness, vulnerability, finitude, pain, failure, violence, displacement, also be a story of pure potentiality and revelation of new forms? Can an archive border on magic?

There exists a place that no one inhabits that is dear to me. Slowly, specs of dust are piling on one another over the eggshell linen tablecloth covering the dining room table, the intricate Persian design of the woolen bedcover, the rows of coarse, hardbound Soviet era collected works of Russian and foreign authors, the golden numbers of Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic editions, and the wooden picture frames hung in a disorderly fashion on the wallpaper's pink tinted floral designs. The dust specks are settling on top of the 50s Zil-Moskva fridge and the large dark wooden kitchen cabinet still containing dozens of jars with home-made raspberry jam. They are forming a thick layer on the embroidered handkerchiefs neatly placed underneath vases of all shapes and sizes with dried flower arrangements that have dulled and greyed under the layers of grime and time.
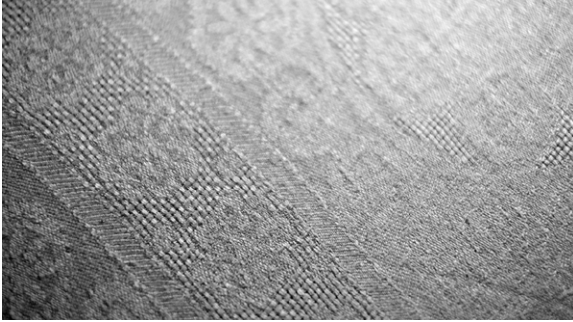
This space is still and silent except for the sounds of traffic rushing past on Bolshaia Pushkarskaia street – one of the main arteries of Petersburg's Petrogradskaia side – and its reverberations in the large windows shaking violently in their old, white, wooden frames.

Here is my archive: a former home, thousands of miles away from where I live now. Not at all an archive in the strict sense – "the storehouse that catalogues the traces of what has been said to consign them to future memory" (Agamben 1999, 143) – but a domestic storehouse of the traces of what has been catalogued unconsciously and unintentionally by the daily life itself, without much thought for posterity.

What is this place and how does it function? While interrogating the arbitrariness of the term "archive", Derrida addresses its etymology and lays down several dynamic laws according to which it operates. In his opening etymological exploration of the archive's Greek roots, the archive is both a place of residence and a place out of which law is made by its privileged guardians – thus carrying within itself both the topological and the nomological functions. But the archive is more than a static place: it is also a dynamic force. Informed by Freud's work on the death drive, Derrida reveals that the archive itself is not necessarily a particular institution nor place, but *rather a relationship*, or a *dynamic* explained by the operations of the psychoanalytic drives and impulses. The archival dynamic is one of simultaneous creation and destruction; the creative force is necessitated in the face of finitude, which is immediately resisted by the infinite destructive force, produced by the omnipresent impulse towards a return to an inorganic state (the death drive). Thus the archive is a process born out of the very same impulse that destroys it. Derrida then, underlines the ambiguity of the notion of the archive; his vacillation between the static and the dynamic concept of the archive opens up several possible interpretations of my archive.

The concept of the archive, Derrida explains, originates not only from the notions of "the original", "the first", "the primitive" or "the commencement", but also from the idea of a place: "first and foremost, an archive is a place, a "*there*": "*There,* we said, and *in this place.* How are we to think of *there?* And this *taking place* or this *having a place,* this *taking the place on has* of the *arkhē*?" (Derrida 1995, 10). Etymologically, "this place" originates from the Greek word *arkheion:* "initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons,* those who commanded"(10). Therefore, the archive in its roots is not simply any place, but a domestic, residential place – "a private house, family house" (10). "It is […] in this *domiciliation,* in this house arrest, that the archive takes place," Derrida continues (10).

How has our contemporary conception of the archive distanced itself so far from the sphere of the household and domesticity? How did it penetrate so deeply into the sphere of the political? Or is this seeming displacement more illusory than it might seem? Perhaps, to underscore the ambiguous nature of these questions, it would be productive to put Derrida's text in conversation with Hannah Arendt's assertion that modern political philosophy of the Western world repeatedly confuses and misreads the interrelationship between the public (political) and the private (domestic) spheres in Ancient Greece. Arendt argues that many thinkers of the modern era have mistakenly sought to perceive the line separating the household and the political of the ancient Greeks as blurred – especially, when the modern age began to see "political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping" (Arendt 1958, 28). Power, hierarchies, dominance, and violence that we associate with the sphere of politics today, Arendt continues, are in fact, pre-political dynamics of the household in Ancient Greece. The household was driven by the need to satisfy various life necessities – a need, which justified the brutal use of power such as violence and slavery among others (31). The private sphere also excluded all possibility of spontaneous action, operating under tight control and surveillance of the male leader, and demarcated a strong boundary from other estates, offering security and protection. This point of view, then, substantiates Derrida's assertion that the archive, which was originally required to be "deposited somewhere, on a stable substrate," found its safety in a domestic space (Derrida 1995, 10).

By contrast, the political realm of the democratic Athens excluded hierarchy and violence and advocated for the use of speech and language:

> To be political, to live in a *polis,* meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence. In Greek self-understanding, to force people by violence, to command

> rather than persuade, were prepolitical ways to deal with people characteristic of life outside the *polis,* of home and family life, where the household head ruled with uncontested, despotic powers. (Arendt 1958, 26–27)

Unlike the modern conception, freedom did not mean justice, but rather independence "from the inequality present in rulership" and movement into "a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed" (Arendt 1958, 33). The satisfaction of necessity in the household allowed for the participation in the political life to those who freed themselves from the practical demands of life.

Therefore, according to Arendt's argument, the modern conception of political practice (one, which often operates on authority, hierarchies, dominance, force, and violence) replaced that of the classical Athens's private realm (or what she refers to as the "prepolitical"); or, in other words, the hierarchical, prepolitical structure of the private realm that justified force and violence for the satisfaction of life's necessities spilled over its boundaries and determined the modern realm of politics in the West. From this perspective, the archive's seeming displacement away from the domestic space into the space of politics and bureaucracy is only illusionary; its contemporary assignation within the realm of the public and the political – with its claim to authority, power, and dominance – continues to operate according to the hegemonic and authoritative structures of Ancient Greek household. So while the topographic particularities have changed (from a household to an institution), the operative structures remained unaltered.

This argument however can be complicated by the fact that the term *arkheion* differs from the traditional term for household in Ancient Greek – *oikos*; for *arkheion* is a household of the *archons* – the powerful, privileged magistrates, who often came from two of the most wealthy property classes in Athens or another *polis* and had the power to lay down the law, which would ultimately affect both the private and the public realms of Greece's life. The *archons* were the

dominating rulers, appointed by birth and wealth in Greece prior to its gradual maturation into democracy. In an attempt to settle the unrest during his archonship, Solon legislated all citizens to be admitted into the field of political decision-making (although that still remains a contested fact). However, the power of the *archons* continued to dominate, because an appointment to the archonship still remained within the power of the top ruling classes, and very few people outside of these classes had the military training needed in order to qualify (Hansen 1991, 52).

This rather lengthy digression shows that Arendt's argument about the clear division between the political and the domestic dynamics of power cannot be so easily accepted. One can argue that, etymologically, the archive – the house of the privileged – originates at *the cross between the private and the public spheres* of Ancient Greece, thus revealing the porousness of the strictly demarcated physical and symbolic boundaries between the household and the *polis*. The *arkheion,* then, challenges Arendt's argument: safety, stability, hierarchy, power, and violence inevitably interweaved with discourse, rhetoric, and persuasion.

This aforementioned set of interweaved characteristics often plays within the political realm of the modern era: where there is hierarchy, power and violence – rhetoric and language play an equivalent role in an attempt to widen the sphere of influence and control over the gradually emerging social sphere. Perhaps in response to this growing influence of the political on the individual and society, the onset of modernity evoked a different conception of home. Home became a utopian haven – a symbol of the romantics and the bourgeoisie: a stable stratum amidst accelerating temporality and mobility, a shelter from social pressures and political violence, and a reservoir of privacy and comfort (Chawala and Homan Jones 2015, xii).

This idyllic vision of home as a place clearly demarcated from the political and social realms was eventually challenged, particularly by

feminist and post-colonial theorists of the 20th century. The sheltering boundaries of a home came undone – the domestic space was acknowledged as a place of potential violence and power dynamics (especially for women and children), as well as a site of estrangement (Chawala and Homan Jones 2015, xiii). The notion of home became increasingly porous; in his metaphoric exploration of the "house" or home of fiction, Homi Bhabha refers to the experience of the outside inside a home as "unhomely": "The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world," which leads to an experience of "incredulous terror" (Bhabha 1992, 141).

This notion of the "unhomely," I would suggest, is a good entry-way into analyzing the formation of my domestic archive and the ways in which I experience it. The porousness of the "unhomely" mirrors the liminal position of *arkheion* – between the life of the *polis* and the household of Ancient Greece (interweaving both rhetoric and power) – and introduces a dynamic between the inside and the outside that Derrida investigates throughout his text. The arrest of the public archive in the household of the *archons* creates a movement towards the inside from the outside (public documents being organized and catalogued within the home of the *archon*), while the nomological power of the archive moves in the opposite direction – outwards. Therefore, the archive involves two dynamics in opposite directions – those of the archive's construction and its hermeneutic practice: the work of an archivist who constructs and of an archaeologist who interprets. The *archon,* then, occupies this dual position.

At the moment, I can claim to be the *archon* of my archive – my domestic space that contains documents and things that I am free to interpret. As I conduct my "archaeological dig," I am the one with the power to lay down the law. I have the power to refer to this place as my archive. By "virtue of a privileged *topology*" my apartment

now feels like a secure storage, for the human hand barely touches it. It is encaved within the sturdy structure of a Stalinist era building and protected by a thick metal door with several locks. I own the keys to these locks. While I have access to act as an archon-archaeologist, the actual gradual construction of the home archive was carried out in the absence of one particular *archon*: the work of the archivist, I argue, was in some measure carried out by the outside world (Bhabha 1992, 9). Conventionally, the archive is the place of dominance which commences and commands – one in which the archivists determine what is left and excluded for posterity, and subsequently, it is a place that has the power to decide on the degrees of significance of objects and documents to preserve for future memory and interpretations of history. But what or who archived my home – an organic space filled with life? I would argue, it was the external life itself – the changing (or not) social, political, ideological, and economic conditions. The *archon*-archivist of a home archive is the world, which penetrated into the porous boundaries of the home and triggered the unsettling terror of the "unhomely."

As I read through the thick 1956 edition of the Dostoevsky volumes that were originally purchased by my great-grandfather, for instance, I notice very faint traces of marginalia on its pages: some sentences have been underlined, some comments made on the margins. It becomes clear to me that another member of my family (most likely my grandmother) carefully went through these markings, erasing every trace of his thinking and fearless mind. In these faint traces, perceptible only in the indents on the pages left by the pressure from the lacquered yellow pencil, I sense the fear and terror of the gazing outside – paranoia penetrating through the thick stone walls of the communal apartment room in an intricate late 19th century building on Kirovsky prospekt, in which my whole family was suffocating during the Soviet regime prior to eventually moving here. In these erased traces, I feel ways in which the danger and the violence of the outside punctured through the bricks

of the home, in which Bhabha's striking "unhomeliness" reveals itself: "in a feverish stillness, the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha 1992, 141). The *heimlich* becoming the *unheimlich.* The uncanny – the uncovering of the familiar, which was supposed to be concealed. The chilling sensation that I experience as I retrace the word *skoro* (soon) next to Dostoevsky's passage in *Brothers Karamazov*: "And were it not for Christ's covenant, they would annihilate one another down to the last two men on earth" (Dostoevsky 2002, 318). Or a comment *ne spas* (didn't save) in response to: "But God will save Russia" (315). As the *archon* of my archive, I take the liberty to outline the erased traces and to put my great-grandfather's initials next to them. History's traumatic invasions into my home are both in these tiny pencil markings and their erasures, and now even in my retracing of them. These miniscule lines of the repressed abyss, split identities, doubles, hauntings... And I, the archaeologist, temporarily become the archivist – I have the power to decide to resurrect these traces, to release them from their erasure and repression and to reconstruct something familiar – the horror-provoking anxiety of the world behind the thick walls that, as a child, I was aware of through snippets of conversations and tired glances of the adults. This power scares me.

The violence of history's invasion into the home... The dynamic of the world forcing itself into the apartment is also evident in all of the things that I admire and observe. Unlike the fast paced Western culture of consumption and "recycling", in former Eastern Europe, the acquisition of objects was a rare occurrence and their recycling – even less frequent. Various things that I examine throughout the space attest to the scarcity of the market. They also become the monuments to the layers of time; in a place where barely anything was thrown away, encapsulated in these rooms are the many layers of various historical time periods of the relatively brief but ferocious system.

A home archive then, has a dual relationship with the outside. It is arranged and composed by its inhabitants and their interrelationship with the outside – the latter often having a powerful and dominating power of commencing and commanding over the people doing their living in this domestic space. It follows that the stability and the privacy of the personal home archive is immediately destabilized when considered against its vulnerability towards the outside. The interrelationship between the inside and the outside challenges the utopian images of intimacy as "transparency, authenticity, and ultimate belonging" (Boym 1998, 499). The penetrating "outside" challenges the binaries of private versus public and reveals that a home archive in its constitution (at least in the context of the Soviet regime) cannot be defined as strictly a private sphere: "intimacy is not solely a private matter; it may be protected, manipulated, or besieged by the state, framed by art, embellished by memory, or estranged by critique" (500).

My attempt to break down these sharp boundaries and to show the porousness of the interrelationship between the inside and the outside, home and the *polis,* would help to reveal that wherever there is power and dominance, there are also vulnerability, weakness, and fear. The temporal "freezing" of the objects in the time when this apartment became uninhabited seemingly thickens the archive's border from the outside. And yet, is that really so? Am I really a powerful archon with the ability to adequately interpret the archive? Are my interpretations, in fact, lost to the futility of the project to reconstruct the past memories?

As already mentioned, in addition to seeing the archive as a domestic place and a place out of which law is made, Derrida also reveals its incessant dynamism produced by the interrelationship between the inside and outside. Seeing the archive as dynamic rather than static allows Derrida to recognize its workings in various realms – from an institution (the inauguration of Freud's museum), the book (Freud's grandfather's gift), the body (circumcision), to the

psyche (Freud's theory of memory). The feverish dynamic provoked by the need to remember and to reconstruct, to produce a memory aid to the ever fleeting and shaky live memory exists, according to Derrida, on every possible level of existence. Therefore, like Dante in his concentric circles of Hell, when considering the archival dynamics and its applications to psychological as well as political structures, I too can traverse the realms from outer to the inner circles in which the archival dynamic is played out on every level. The archaeological practice that can be attempted when considering my archive is one of the multiple layers of exteriorities; for in trying to understand my own relationship to this archive I have to dig through several layers of the "inside/outside" realms that generate the dynamic by means of their friction.

This apartment is currently my safe, stable substrate. But what is the outside? What is the place of fragility and fear? Without this place – this home – my sense of ever being present in St. Petersburg and Russia would disappear. I crave for the materiality of these things to prove to me that *my events* happened here.

Thus, at the outer circle lies the event. Things happened. Many things happened. Many things happened to me here and then they happened in this place no longer. Here is the first trace of the outside. My life events no longer happened in Russia, in St. Petersburg, in Petrogradskaia storona, in my grandmother's apartment. They happened half way across the world. A radical geographic divide. A displacement. From the age of twelve, things never happened *there* to me anymore as a person who lived there, but only as a person who temporarily returned from my "exile". This spatial divide forced me into a heightened mode of archival fever – gripped by an "illness" – to store and to compile traces of live memory – a project doomed to fail from its onset.

From the early days of the Greeks and long into Western philosophic tradition, live memory was associated with imagination and representation and subsequently treated with suspicion. Platonic

eikon – the presence of an absent thing was associated with efface-
ment of true traces and a mismatch between memory image and
a real imprint. From this perspective (and this is something that I
perhaps can be thankful for), I engaged in a romance with fantasy
about my city and my home. Nostalgia, no matter how illusive, until
now allows me to be enamored with re-membrance of my city. The
city's walls that I revisit, the streets which I walked when I was a
child, the facades of the 19th century capital, the rivers, canals, and
bridges – all form an archive, in which my footsteps are embedded.
Yet, it is my playground of imagination and nostalgia. Nothing more.
These memory images metamorphose with each and every return; a
dynamic double exposure.

  The return to the particular nucleus of my life in the city is the
next realm of the set of concentric circles. Here is my archive. Every
year, around the time when the sun barely sets and the streets of the
city are still lingering on to the fragrance of the hackberry trees in
bloom, I return to this calm space for several weeks. Each time, I
begin my stay by carefully wiping off the settled dust. I lovingly lift
the various knickknacks, envelop them with a cloth, rub them gently,
placing them back in the same position as they have been left over a
decade ago. Like a haunted archeologist, I remove the layers of dust
signaling the temporal paradox in which these things exist. They are
outside of the "homogenous, empty time" (Anderson 2006, 26); and
yet they are enveloped in the layers of dust that materially embody
the gradual and continuous passing of time. By removing the dust,
I deny these things an existence in time guided by clocks and cal-
endars. But they have already resisted. Each clock on the walls and
on the bookshelves stands still – no ticking. In my very desire to
reinstall them to a previous state of life, lies the very impossibility of
this endeavor. The things do not belong here and now because they
are orphaned. For they do not belong to me, but once belonged to
the me who is no longer and my loved ones long gone. In fact, they
exist in a vacuum. Dead, paused, unused.
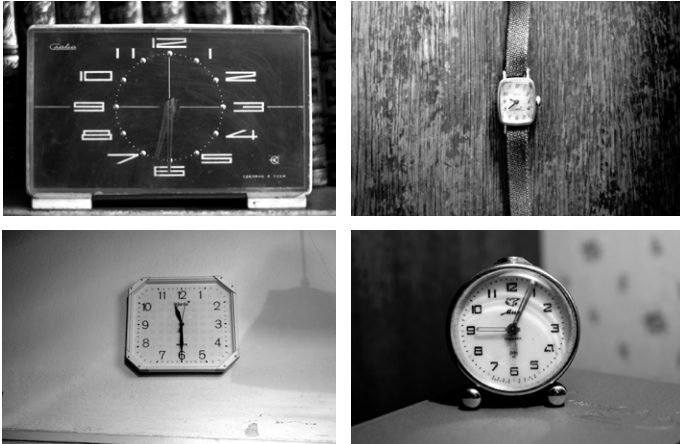
But by stripping them of dust, I remove the illusionary material trace of the passed time. The removal of dust feels like a gradual return to the origin – the things shine as they have while this apartment was inhabited by a lively family of several generations. And with it, a feeling of a return to the comfort and joys of the time long gone. Here is the perfect illustration of the pleasure principle – a psychic process towards gaining pleasure (Freud 2016, 7). Looking at and living among the things that signal comfort feels pleasurable and calming. It is an experience that is "the dominant tendency of mental life and perhaps nervous life in general" – reduction and elimination of internal tensions due to stimuli (Freud 2011, 92). Thus, the pleasure comes from the feeling of harmony; I am hidden away from daily tensions of the present, feeling as if I am protected by the perfect unity of the calm space. As I wipe off the dust, the thought of shifting or moving the arrangements of objects as they have been left scares me. As if the traces of my past life embedded in this arrangement would be lost forever. Here the revelation of my weakness, the fragile status of the memories and its traces of my life in Russia. The thick walls give off an illusionary sense of the stable substrate.

Here is my archive – a site of natural consignation that "aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or secret which could separate, or partition, in an absolute manner" (Derrida 1995, 10). Not a dustbin of history. All the materials here are relevant to the place of origin. No decision of what should be held on to or what is important is asked. The penetrating world has done its archival job. There is no assessment of value; everything stays. It has to. Otherwise, the wishful unified harmony of this memorial, "in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration," would be harmed.

Here – a small interjection. As I wrote the original text several months ago, I knew that in reality, the window frames in the apartment have been long replaced by the new plastic, sound-resistant frames. They did not shake violently, nor can you hear much traffic anymore, as I described in the opening paragraph. What drove me to write these lines, in full knowledge of the truth? Where did my mind wander? It refused to stay within the realm of knowledge, and instead wandered to the past, superimposing my memory with the present, pointing to my desire to return as far back as I can remember, to cling on to the sounds and the visuals that have been imprinted in me. The past resisted the "now". In this crack, in this revelation of my romance with fantasy and myth, my moment of inspiration guided me to choose a "lie" instead of truth. Why? Perhaps, because the "truth" stood in the way of the archive's consignation – the new windows are an intruder into the ideal configuration of the apartment (Derrida 1995, 3). The "lie" points to the romance with the whole, in which the nostalgic longing manifests itself in mythmaking.

This wishful desire to preserve the "whole" of my family's origin is the main reason why this apartment is still here. To disassemble it and to sell it seems somehow a crime, a violation of the family's history that my mother – the matriarch of my family – is unable to com-

mit. Even to her – the one who always criticized my grandmother for making these rather tacky dried flower arrangements – they are now somehow sacred and filled with meaning and essential to the unity. The assessment of value of these things, or rather, its reassessment, happened in retrospect – as a result of a person's painful absence. The value of the trace has escalated with death and leaving... This increase in the value of these things once again points to my family's experience of the fragility of the presence of our past. To reject this archive would be to deny ourselves the last remaining proof of a former life the absence of which aches within each one us.

Yet, there is something haunting lingering underneath the pleasures of returning to this seeming unity. I hear the drum of Clarice Spector's narrative in *The Hour of the Star*: each time that my suspicion interrupts the pleasure... Boom, boom. For I repeatedly uncover the past which has never been present, while hoping to uncover anamnesis – a living memory. As I write this, my readings of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Derrida's *Archive Fever* deconstruct the pleasure in my nostalgic and naïve longing to return to the origins. In light of Derrida's consideration of Freudian theory as a theory not only of memory but of an archive, I am involved in

a paradoxical dynamic of the death drive: the feeling of finitude and death of living memory drive me to construct the very archive that is already always effaced, fractured, and violated.

My exegesis of my archive – an imprint of an imprint – will inevitably lead to fictitious constructs, a collage... it is a memory aid, a *hypomnēma*. The wishful trust in the archive that would allow me to relive the true memories of the past is undermined by my repetitive return to the archive, which everywhere leaves traces of death. Boom, boom... Like Austerlitz in Sebald's novel, I break through the thick walls of the repressed memories, only to find myself encaged by the very inability to return to the origin and hostaged by a repetition compulsion to confront and to incite the shattering of the archive.

Beneath the pleasure from repeatedly returning to the place that I consider my origin, my obsessive desire to uncover it from the dust of time, and the powerful longing to experience the space I once lived in its totality lies the death drive – the goal of returning to "an original state that the living being has left at some time, and toward which it strives to return through all the detours of evolution" (Freud 2011, 77).

For despite the feeling of unity, I am always confronted by the fragment, and subsequently, traces of death as the negative of the fragment. The objects in this apartment that are so dear to me are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that compose a whole – the remaining witness to my childhood joys. When the pieces of a puzzle are placed together, however, the cracks still remain visible. I am conscious of that. The ragged lines that obscure the final representation of the puzzle explicitly attest to the unity's very fragmentary nature. Perhaps, the puzzle points to the indivisible nature of the pleasure principle and the death drive. In the pieces themselves lies the pleasure principle – the overwhelming satisfaction and joy of beholding these things.

In the cracks lies the death drive – the reminder of absence and traces of my own multiple deaths. Boom, boom... Here is my archive. Of a life interrupted by a geographical displacement... Or of several lives interrupted? Or so the archive frighteningly reveals.

On the door frame leading into the larger room, you can see fading traces of my adolescent growth spurts. Marked in blue pen, little lines are carved into the wood with a date next to them: 03. 12. 1995, 01. 04. 1996; 06. 12. 1997, and so on until early September 1998. The traces of singular fleeting moments. The record of my presence which fills me with joy. But where was I between 3rd of March 1995 and 1st of April 1996? I am not there… and neither is my trace. The gap in the dates only points to my absence, to my being as temporarily existing and then ceasing to exist.

And, come to think of it, even the imprinted dates themselves point to the absence of the original referent. The other me at the age of twelve who boarded the flight to Toronto was shorter than I am now, although not very much. She had roughly the same length of hair as I do now, but it was different hair then. How many haircuts… how many inches of hair has grown, was chopped off, only to grow out again. The hair I have now does not belong to the person in 1998. The cells in all of my body have been renewed. My skin has shed billions of epidermal cells and regenerated endlessly. *I am not I.*
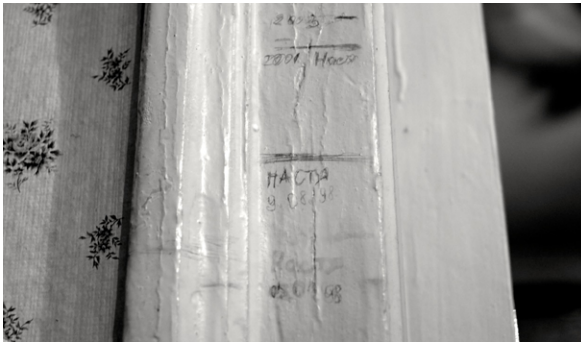
In his work *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004), Paul Ricoeur asserts that the philosophical tradition of memory "tends to favor the egological side of mnemonic experience" (3) – the idea that memory

is fundamentally self reflexive: in the act of remembering, I remember myself. I am skeptical of this notion in light of the traces of my multiple deaths – the fragments attest to my presence that I can never recover. The absence of the fragments produces the same result. It seems that I cannot answer affirmatively to Socrates' question in *Theaetetus:* "Can a man who has learned something not know this thing when he is remembering?" (Plato, quoted in Ricoeur 2004, 8). The traces and the absence of traces in my archive remind me that I do not know the object of my memory – I do not know the person(s) whose height was imprinted on the doorframe. Furthermore, I have even less access to the person(s) whose trace is missing entirely from it. Thus, my archive estranges me from myself(ves). Only the form remained – my bones, my flesh, my organs – and even then, it has been deformed, metamorphosed, regenerated.

The return of memories, as imperfect as they are, points to the split of my consciousness. As I wander around the apartment, what I recall are sentiments and sensory experiences – the events that were experienced from the inside of my body: the excited anticipation of my mother coming to pick me up to spend the weekend with me, the loud noise of the television set – a sign of my great-grandmother's receding hearing, the taste of my grandmother's soups… The things in my archive also bring back visual recollections of those who surrounded me at the time of my childhood – those whom I have seen through the eyes of a child. My great-grandmother, wearing a striped knitted white and green sweater with mismatched buttons that hangs in the closet, (perhaps why I like stripes so much?), sitting in an old armchair in the kitchen, reading *Izvestiia.* My grandmother reading out loud to me. It is this lamp that was turned on every evening. Jules Verne? A collection of foreign fairytales? A golden tome of Japanese tales, the brothers Grimm, and so on… She would read slowly and for a long time, often slowing down and falling asleep mid sentence.

However, the material traces in the apartment also produce memory images of myself as an object. Here is the bed on which

I slept. Here are the toys with which I played. Here are the books that I read. I must have stood right next to this doorframe several times as my grandmother marked my next sudden growth spurt. My recollection borders on pure imagination – I gaze at my self as if from a position of "the other" – an outsider who objectifies the "me" of the past from the current position of my consciousness in time and space. For I cannot embody that body...

What does it mean to remember oneself? Perhaps literally to "re-member" oneself: to put the body back together. But instead of limbs, I am made up of prostheses: the past "I" is but a ghost resurrected by the objects and their relation to the past "I" that surround me. Thus, the archive does not just trigger the doubling of subjectivity and exposures; it triggers the resurgence of infinite amount of manifestations of me both from within and without my consciousness – all figments of my imagination – a double exposure of the specters of the past and my wandering mind.

The layers of dust that I so carefully remove upon my arrival are not as thick as they would have been when this place was occupied by my family. In the past, billions of shed dead skin cells and pieces of fallen hair were included in the mix of dust, and if it wasn't for the weekly cleaning, much more plentiful layers of dust would accumulate and testify to the constant regeneration of human bodies and the passing of time. This thought leads me to consider Derrida's assertion that the inscription of inscription opens up an archaeological abyss – that it "leaves the trace of an incision *right on* the skin: more than on skin at more than one age. [...] Each layer seems to gape slightly, as the lips of a wound, permitting glimpses of the abyssal possibility of another depth destined for archaeological excavation" (Derrida 1995, 19).

To connect the literal with the figurative, we shed the epidermal cells of our body every 30–40 days (Saladin 2007, 133). Thus, almost every month we are recomposed of newly generated cells and the traces of the old cells are found only in the dust specs around us. Therefore, most imprints on the skin will be lost forever – transfigured

into billions of dust particles and sent off on a perpetual journey. This suggests that not all of the inscriptions on the skin necessarily form an archaeological abyss, but rather metamorphose and rupture into billions of tiny particles. The skin's marks are forever lost not due to disappearance but due to their metamorphosis:

> This is what Dust is about; this is what dust *is:* what it means and what it is. It is not about rubbish, nor about the discarded; it is not about a surplus, left over from something else: *it is not about Waste.* Indeed, Dust is the opposite thing to Waste, or at least, the opposite principle to Waste. It is about circularity, the impossibility of things disappearing, or going away, or being gone. Nothing *can be* destroyed. (Steedman 2001, 164)

The traces then, never fully disappear but are re-arranged and rendered unrecognizable. Yet, to think that they still exist… parts of my skin and hair from decades ago as a dust bunny in someone else's home.

For a trace to remain on our body proper it has to cut deep. It has to be an injury, a shock, a deformation: scars, tattoos, and circumcision. They are all traces of a severe violence enforced on a body. A circumcision – a violent removal of a part belonging to you; thus, a repression, a censorship. A scar – a mark of a deep injury – a cut – unable to heal. A tattoo – a painful, violent incision and confinement of ink underneath the regenerative layers of skin. Thus, can the external trace – an imprint of an imprint – be sensed only if in its very constitution it is a trace procured from extreme violence? Thus, a trauma? Their presence attests to the missing parts, to the absence of the healthy skin cells that would naturally shed, to the absence of parts of the body proper… an amputation.

How much have the experiences that I faced as an immigrant abroad wounded me and irrevocably transformed me? My life, gone astray, sideways… This archive then is the scar, the tattoo, the circumcision on my body of a violence done to me by the loss of a home. As I write these words, as I inscribe them on a page, I too produce a trace of this violence.

Does this violence imposed on the body border on pathology? The desire to remember, to archive, to imprint, as Derrida argues, forms an exterior space within the psyche itself. It points to the psyche's confrontation with finitude of the live memory of the event and with the demand for a *hypomnēma* – the prosthesis for memory.

> Taking into account the multiplicity of regions in the psychic apparatus, it also integrates the necessity, inside the *psyche* itself, of a certain outside, that is to say also with the hypothesis of an *internal* substrate, surface, or space without which there is neither consignation, registration, or impression nor suppression, censorship, or repression, it prepares the idea of a psychic archive distinct from spontaneous memory, of a *hypomnēsis* distinct from *mnēme* and from *anamnēsis*: the institution, in sum, of a *prosthesis of the inside*.[...] The theory of psychoanalysis, then, becomes a theory of the archive and not only a theory of memory. (Derrida 1995, 18)

The presence of *hypomnēma,* driven by the paradoxical, eternal archive fever, places our psyche in constant tension and anxious confrontation with finitude and violence.

Thus, my hungry return to the apartment is only a secondary (?) layer of exteriority. My hunger to remember, to uncover the origin, is first and foremost a relationship between my unconscious recognition of the finitude of memory and the subsequent archival fever to store, preserve, and record my memories deep within my psyche. This is perhaps the nucleus of my concentric circles paradigm. The apartment and the traces within are rather the imprint of an imprint – the secondary prosthesis, which in itself also carries various relationships to exteriority. The dusty things within are the material manifestation of the imprints in my memory.

Christian Boltanski writes that to ensure oneself of never dying, one has to set out on a "big collective" effort of "searching, studying, classifying" in order to resist the shameful experience of death (Merewether 2006, 25). In Ilya Kabakov's work, the man who never threw anything away insisted on being able to comprise a single uninterrupted fabric of an entire life (43). On the contrary, the

markings on the doorframe bear witness to my multiple deaths and the destruction of the archive's consignation.

The Romantics and philosophers like Heiddeger and Bachelard had an idyllic vision of home, which was "not just as a physical location, but also a space of imagination. It is projected and framed as a space that offers freedom and control, creativity and regeneration, and intimacy and closeness. Such a home is generative because it can survive the material loss by being imagined and poetically excavated" (Chawala and Holman Jones, xiii). While the mythmaking continues even as I write this work, it is obvious that fiction and creativity are insufficient to fully excavate my home in St. Petersburg. Rather, the creativity involved in this writing is a medicine against a total despair in the face of recognizing that this home is forever lost. But the need for medicine from the onset assumes an injury on a body; medicine, like Plato's *pharmakon*, Derrida claims, can be both therapeutic and poisonous, beneficent and maleficent (Derrida 1981, 98). This calm and silent space is like a prosthesis, which aids you but which also carries in its very fabric the reminder of the original amputation, of absence, and of irrecoverable past: the people who have long gone, the time long gone, the "I" lost to displacement, the multiple "I" lost to the absence of a trace. Here, I experience the "uncanny," – a revelation that I repressed and concealed from my own self – that I will never be able to return to my utopian garden, to my paradise lost, to the comforting wholeness of my home. My archive, then, is "unhomely," evoking an unsettling sense of disorientation, terror, and doubling. Yet, the moment that I leave this space, I spend a year impatiently waiting to return… and the eternal drive to return to the illusionary origin persists.

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* This text was written several years ago. Since 24.02.2022, it has become impossible and unthinkable for me to return to St. Petersburg. The apartment's doors are shut tight. It stays a silent witness to the passing of dark times. The dust specks keep piling.

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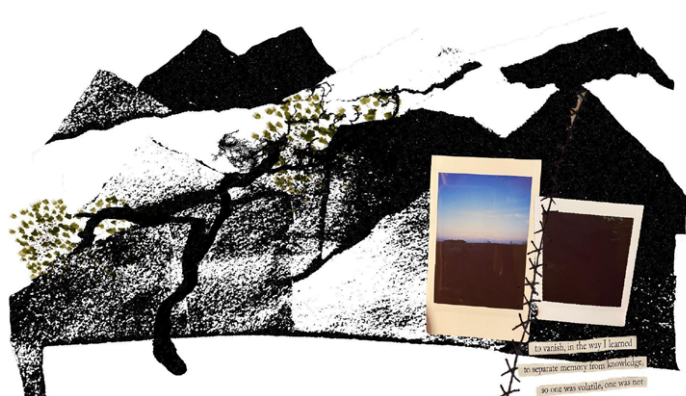
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Witnessing [With] Each Other:
The Screams that Do Not Speak

Abigail Fields and Eden Almasude

We ask that you spend some time with our Sensetrack before
reading this piece. The Sensetrack exists at www.sensingviolence.
wordpress.com in some iterations, and also as fragments that we
encourage you to engage with, play with, juxtapose, and
experience at your own pace, through your own combinations
and constellations. This is ever-evolving work that sustains us.
We will keep coming back to it and we hope to share this space
of reckoning, exploration, and creation with you.

to vanish, in the way I learned
to separate memory from knowledge
so one was volatile, one was not

Dans mon nouveau lit qui sentait le D.D.T. je passai ma main
sur tout mon corps à la recherche de quelque chose qui
rappelât un être humain, quelque chose qui pût me ressem-
bler pour me tenir compagnie et m'aimer comme un frère.
(Mechakra 2000, 52)

In my new bed that smelled of D.D.T. I passed my hand over my
entire body in search of something that recalled a human being,
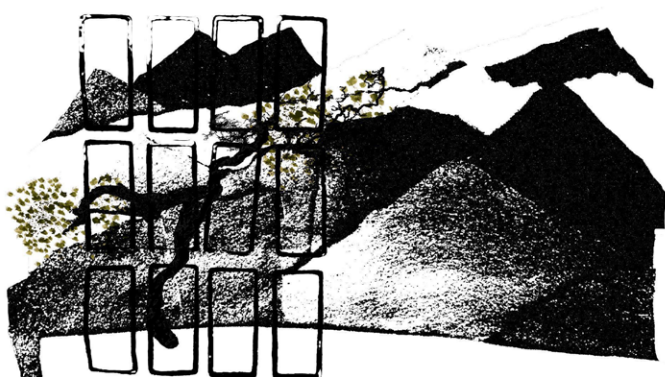something that might look like me to keep me company and
love me like a brother.[1]

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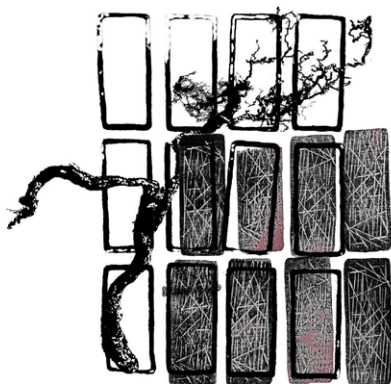
[1] All English translations of *La Grotte éclatée* are by Abigail Fields.

Je dis à mon fils un dôme où se reposent les cigognes que tu aimais, toi, l'analphabète au grand coeur, toi, le fellah qui baptisas de ton sang la terre de mon pays pour que tes enfants, hier déshérités, aujourd'hui la reconnaissent, toi, le fellah devenu terre par amour de la terre, par amour du crève-la-faim qui te sillonnera pour que le blé ne meure. (Mechakra 2000, 146)

I say to my son a dome where the storks that you loved rest, you, the illiterate with a big heart, you the fellah that baptized with your blood the soil of my country so that your children, yesterday disinherited, today recognize it, you the fellah become soil for love of the soil, for love of the down-and-out that roam you so that the wheat does not die.

How does one travel from text to artly (?) critical (?) otherness, and why? For whom have we created these multi-dimensional landscapes and of what? To what end and from what seed?

We sat down to read *La Grotte éclatée* (1972)*,* the first novel by the Tamazight Algerian author Yamina Mechakra, in the spring of 2020. As individuals and in collective community (with each other, with our valued professor, Jill Jarvis, with Yamina Mechakra's spectre both in text and in spirit, with the recovered voices of those silenced by government, academia, and other agents of History both in and outside of Algeria), we have undertaken work in the form of traditional academic publication, artwork, live readings, participatory workshops, and translation. And yet we do not tire of the text, returning to it time and again to learn more, think more, read more, to inhabit the many mansions of the novel, exploring spaces left uncovered in previous readings.[2] An act of continual cracking open.[3]

This is in part because it is complicated: there is much to crack open, many turning, diverging, overlapping paths to follow. The text centers on the experience of a nameless 19-year-old medic, working for the National Liberation Front (FLN) against the French in the Algerian War of Independence.[4] The first half of

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[2] This language, "the many mansions of the novel," is inspired by Gayatri Spivak's writing on translation, in which she warns the English translator against the risk of razing the "many mansions, and many levels" of the source language, through an appropriative or uninformed translative practice (Spivak 2005).

[3] In our notion of cracking open the text, in search of resonance more than solutions, we read alongside Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, especially their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980).

[4] French occupation of Algeria began on July 5, 1830 and continued until Algeria won its independence in 1962. The Invasion of Algiers in 1830, led by Charles X, resulted in a long-term "pacification" campaign, undertaken by the French military. In 1848, the French government imposed (European)

the narrative follows the narrator and her comrades (mostly men) as they hide in caves in the Aurès mountains. The narrator tends to wounded soldiers and, in some cases, civilians, while also caring for a small child caught up in the trauma of war time. This first section of the text, visceral in its testimony of war, violence, and trauma, is intercut with the memories that the narrator collects ("harvests," to use Mechakra's language) from soldiers, rendering the novel witness not only to war, but to the quotidian horrors of colonialism. There is devastation here, to be sure, but there is also warmth, solidarity, and love – romantic, familial, militant – as the narrator meets a lover and gives birth to a child in the midst of the threats and damage (both physical and psychological) of war.

The second part of the text is set off by a napalm attack to the cave in which the narrator took refuge, a bombing executed by the French army. The narrator wakes up in a Tunisian hospital, critically wounded, as she comes to grips with the losses incurred in this attack. The text after this rupture is best described as a tailspin, as the narrator – and thus the reader as well – remains unsure what is real and what is hallucination. The instability of memory after trauma extends to the very

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socio-geographical order on Algerian land, dividing the country into *départements* that bureaucratically divided Indigenous peoples and families. The long colonization of Algeria also included the relocation of many French citizens, known as *pieds-noirs,* to Algeria; France thus acted as a settler colonial society, imposing its culture, population, and practices (familial, social, agricultural, industrial, etc.) on those living in the confines of French Algeria. The Algerian War of Independence began on November 1, 1954, when members of the Front de Libération National (FLN) carried out a series of attacks on French forces. The war, lasting just under 12 years, took place in several arenas, both within major cities, and in the countryside, where FLN fighters and French soldiers maneuvered mountain cave systems (like the one in which the narrator of *La Grotte éclatée* finds herself).

existence of her prior experiences – *tout inventé*. A negation. The narrator's child – or, at least a spectre of him – stays with her, although it is unclear if he is severely injured or indeed dead, existing only as a figment of the imagination. This second movement is a meditation on trauma and memory, as the narrator attempts to piece together her shattered life and to give testimony to a world that seems not to remember nor care about the realities and (personal) histories of war – one that is happier to continue on without this reckoning.

How do you read a text like this? What do you do with it? The questions we have asked ourselves over the past months; the texts that led to what we call a "sensetrack," a multi-media, multi-sensory endeavor in experimental, embodied criticism – that is, reading, *feeling* a text beyond the limits of our intellectual(isms), in the visceral strata of our bodies and our consciousness. In the project, we offer a creative reflection on *La Grotte éclatée*, bearing witness to the memory that Mechakra works painstakingly to hold, to reconstruct, and responding to it. Through sonic and visual renderings, meant to be experienced in no certain order or combination, we shift between genre, volume, text, language, and accent, reflecting the painful and often violent mélange of North African experiences. The tracks echo elements of memory itself: they are fragmentary, somatic, and even fictional. Memories – like people, like archives – are continually stored, retrieved, re-worked, "disappeared," and repressed. The visuals combine text with designs, mostly handmade using plant material, textiles, ink printing and paint, stitching together the vegetal, mineral, human in a (para)textual ecology.

Disappeared – we choose this word with intention. Thousands of individuals deemed as threatening to the state, along with their families and loved ones, were disappeared

by the Algerian government following the War for Independence and the Algerian Civil War. In September of 1999, then-President Abdelaziz Bouteflika said of the disappeared: "The disappeared? They are not in my pocket! [...] The past is dead!" (Osman 2021). Disappearing – an active verb and not a blameless or victimless happenstance – is intrinsically tied to the notion of remembering (or rather, forgetting). Such a reflection encourages us to understand memories and archives as equally vulnerable to disappearance and equally deserving of the justice for which Osman advocates. This project, while rooted in the experiences and voices of colonized people, is also linked to the colonial landscape of the United States, from which we write, and it is only a step toward the need for large-scale recognition of obscured memory. However, we hope that this might encourage a more extensive engagement with the memories lost to History – French, Algerian, American – so that we might work collectively to do justice to lives and voices lost to state violence, imperialism and other forms of oppression.

In the pages that follow, we will do little to further explain *how* the project was developed. Instead, we meditate on the sensetrack project as a response to a call to action received from *La Grotte éclatée* and Yamina Mechakra. As in many other moments, we are guided in this by the novel:

– De ce cri-là on ne parle pas. Il est inconnu des caïds intellectuels qui, pour une poignée de francs, montent sur les tribunes, miment la lutte des peuples pour s'approprier l'Histoire. Que savent-ils de cette mère violée sous le regard de ses enfants déshérités ? (Mechakra 2000, 35)

– Of this scream they do not speak. It is unknown to bigshot intellectuals who, for a handful of francs, take to their

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platforms, mime the peoples' struggle, all to appropriate History. What do they know of this mother raped under the eyes of her deprived children?

Several Mechakra scholars have already made note of the author's interest in history and, more specifically, what is lost in the narrativization of the past. As Jill Jarvis notes, Mechakra's work acts to decolonize memory and "[make] of literature a site for mourning deaths that have no written place in history, and a space to convey unauthorized love for what falls outside the reach of reason or law" (Jarvis 2021, 134). As we have seen, Mechakra lays her cards on the table early on in *La Grotte éclatée*, positioning her narrator and, by extension, her text and the testimony it holds *against* History (with a capital 'H') and those who create or protect it.

This refusal is modeled in the same passage. Just before the sentence quoted above, the work's narrator, tells of the scream of a man that "they offer to the dogs, alive" (Mechakra 2000, 35). This visceral, guttural experience, replete with jagged canine teeth, sharp pain, shredding flesh and flowing blood, nebulous across the ground and across the pages of history, is encapsulated in memory by a single scream. A soundwave evoking images, smells, taste, the warmth of the summer sun is necessarily reduced and abstracted to fit on a page, and still unavailable – even in this distilled form – to the purveyors of academic History.

Even worse is the appropriation and the veritable market for memory – for History – that intellectuals perpetuate. This History is written and published in words, in documents, in books that stand in stark contrast to the flesh, blood, and soil in which the events were originally inscribed. These books, already a (mis)appropriation, then contribute to an exploitation and

erasure of the subaltern voice and body, and along with them, the embodied pain, the blood, the charcoal lines traced on feverish flesh. It is not only skin and blood that are forgotten, but humans, entire populations. Mechakra foresees this – "of this scream, they do not speak", she says – and writes her own sensory, visceral, painful history nonetheless, in what may be read as an act of authorial resistance. By documenting embodied memory and trauma, and by doing so in a sensory epistemological mode likely to be very unsettling to the Western reader, the author challenges imperial history and intellectualism.

We have continued to come back to this sentence – *Of this scream they do not speak* – and to the surrounding narratological commentary to ask what we (a scholar of French literature and a psychiatrist – a sort of piecemeal configuration of Mechakra's own biography and identity, and also persons enmeshed in colonizer and colonized systems) might make of this text. *How can we write about* La Grotte éclatée *and the (hi)story it offers without acting as appropriative forces? How does ink on a page capture devastation, loss, pain, joy, love?* A text that itself asks these questions, it seems, necessitates an alternative response. We have not come to an answer – there is no single answer, nor should there be. Instead, we offer this mode of reading and practicing criticism as one of many possibilities, one of many paths that may intersect, run in parallel, converge or otherwise inform one another. We hope to provide not an end, or a means to an end, but a fissure, a point of productive undoing of our understanding of text and the practice of literary criticism.

We have found our conversations about the text and the theoretical underpinnings that guide our own work and our lives (because what is theory if not emotional, emotive, lived-in,

lived-by?) to be endlessly enriching – a space of bounty. Thus, we choose to present this text as a conversation. We hope that this form will accomplish several things: first, we invite readers to enter into the conversation alongside us, to challenge, to (dis)agree, to add, to reimagine. In so doing, we resist the notion that we must make claims *about* and *to* our areas of study (there is no *our* author; is there such a thing as *our* work?). Ideas are meant to be shared, assembled, and rearranged. And they are deserving of articulation. Mechakra emphasizes the influence of the oral traditions of her Amazigh ancestors and relatives (especially her great-grandmother and other female family members), coffees shared between peasants, and the soil (the "humus") of her Indigenous land on her ways of writing and thinking.[5] In this acknowledgement, she maps the social and environmental constellations that figure in her authorly skies, anchoring her own trajectory in collective experience, all while tracing her individuality through specific relationships. In a similar vein, we recognize that we come to this work (both in the context of this publication and in our work on the Sensetrack) as individuals, with our own baggage, our own reading lists, our own "this makes me think of," our own a priori in differing stages of being shed. Recognizing this, we eschew the critical distance lauded by the Academe, opting for a personal, embodied engagement with the text, and, most importantly, inviting the reader – *any* reader – to do the same, visioning a collective space dependent not on institutional affiliation or official knowledge, but on desire, emotion, and care. We read neither to know or to make ourselves, but to "unknow ourselves, to unhinge, and thus come to know each

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[5] These reflections come out in interviews between the author and Rachid Mokhtari, published in *Yamina Mechakra, Entretiens et lectures* (2015). See especially pp. 52–53, 66–67.

other, intellectually, inside and outside the Academy, as collaborators of collective and generous and capacious stories [...]" (McKittrick 2021, 16).[6] In the next several pages and beyond the stark space of the page, let us revel in our unhingedness and the spaces that the loose screws leave open.

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I have often experienced a sense of fear as I approach *La Grotte éclatée*. Fear that I will ruin, mistreat, mishandle a text that I hold dear, yet am perhaps (or have been) epistemologically/ontologically ill- or under-equipped to "handle." *And why would we want to* handle *a text in the first place ?* From a colonizer nation, working in a space of colonization (the University), and having undoubtedly perpetuated these systems and dynamics, I am attuned to the risk that I, like those "bigshot intellectuals" might appropriate a sentiment, an idea, a trauma. That I might aestheticize, fetischize memory for my own critical ends, even if without realizing – that I might be a purveyor of History. And yet, one cannot write from a place of fear. (For fear here would center the critic and not the author, the text and its many worlds.) I am still working on shedding the fear; you have been instrumental to that.

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6   Although we had not read Katherine McKittrick's *Dear Science and Other Stories* (2021) before working on this project, her mode of understanding academic work aligns very closely with our own vision. As such, it is worth citing her extensively here: "What if we read outside ourselves not *for* ourselves but to actively unknow ourselves, to unhinge, and thus come to know each other, intellectually, inside and outside the Academy, as collaborators of collective and generous and capacious stories? Unknowing ourselves. The unhinging opens up a different conversation about why we do what we do, here, in this place, that despises us – not focusing on reparation of the self, alone, but instead sharing information and stories and resources to build the capacity for social change" (16. Emphasis in original).

One way that I think about doing this is rooting my work and any relationship I have – with a text, with a collaborator, with a piece of my own writing – in gratitude. In this, I am learning from Robin Wall Kimmerer, an ecologist and a Citizen of the Potawatomi Nation (to whom I am endlessly grateful, in the reciprocal relationship of having received her words – and physical text – as a gift):

We are showered every day with gifts, but they are not meant for us to keep. Their life is in their movement, the inhale and the exhale of our shared breath. Our work and our joy is to pass along the gift and to trust that what we put out into the universe will always come back. (Wall Kimmerer 2015, 104)

The first step, then, is to understand that we do not own the text, or our responses to it; it is to reject property in favor of a gift ecology.[7] What happens when the text becomes not something to be studied (mastered) or owned, but a gift to be received and passed along? Criticism is an adornment that may travel with it, fueling its flight, that something that goes into the universe and someday, we hope, comes back to us. This does not mean that a simple change in perspective equates a change in practice or outcome. And it does not erase the risk of extractive criticism (the analytic mining action that seems to leave the text sapped and dull). But it has provided me with a daily practice of gratitude-through-reading to hold and hold myself to that provides me with a different means of engage-

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[7] Ecology replaces economy, which is no longer possible. An ethic of relationality usurps a logic of commodity. Saidiya Hartman also calls narration a gift, something that I discovered after reading Robin Wall Kimmerer and thinking about gift ecologies in my own life and work. I lift this up as a bountiful moment of collective and poetic circularity. See Hartman 2008, 3.

ment not rooted in the systems through which my ancestors and myself have caused harm.[8]

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One of the beautiful experiences in this project is co-creating a space to lean into our fear and other emotions when approaching the text, and this work more broadly. We've asked ourselves other open-ended questions along the way, such as what we might learn about violence, about memory, about fragmentation and rupture, when we feel some element of its viscerality. Similarly, what might we learn of our positionality, of our relationship to text, to academia, when we explore our own hesitations and fears? My insecurity here is around relationship to language, to languages – both Indigenous and colonial – and the uncertainty of access or even 'ownership' on the basis of sociolinguistic structures. I am a North African woman – Amazigh – like the author Mechakra. We both struggle(d) with speaking our own Indigenous language, reverberations from the aftershock of colonial fragmentation. I fear *proximity* to the material rather than a potential disconnect. Falling,

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8 Through the process of completing this work and writing this piece, I have also been called to challenge my own biases and actions rooted in the corporate university. I have experienced a tension between a desire to find nourishment and meaning in the work and a felt need to meet deadlines, publish writing, and otherwise "fit" this work into a system it does not wish to serve or perpetuate – and a system that does not necessarily serve the text itself. This has especially caused me anxiety as I work with you, a person that I care for deeply, am constantly inspired and challenged by, and with whom I want to be in relationship for my life. *How do I undo my own conditioned needs for control?* I am grateful that we have held space to discuss this tension. We are both grateful to Marta-Laura Cenedese, the editor of this collection, for her commitment to care over the corporate demands of the field; she has modeled empathy and intention that are rare in the Academy in the process of revision and publication of this piece.

merging such that I read myself into the text, impose the specificity of my experiences over those of the writer.

But – and – I don't speak French, in part because of forced displacement leading to my family's rupture from the land, and in part because France is not *my* colonizer, but rather Spain. While there is one Indigenous region known as Tamazgha, this land has been carved into different states by external and imperialist forces, separating our people. And so, amidst these fragmentations, I have a distinct preference for my *own* colonial language. For years I have held this question quietly, even with shame. *What does it mean to prefer my own form of colonialism over another?* Yet perhaps this is a natural response. Spanish carries a certain familiarity, an affection, a means of communicating with people in my own region and from other Spanish-colonized areas, opening opportunities for solidarity and resistance. And English, a language of imperialism and now globalization, with which I am most comfortable, I hold no claim to. There is little or no viscerality – it is, for me, a language of practicality, of communication, of thought rather than feeling. My nerves, my spirit, do not tremble and resonate through it.

Reflecting these assertions and doubts, the auditory dimension of the sensetrack includes colonial, Indigenous, and creolized languages and accents, true to the complexity of language politics and affective responses in the region. Specifically, there are passages and song in several dialects of Tamazight (Tanfusit, Tarifict, and Taqbaylit), Darija, French (from the metropole, from Québec, and from North Africa), Spanish (from the Canary Islands and the Rif), and English (from the United States). All of these are part of our mosaic. All of these are part of the destruction, part of the survival, part of the resistance and resilience of Indigenous peoples.

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Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reflected on the linguistic and psychological violence done by the colonial educational system, dissociating the sensibility of a child from their natural and social environment by way of rupture from one's mother tongue.

> Our whole conception of ourselves as a people, individually and collectively, is based on [pictures of the world/lived experience] and images which may or may not correctly correspond to the actual reality of the struggles with nature and nurture which produced them in the first place. But our capacity to confront the world creatively is dependent on how those images correspond or not to that reality, how they distort or clarify the reality of our struggles. Language as culture is thus mediating between me and my own self; between my own self and other selves; between me and nature. (Thiong'o 1986, 15)

To be colonized is to be alienated from both our external surroundings, cut off from educational access, livelihoods, our land, and also internally, from our own psyches, our spirit. This alienation contributes to the commodification, the "thingification" of beings (Césaire 1972, 42) rather than the sacred relationships and interconnectedness of life. Text then becomes an object, to be handled or analyzed or broken down, rather than a gift, another iteration of stories passed down between generations. Split off from mother tongue, from land, I sense the precarity of selfhood after both colonization and displacement. I reach out, grasping – and language being a vessel for communication, I cannot find solid ground.

Decolonization must be praxis, resisting intellectualization and commodification. It is picking up the pieces of a shattered landscape and searching for new pieces as we re-establish a ground to stand on. A place of dynamic stability. Tuning in to

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the vibration, however faint, of my nerves and muscles, search-
ing for voices of my ancestors. They speak neither English nor
French, but a language of the land, of emotion and experience.

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And why should our bodies speak French? Why should our
emotions, the memories that waft in with a familiar, grotesque
smell, flavor themselves with English? I think of Derrida and
his attempt to reckon with a "terror inside languages [...] soft,
discreet or glaring" (Derrida 1996, 23). Reading Glissant,
Derrida comes to understand this terror as a direct result of the
master's (to use his term) appropriation of a language he has no
natural ownership of. That is, language, never a given, never a
necessity, never capable of fully inhabiting or being inhabited by
anyone ("I only have one language. It is not mine," 1) – master
included – becomes the colonizer's tool – and one over which he
has, ironically, no mastery at all: "the first trick" (23).

When I think of this "trick" I think also of Donna Haraway's
ecofeminist notion of the "god trick." Writing not about
language, but from the field of science studies, Haraway thinks
about situated knowledge(s) and objectivity. The objective gaze
is itself situated of course, but effectively obscures this fact, com-
ing to be understood as impartial, neutral a "view from above,
from nowhere" (Haraway 1988, 588) (although above is not
nowhere, we know).[9] The "god trick" renders any other position
(defined by its distinct situation, in contrast with [white-male]
neutrality) invalid; it denies and destabilizes personal voice,

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[9] I have been better able to understand Haraway through the work of Monika
Rogowska-Stangret in her entry entitled "Situated Knowledges" in the *Alma-
nach* created by the scholars contributing to COST Action IS1307 on New
Materialism. See their work at newmaterialism.eu.

subjectivity, emotion, embodiment. Haraway and Derrida depart from different positions, but land in the same place: the master makes universal that which he does not own, but which he appropriates – a hegemonic, monolithic (objective) language, or – *and* – a distanced, analytical (objective) lens.

And isn't this where Mechakra ends up as well? *Of this scream they do not speak*. Because they cannot; they have neither the language nor the empathy – the situatedness – to speak the horror of subjective, personal, visceral pain. Ngũgĩ speaks of the "gentle" psychological violence of the colonial classroom, which imposes not only a particular (often partial or mediated) History, but also a way of understanding the world, of interacting with the very state of aliveness (1986, 9). Audre Lorde speaks to this in her brilliant essay, "Poetry is Not a Luxury":

When we view living in the european [*sic*] mode only as a problem to be solved, we rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious. But as we come into touch with our own ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes.
(Lorde 1984, 26)

Of these screams they do not speak. Because they cannot speak and also because they do not attempt to hear. And in this act of not-hearing, of not-listening, the *idea* is prized over the *feeling,* as History becomes something other than memory – becomes a problem to resolve, a subject to analyze, an entity to understand, adjudicate, and rationalize. And in this rationalization of living, this exile of feeling, History kills experience. It is in this vein

that we understand Saidiya Hartman when she calls the archive "a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history" (Hartman 2008, 2).

La Grotte éclatée seems to propose another way forward, in line with Lorde's call for feeling as a form of knowledge and Hartman's notion of critical fabulation. Indeed, by inviting the reader to blur the lines between the real, the imagined, the lived, the remembered, the read, the seen, the felt, Mechakra "sanctif[ies] the lives of the most dispossessed, banished, and ghosted in modern Algeria's history" (Jarvis 2021, 102). In so doing, she introduces a phenomenological an-archive ready to be held between the reader's ink-stained fingers.[10]

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10 In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995)*,* Derrida describes the theory of the archive as "a theory of this institutionalization, that is to say of the law, of the right which authorizes it" (x). In short, the archive is, at its core, a function of the power that be (and indeed a technology of power, à la Michel Foucault). Understanding this, thinkers, artists, and writers have done much in recent years to theorize and create anarchive(s). In *The Go-To How To Book of Anarchiving* (2016)*,* published by the Senselab in Montreal, Brian Massumi defines the anarchive as "a repertory of traces of collaborative research-creation events. The traces are not inert, but are carriers of potential. They are reactivatable, and their reactivation helps trigger a new event which continues the creative process from which they came, but in a new iteration" (6). Emphasis here is thus not on the past (even if elements of the anarchive are relics of the past) or on any set or imposed order – as is the case in the archive – but rather on the future, as the anarchive represents a "feed-forward mechanism" (6). Artists such as Andrea Wolf and Luis Berríos-Negrón have created and documented anarchives of their own; see Andrea Wolf, "An-Archive," http://an-archive.net/; Luis Berríos-Negrón, *Intransitive Journal,* https://medium.com/intransitive-journal/. More directly relevant to our project, the literary critic Lia Brozgal (2020) constructs a literary and cultural anarchive that registers and contextualizes of the police massacre of Algerian protesters in Paris on October 17, 1961, which has been covered up by the state, but exists in traces of memory, literature, and art. In all of these cases, and in Mechakra, the

We may have an understanding of how this is possible in literary production, and especially within the realm of contemporary fiction, where the lines between genre and experience feel flexible. Our question is how we might continue, and perhaps amplify this practice in our critical engagement with the text. In *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016), Christina Sharpe thinks the disaster, terror, and trauma that affect Blackness through the notion of the wake, which denies a linear historicization and temporality that would risk effacing the rippling out of violence and oppression. Staying in the wake allows – requires – a reckoning with fragmented, concentric, and always interrelated (after)shocks of colonial and white supremacist violence. It also requires that thinking become a practice of care and intention. Although we have not used the same language while we have thought about the project, I think that we are also attempting to stay "in the wake" in the Sensetrack. Rejecting traditional academic norms and modes, denying any temporality or linearity (citations are taken from all over the text and interspersed with words not present in *La Grotte éclatée,* images and patterns repeat, meaning is not assumed), amassing assemblages that shine a light on the text and our experiences (with it and outside of it),[11] and prioritizing affect over aesthetics, we try to care for the text, Mechakra, victims of colonial and state violence, ourselves, and each other without the need for

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anarchive rejects the destructive, restrictive forces of the archive by creating a generative space to explore what has otherwise been lost, and what may come of that recovery.

[11] As Alexander G. Weheliye argues, "assemblages are inherently productive, entering into polyvalent becomings to produce and give expression to previously nonexistent realities" (2014, 46). We use assemblages – which we sometimes also describe as constellations when we speak to each other – to construct (rather than deconstruct) a generative vision of the text that remains radically open. In this way, we engage in our own act of critical fabulation and experimentation.

resolution or answers. We make space for fear, joy, confusion,
tension coming from the past, projecting into the future, and
dive-bombing between the two.

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And how, then, can the subaltern *make* ourselves, our voices, our
stories, be heard? To whom – where – when?

The first visceral reaction I experienced to *La Grotte éclatée* was
through a passage describing the sense of charred flesh. My body
immediately and involuntarily reacted, a wave of nausea and
acid rising through my throat and shivering through my limbs. I
was back in the operating room, a medical student again, taking
in the smell of cauterized flesh filtered through a surgical mask.
She was a doctor too. Mechakra's body, too, stood by operating
tables with her hands inside a living body. Feeling the warmth
of blood and tissue, sensing the rhythm of a beating heart in our
hands, hearing the sickening buzz of a drill or saw. She, too, then
specialized in psychiatry and also struggled with her own mental
health. I still fear over-identifying with Mechakra and thus
becoming too personally entangled in the text and project. As if
there is something wrong with the full rawness and vulnerability
of being human, as if there is something wrong with coming to
this work with my heart open and aching.

Similarly, I fear the result of being a colonized subject living in a
globalized world that has been *psychologically* invaded, a process
accelerated by western education. Fanon writes, "The native
doctor is a Europeanized, westernized doctor… It is not by
accident that in certain colonies the educated native is referred
to as 'having acquired the habits of a master'" (1965, 132). The
process of western medical education is a stripping-down of self,

another step of alienation from community and from land. And yet, it simultaneously provides an opportunity for expansion, for bringing in a breadth of human experience from working with children and families in extreme states, from working in psychiatric institutions of violence, from working with the conscious and unconscious, the verbal and non-verbal. Witnessing incredible suffering and entering into the sacred interval between life and death; sitting with a person to hold the weight of overwhelming pain; choosing to move away from traditional medicine and towards a broader sense of what it means to be a healer and artist in a community. The smell of cauterized flesh that continues to haunt me, that has seeped into my body and is now integrated as part of my being-in-the-world.

Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997) writes on the Eurocentric privileging of sight over other senses, affecting the way we (meaning not only the west, but also those of us from the Global South that have been assimilated into a system of western education) conceive of the world. This extends to even the idea of a world-*view*, rather than, as she proposes, a more inclusive world-sense. Through our experiment in creating sensetracks in response to Mechakra's text, we question what representations of violence and trauma might be rendered more or less legible by way of global power dynamics. What do we miss when we only allow sight to represent our world, our feelings, our memory? Amidst the colonial landscape of linguistic violence, how can we move beyond even language to capture the memory of the body?

Of these screams they do not speak.

Unless, perhaps, we use an entirely different epistemic logic than that espoused by the academy.

Oyěwùmí: Academics have become one of the most effective international hegemonizing forces, producing not homogenous social experiences but a homogeny of hegemonic forces. (1997, 3)

I am not certain we can – or should – take on the epistemological hegemony of western academia. Even if this were an equal battle, it requires throwing an incredible force directed towards, still in the orbit of, Europe and other colonizing nations. We end up spinning around, stuck in the same necrotic well of colonial history and present.

What if, instead, we sidestep the west entirely? *Ignore* the demands of academia to cite the 'great authors,' the pillars of an institution inextricably linked up to colonial violence. *Dismiss* the attempts to invalidate Indigenous histories and epistemologies by insisting on another way. *Refuse* to be caught up in the game of endlessly defending our ways of being, or assimilating into the dominant stream. Instead – drawing wisdom and creativity from our own roots, and moving towards an entirely unknown future. Insisting on our expansive and messy entanglements, leaning into our fears with the excitement of the unknown, welcoming dissonance as a space of generation. Perhaps this is one of many decolonial tricks we can play.

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> I have struggled with (*with* and not *against,* in which struggle is a hopeful space of bounty and possibility) this idea since we saw Chakenetsa Mavhunga speak at Yale in February 2021.[12]

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[12] Mavhunga was invited by the Yale Environmental Humanities Program on February 26, 2021 to give a talk titled "The Global South Cosmologies & Epistemologies Initiative."

Mavhunga spoke of a conference on African cosmologies in which they barred the Western canon: *We could not mention Foucault.* And I thought I had found a solution for the many moments I had wished I could do away with an academic patrimony that does not respect me and those I love most, our bodies, our tears, our wretchedness. And yet, even though I do not wish to apply a Foucauldian framework to Mechakra (indeed, this project is an explicit rejection of the very notion of fixed critical framework), the ghost of Foucault haunts me, inhabiting my education of the French canon, the first theory I knew how to use when I was raw and unfettered.

I spoke with a friend about this and he guided me toward Katherine McKittrick (I am grateful to them both).[13] Writing against Sara Ahmed's (2017) call to stop citing the white male canon, McKittrick notes that we do not unlearn through refusal (the specters remain), suggesting that radical and liberation-minded scholars focus less on *who* we come to know and more on *how* we learn to hold the knowledge we carry – how to use it (2021, 24–25). This has been difficult for me to grapple with. I feel in many ways that it would be easier, less painful, less confusing, if I might *forget* that I was educated with a patriarchical, white supremacist canon. I have felt intimidated by references I do not have, things I have not read – and ashamed of those I do bring to the table. In many cases, this has prompted me to read more, to think more expansively, to crack myself open and question what I find inside. But McKittrick teaches me that this learning

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13 So, while Foucault is not present in the Sensetrack, had I not heard his name (even in the form of a denial), had I not repeated it to my friend, had he not read it and heard it and repeated it, had he not read and heard and repeated Katherine McKittrick's name, and Sylvia Wynter's, I would not know the ways I have come to know. *How do we cite friendships and conversations and long walks and rememberings and forgettings?*

and unlearning, a denial or erasure of the paths I took to get here are not enough: this is just another way to obscure history (both my own and a broader intellectual History that is the very force we try to resist here). We must also be committed to the creation of something new. Or rather, the rigorous and liberatory validation of existing voices currently undermined, disappeared, or otherwise forgotten.

Of these screams they do not speak – is this only because voices do not scream in writing (or, at least, not only that)? That is, if we commit to anarchival practice, to generating generative assemblages, to producing critical work that is somehow *different* – is it enough? We have spent a lot of time thinking about ways to speak to and of and *from* the screams – to understand history through the echoes of life reverberating in fiction, poetry, music and also flowers, charcoal, soil, blood. Hartman asks us to uncover "another mode of writing," in which it is not sufficient to expose trauma – in which we must use the fragments remaining to envision a "*free state*" (2008, 7).[14] How do we envision a free state? Our answer has been through the body, through our own bodies and the act of embodiment. Feeling along with Audre Lorde not only in those hidden internal spaces, but through our flesh and nerves. I think often about the document that we passed back and forth – because this has always been a conversation, an act of sharing – in which we noted passages that gripped us, the sensory experiences that they provoked, the memories that linger. This was the first time that I read so intentionally with my body, with my tongue, with my skin. This has never been an intellectual or academic project – or not only that; it is

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[14] Hartman asks if stories can be reparations, for the writers, the readers, the critics. *If stories can be reparative (and I must believe they can be), how do we write criticism as reparations?*

a wholescale validation of the body's knowledge, centering skin and fat and bones as sites of memory and resistance, within the texts and within ourselves.

Our bodies have a form of knowledge that is different from our cognitive brains. This knowledge is typically experienced as a felt sense of constriction or expansion, pain or ease, energy or numbness. Often this knowledge is stored in our bodies as wordless stories about what is safe and what is dangerous. The body is where we fear, hope, and react; where we constrict and release; and where we reflexively fight, flee, or freeze. If we are to upend the status quo […] we must begin with our bodies.
(Menakem 2017, 5)

We use the body to upend the status quo as it is imposed on memory and as it is maintained by the gatekeepers of the Academy, the purveyors of History. We read with our senses awakened, writing down the places our bodies hold the text, the smells words evoke, the pain at the bottom of my foot as I read. All of this goes into the work in one way or another as we work to untangle a new way of reading. But I am grateful that you mentioned Oyěwùmí and seeing. When we first started work on this project, I was drawn to visual imagery as a rejection of the written word, the medium of my field. It felt – and feels – good to work with my hands, plant fibers, ink, to get dirty, to be *in* the work of embodied criticism. And still, I think a lot about my choice of the visual as a "radical" departure from academic work, about how it might uphold a world*view* that centers the West – centers a palatable and consumable reaction that, despite its rejection of the written word (yet still only partially, containing textual fragments), fits relatively neatly into accepted artistic forms. Am I really using my body to upend the status quo, or am I just finding another way around it, another trick?

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I don't yet have answers to these questions – I'm not sure I will. The Sensetrack has not resolved the meandering conversations we have had since its inception. It provides little closure or resolution, and meaningfully so. In engaging in this project – an experiment by nature – we trouble the Academy and its preference for cognitive over emotional functioning, for endings over beginnings.

We give up the diamonds of the institutions that formed us and that hate us now for the blood and sap in which we might fight with and alongside each other.[15] In talking through these questions, in holding the fear we harbor, in deconstructing and reconstructing our own reactions and identities in and through and with the project, we come to find ourselves and each other within the text, within the disaster – of war, of the (neo)colonial, of the Academy. *This* – this knowing and doing and seeing each other, and not necessarily the project itself – is the site of resistance as we move through the text to betray the *system* (our system) that it was constructed against.

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And so, here we come to the Sensetrack. We have not attempted in this project to make a point – Mechakra has already done that in her stunning, heartbreaking, horrifying testimonial of war time violence. Instead, we have stepped into this work to hold space for Mechakra, her teenage narrator, the reader of Mechakra, the reader of our tracks, ourselves. We have brought our own readings, our own "this makes me think of,"

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[15] Leopold Senghor says that "French words send out thousands of rays like diamonds," whereas African words have a halo of sap and blood (quoted in Thiong'o 1986, 19).

our own crumpled fragments of dried-up wheat and flower petals pressed onto scrap paper. We come as survivors of our own traumas, as children of our own Earths, as lovers of our own men. Tears that we cried are present (even if invisible) on the images we've scanned into this new archive; and yet, they do not compete with Mechakra's – they simply exist in constellations.[16] In this work, we have come to understand criticism as a praxis of care and of communion.

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* Eden and Abigail are artistic and intellectual collaborators. *Together, we lean into collectivity, care, and our own creativity, embracing arts amidst chaos in recognition of our own humanity. We actively work to come to terms with our role as critics, as intellectuals, and as humans. With this in mind, our project has ebbed and flowed in relation to the goings-on of the outside world, our minds and spirits, and each other.*

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16   We speak a lot of constellations when we speak of the Sensetrack project. This has allowed me to understand my work as a discrete contribution – neither dominating of nor subservient to – a living entity, a (para)textual ecosystem. I also think about the contemporary Algerian poet Samira Negrouche, who describes her poetic influences as a constellation, forming around her and of which she becomes a part.

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The Map of Volcanoes:
Thinking with Stories beyond Abuse

Jelena Nolan-Roll with Mirabelle Jones, Martina Salov,
Imogen Thomas, and Ljubica Mladenovic

> They wore blouses with buttons down the front
> that suggested the possibilities of the word undone.
> These women could be undone; or not.
> They seemed to be able to choose.
>
> Margaret Atwood

Introductory Note by Dr Nolan-Roll

The aftermath of abuse, or rape, often feels like the end of the world. There is fear. Panic. Disbelief. Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder – or however you want to call it. The person tries to freeze time, willing it to come back before "IT" happened, when they still didn't know how awful and scary it could be.

Unfortunately, time doesn't care. And as it moves forwards, it drags the person along with it, like waves take a woman who is afraid of the sea and believes she will drown away from the safe shore, deep into the ocean of unknown.

Our project, which ended in the trace "Beyond the Rape"[1] is a way of best practice exchange about how to swim in that sea, what to pay attention to and – god forbid – maybe even have some fun along the way.

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[1] This formed the part of the summer 2020 symposium programme of the Nordic Summer University's Study Circle "Narrative and Violence" (26 July–2 August 2020).

I imagined this chapter as the map of such a journey.

For the ocean we find ourselves swimming in – the society we live in – can often be unfair. Having seen and grown up in quite a few societies – ex-Yugoslavia, post-war Serbia, and the United Kingdom where I live now – I know: every society is unfair to some of its citizens to some extent, by default. But being a woman who lives in a society whose unfairness led to my being sexually abused, assaulted, and then left feeling powerless; and being a mother of a daughter who grows up, albeit with more privilege, in the same society, I chose to tackle that specific unfairness.

You might agree. Or not.

Happy democracy to both of us.

I also come from a family of teachers and people passionate about education. Within the same contexts I mention above, I witnessed how, by being educated, you can wrap yourself in layers of privilege and use them to fight social injustice. My current privilege lies in having a PhD from one of the best universities in the UK, and the engagement and activism that followed with it. My current privilege lies within knowing I can do something to tackle unfairness against women. But then again, I always thought that. I was raised in empowering ways (hvala Deda) by a shepherd who became a butcher who became a teacher, and whose daughters led education reforms.

And I truly – I know, idealistically – believe everyone can do their bit.

However, many don't. Many women don't. Many men disempower women and many women disempower themselves and other women. Before you say anything: not all men. And not all women. But many. And many of the disempowered ones find themselves lost.

This article you are reading offers a map to find some ways to understand and give meaning to their (or yours) experiences, through the lived experiences of others.

"Beyond the Rape," the research project undertaken by myself and Dr Gal Harmat is about empowerment. Specifically, it is about

the means by which women empower themselves, what can we learn from it and then apply. The project grew out of interviews with women who consider themselves empowered. They are scattered around the world: from Brazil to Serbia to Israel. Many of them are engaged with Empowerment Self Defence Global (who kindly funded part of this project. Thank you ESD!). Some are artists you might have heard of. Some are less known.

By choosing this specific group of women we hoped to represent diverse voices and diverse answers to the question "What is empowerment for you?" as well as explore what happens beyond the rape and abuse, and how we can transfer that knowledge further so it reaches others beyond the immediate geography of these particular participants.

Empowerment can mean different things, ranging from product (i.e. empowerment to act on someone's behalf) or process (i.e. learning a new skill). For myself it meant the process of gaining more power in life. But I was and am very much aware it might not hold the same meaning for others.

Being in Israel and the UK talking with participants located all over the world, we performed narrative interviews (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000) over Zoom, where we did our best to let each individual tell their story of empowerment. We asked what *empowerment* represents to them, how it feels, how it smells, what does it do and how does it look like. We used narrative interview as "discourse opening up space for resistance and counter narrative" (Speedy 2008, 61) and I think we managed quite well, according to the map in front of you

These encounters in cyber spaces often yielded more questions than answers, thus illustrating the very nature and messiness of artful collaborative inquiry: the challenge of many lived experiences bending and turning around the aftermath of abuse, making the inner and outer world once again a powerful place to exist, as well as a difficult concept to describe.

The artist Ljubica Mladenovic joined our collaborative effort and gave this research the visual representation you see below. Thank you, Ljubica.

For me, as a narrative researcher and creative writer, the epitome of my practice is inviting audiences to think *with* the story. Arthur Frank (1995, 23), quoting anthropologist Julia Cruickshank, suggests to think with, instead about stories. Thinking *about* the story is to reduce it to content and then analyse it. Thinking *with* stories is to take the story as already complete and allow it to work on the audience members, letting them discover truths about their own lives by engagement with the story.

Morris (2001) further underlines that thinking with stories is not meant to replace the thinking about stories, but just to modify it by including the corporeal sensibilities into it and allowing the narrative to work on us – in an embodied way, where we feel the feelings and let story touch our senses. This is, indeed, the practice of many communities, but it is also the first lesson in morality – through fairytales for children, for example. We don't want to end up being bad, so we would rather be little red riding hood than the wolf, as we empathise with her more and more throughout the story. The narrative of the fairytale triggered our "moral imagination" (Morris 2001, 56) and we made our choices. I hope the narratives which follow do trigger your imagination… and, who knows, by engaging with them on both cognitive and emotional levels, even lace your own story into the chaos which is the world we live in.

To think with stories is to let your own story be changed by the influence they, others' stories, have on you.

To think with stories is to acknowledge that, despite all of your academic-ness and degrees and status, you are still a human being who can be touched by other human beings' experiences. Touched at the places no professor ever encouraged you to be touched in while researching.

To think with stories is to let you feel them…

… and then write about them, if you are myself, or let yourself understand this touch in a way which works for you.

In that context, and based on the material our participants kindly shared with us, I wrote some stories. I wrote them in the way of textual poems (De Mello 2007), using the phrases I resonated with.

This is my research practice, from the place between academic and creative worlds.

This is also the map which might prevent someone from drowning in the aftermath of a storm which is an abuse, an assault, a rape.

Let's swim together.

The Map

The person saying the following never killed anyone, or plans to. But what is said does speak of rage and anger and we – as a society – so rarely speak of it: women's rage and anger. So this is where we start.

There have been moments in my life after I was 17, when I was 17 and I got raped that I thought I need to fucking know how to kill someone. That's it, I need this information, I need to know. And long before I learned how to work with any martial arts equipment, I learned how to hit, I learned how to fight with a baseball bat because I was living in an anti-fascist household for about, I don't know, maybe four months, I can never really remember how long.

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The house was regularly assaulted by neo-Nazis. So that was
when I really started basic self-defense. Learning that fuck. I lived
with a girl who'd been gang raped by Nazis. And you don't come
back from that, you know? And there was always that constant
threat that if they get you, they will rape you.
That's what they do.
That's what happens if you get caught.
I learned how to fight with a baseball bat. I learnt to swing low,
and go for the knees, go to the ankles, fucking hit hard and fight
like your life absolutely depends on it, because it bloody well
could. This is what's going to happen to you.
You sit at the bottom of the power struggle here.
That's when I really started using my body to empower and to
fight and to say,
fucking no more. You aren't going to do this anymore.
When I was really bad with it, in college, I had a mantra
that mantra was the next one fucking dies.
The next one that does that dies.
And that's a hell of a place to go in your head.
But it would be you know, I don't care, I'll pick up a bottle and
I'll put it in his throat. I don't care.
No one's doing this anymore, you know,
not to me,
not to anyone

On Inspiring Others:

I remember the women who were all the servants in this temple
they realized that we were martial artists,
I saw them looking at us, like they were thinking
"hang on, they are women and martial artists
they're women.
They're women."

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And there was this kind of, you know, rush of excitement
amongst all the women ushers.
And then when we got up to do the performance, they were all
there.
And I don't know whether they were supposed to be there, or
they were not, but they were there at the back, gathered at the
doorway and you could see their faces and
it was one of those funny days that the guys didn't have their
mojo on, and we fucking did.
We did the best performance of our stuff that we have done to
date in the Shaolin Temple with the Shaolin monks who were
grading that day, and their tutors, and their Abbot, and all of
these women who were supporting them, but not being part of
the process as yet, watching, and
we fucking ruled.
And we did it.
And at dinner they were just like, they were just at the end of
that they were just coming up to us and just grabbing our hands,
and just holding our hands and it was like, yes, fucking yes.
Oh, yes

An artist we interviewed, Mirabelle Jones, who runs the organisation "Art Against Assault"[2] made books based on material they collected from participants and then donated the proceeds to Rape Crisis Centres. To the date of the interview, donations amounted to 10,000 USD that Rape Crisis Centres can use for whatever purpose they'd like:

The first book is this green book, that uses a form called a
tunnel book,[3] and the text is very lightly imprinted on the page,

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and that's to give this opportunity for people to back away from the book if they don't want to engage with it. It's a consent tactic. If they find the language triggering, or they don't want to read the stories themselves, they can still view it as a sculptural artifact, without having to read the stories. So there's different ways to engage with it.

The second book is the words and phrases related to the assault itself, and those take the form of a flag book structure, and what happens is when you open the structure, it breaks apart, and the pieces of paper entwine with one another. And so again, this is where this metaphor of the jar comes in, which is this container of a narrative. At this point in our arc, the narrative breaks open.

And then the third book, which was definitely the hardest to make, were the reflections, and it was a hard book to make because the accounts were so different, people feel so differently about their experiences. Partially, you know, based on context, but also based on how long ago this happened in their story. For some people that participated in this project, it had been, you know, 60 years since they discussed their assault, and for other people it had been, you know, three days. But also, people just process things differently, and so there were people that felt empowered and there were people that felt broken, there were people that felt changed.

Most people commented they felt changed somehow.

They also create a safe place for people to create and not be branded as "rape artists," like they are currently being defined as.

For example:

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fact, the sides of the book might make you think of an accordion. The overall effect is an illusion of depth and perspective." (https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-a-tunnel-book)

"I've kind of been branded like the rape artist, which is something I hear from a lot of people I work with: as soon as they do a piece about sexual assault, they get branded the rape artist. So that's one of the goals of Art Against Assault as well, is to say, like, hey, here, you can do this project with us, it doesn't have to define your work, and then, you know, you do as many pieces as you want to, but it's not like you have to do this and only this forever"

When asked how empowerment looks like to them, they respond:

I'm thinking of this one exhibition in the Glyptotek Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark. Here they have different busts, and they're on pedestals and there's a proximity sensor, and as you get close to the pedestal, these busts of these ancient people speak to you. It's a very powerful thing to hear their story in their own words.
It's tricky with art around sexual assault, because you don't want to trigger people with the work, but you also don't want to remain silent, and it's kind of this balancing act between producing a work where you are considering consent, and you're considering the consent of the viewer and the listener, but you're also being honest and speaking up.
I think something like that – something like an interactive sculpture, where there's a multitude of voices, and where it's very easy to hear one over another, but perhaps from a distance it sounds like many voices and then as you get closer to one section, you hear a discrete voice.
A voice of survivor.

How do you maintain that voice of survivor?

One thing that's really beautiful is that this survivor community is so supportive of each other, and that we all do exist, we all are working towards change,

It's not a hopeless situation.
For my performance "Invisible Weight: 109 Seconds," I had every
survivor story conclude with a message to other survivors in this
survivor-love-letter fashion. Each of the 255 survivor narratives
that were shared for 109 seconds, and they were on a loop for six
hours, these stories all conclude with one survivor sharing their
experience, and then saying something else to the rest of survivors.
I think that's how you maintain empowerment.

A person who travelled beyond a same sex abusive relationship and,
as a consequence of it, decided to engage in activism, Martina Salov,
provided a very needed story of something not many talk about and,
yet, many experience.

> *The most difficult part about it – when I think about it –*
> *was getting rid of her.*
> *It took a lawsuit, journalists' involvement, stalking,*
> *bullying, lack of police support and a lot of both money*
> *and mental health.*
> *I didn't know anyone who went through a similar thing.*
> *So as no one talked about it*
> *I published stories on my Facebook*
> *And my blog*
> *For other LGBT women*
> *And I was giving them advice on what can be done.*

> *The only good thing about abusive partners*
> *is that they have a pattern.*
> *They always have a pattern*
> *That is a good thing.*

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> *After being co-dependent for 4.5 years*
> *I had to reinvent myself*

I had to learn to love myself
I had to learn to live with myself
I had to learn to be alone
I had to be alone.

It was a turning point for what I am
Everything I do.

When I was with her
I was not allowed to "look lesbian"
I was allowed to look like a man
I was wearing men's shirts. Ties. Hats. Pants. Trousers.
All clothes from the men's department. That was allowed.
But not to look lesbian
So rainbow flags
That was not allowed
The sleeveless shirts
Were not allowed
– apparently that makes you look like a lesbian
I am not sure how.

My empowerment was
The clothes
The cooking
The everything
My goal was to not be afraid
When I talk about empowerment
I talk about being proud
The most proud of being able to walk strongly
And not be scared of it.

The most empowering thing for me was that
I could walk around the city
Knowing I will run into her
And just smile.

Empowerment is many little things
You get to do your way
Me presenting myself the way I want to and not caring
Whether it makes you uncomfortable or not.

It took me a while to accept the term butch
A lot of my friends and acquaintances
Thought it was actually being dirty-calling women butch.
When I was working on myself
I was also working on accepting the term Butch.
As it made me look powerful
It made me feel the most comfortable to do whatever.

The photo of empowerment is me: super butch.
Super proud.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Instead of a conclusion, a word of warning: the map is never a territory. Once there, one will encounter little unmentioned pathways, shades of trees not drawn on the paper, and people, always people, never named and always present.

But to map something is also to deny it complete unknown-ess. To tame the dragons, present on the maps of the old.

That was my intention with this chapter, borne out of our "Beyond the Rape" project. To point out some streets one can choose to take. A few resting places to think. And most importantly, to light at least some parts of the darkness: The storm. The waves. The unknown sounds from the distance. The utter feeling of loneliness and despair.

I finish this, as I started, with the words of one of the great women travellers who journeyed both through life and imagination, to make sure that you, too, keep in mind that there is indeed the great beyond:

"*We are volcanoes. When we women offer our experience
as our truth, as human truth, all the maps change.
There are new mountains.*" (Le Guin 1986)

If you are here now, in the space which is unfriendly and scary and sad, just know: there are more of us.

I hope this map helps.

You are not alone.

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Violence and Ambition in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: A Conversation

Fin Walker

Introductory Note by Fin Walker

The following dialogue is an edited transcription of two different panel discussions. The first took place on 28 July 2020 at the virtual symposium "Written on the Body: Narrative (Re)constructions of Violence(s)," and included choreographer and director Fin Walker (FW), actor Nick Holder (NH), performer and scholar Anna Walker (AW), and sound scholar Iris Garrelfs (IG). The first part of the panel included a demonstration of work in progress compiled of a series of directed monologues, and a discussion about my creative practice with an invited audience in the form of a Q&A.

The second panel discussion was held on 9 February 2021 with Fin Walker, Nick Holder and Iris Garrelfs; it included a presentation of my research to the members of ARE (Arts Research Economics), a research group consisting of artists, scientists and choreographers.

Using Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* as a starting point I explored historical trauma and its relevance today. Working with performer Nick Holder, we investigated the progression of violence through Macbeth's body by breaking down 3 soliloquies from Act 1 (scene 7, lines 1–25), Act 2 (scene 1, lines 32–64), and Act 3 (scene 1, lines 49–73).[1] Shakespeare's tragic character, Macbeth, is both the performer and recipient of violence (i.e. perpetrator and victim). In the play his masculinity is constantly brought into question: "When you durst do it, then you were a man," says Lady Macbeth to him (1, 7, 31). Macbeth's ambition for power is consistently referred to: "I have

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[1] Throughout, I will refer to the Cambridge School Shakespeare edition.

no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself / And falls on the other" (1, 7, 25–28). His heteropatriarchal capitalist values and his ambitious drive for power and recognition are acknowledged and rewarded by the King: "I have begun to plant thee, and will labor / To make thee full of growing" (1, 4, 29–30). Macbeth is celebrated for his violent acts towards others and seen as a valiant soldier for his heroic and brutal killings: "Till he unseamed him from the nave to th'chops / And fixed his head upon our battlements" (1, 2, 22–23).

Nick and I investigated 3 monologues to eke out the transmission of violence, gender, power and ambition. For the purposes of this composite, I am focusing solely on violence and ambition.

Violence

Researching the monologues in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* enabled me to investigate violence from a distance. Indeed, philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2008) suggests that, instead of confronting violence directly, we should cast sideways glances at it, for when we look at violence too closely, he affirms, there is "something inherently mystifying in a direct confrontation with it: the overpowering horror of violent acts and empathy with the victims inexorably function as a lure which prevents us from thinking" (3–4). Through the creation of a synthesis of movement and text, the monologues were made physical and spoken by Nick in the role of Macbeth. Nick drew on his personal experiences of violence and ambition to inform the language and the characterisation of Macbeth.

AW*: Nick, do you have a personal relationship with violence? Did you draw upon this to inform the role of Macbeth?

NH: Yes. It is through my work, and through the inhabiting of these difficult spaces that I've managed to release the memory of violence.

It was hidden away in numerous dysfunctional behaviours. It was the norm in the UK at this period in time (1960s) to have parents who were violent, and for them to direct their violent behaviour towards their children. It just seemed like men of that generation, those born in the 1930s, were angry. Ironically it is only in performance I feel really comfortable around these issues. I'm not trying to "affect" anybody with my story, just trying to allow them to maybe experience it and have a release themselves.

AW: What are the repercussions for you when you take on the role of a violent character like Macbeth?

NH: As an actor, you look for the truth and so when you say these words, which are very powerfully written by Shakespeare, they resonate on a cellular level. It is not just the intellect that is at play. Something happens to/in/on your body, and I can't explain that. But it's been my experience over the last thirty years. My initial instinct as someone who has been around violence, either participating or being the victim of it, is to immediately want to dive back into the trauma out of a desire to try and fix it, find a way through it, and make sense of it.

My work with Fin enables me to explore violence in a safe environment, at a distance, finding ways to *shake* it off. There aren't many directors that work in this way, who work with a methodology that, for lack of a better word, "exploits" your experience of violence *safely*, as it is the case here.

IG: These points that you've talked about, safety on the one side but also exposure to the trauma on the other, can you both say a little more about how you negotiate that tension between risk and safety?

NH: It is very simple for me, because I know Fin really well and I trust and feel safe with her. Before I even need to pause, Fin will ask,

"Are you ok?" Intuitively she knows when I am out of my body and in my head. She recognises when I am going *off* someplace else and that place might not have much light in it. I just jump into the room and allow Fin to facilitate the work, knowing she will stop it if it feels toxic in any way. Is that right Fin?

FW: Yes. It is important I "hold" the space and keep listening. My practice as an Energy Worker supports the performer so they don't become re-traumatised but instead stay in the present moment and do not begin to live in the past in any given moment. They draw on the past experiences but they do not re-live them. I am "reading" the energy and listening carefully to what is unfolding. As the director, it is my responsibility to support Nick (and any other actor/performer in general) in the space. And that space needs to be a *safe space* because if there is no sense of safety there is no creative flow. As pedagogue Saga Briggs states in her article "Why We Need to Feel Safe to Be Creative" (2016), "not only do we need to feel stress-free to be at our most creative; we also need to know that we're creating in a safe environment" (n.p.)

In working with the text of *Macbeth* and grounding deep into the body, there is a "holding" wherein the actor doesn't lose themselves in the character and become consumed by the violence depicted through the words and the memory of these words resonating through their system. Although what we recognize is influenced more by past experiences than by newly arriving sensory input from the eyes (see González-Garcia et al. 2018), my method of grounding means the actor doesn't dissociate and lose themselves in the past. This approach uses reflective and mindful methodologies encouraging individuals to reflect upon their emotions and thus facilitating awareness of self. This awareness, in turn, can situate performers firmly in the present and not in the past. That means that, instead of seeing the world through their past experiences, they are present and alert to the moment of "being".

AW: Can you say something more about your approach, Fin, and why it is important to you?

FW: My approach starts from the premise that the performer's awareness of their body in any given moment can support them staying in the present. As psychotherapist, mindfulness practitioner and writer Patrizia Collard writes, "Living in the moment, and seeing everything afresh without judgment and worry, lets us experience life rather than simply get through it" (Collard 2014, 17). I use movement to situate the performer in their body. When working with text, movement can act as an "underscore, overscore and subtext,"[2] as well as grounding the actor in their physical body so they can access the emotional body. Subtext, underscore and overscore describe the fluidity of dance as it moves through text. Dance can be used as a subtext to give more information about the character or the situation that isn't written in the text. Dance used as an overscore can help extrapolate the meaning of the text being spoken. Dance as an underscore can support the actor in staying present in their body and keep the text alive and in the moment; thus, it can help situate the performer in their body.

When the performers are in their body, it can translate into a support for the audience to being present within their own body. Then the audience, too, can feel and be in contact with their emotions and be present in the moment with themselves.

For me, good performance/art happens when an audience feels something as a direct result of the experience that has unfolded in front of them, such as is articulated in "emotionalism theory," which "places emphasis on the expressive qualities of an artwork. The communication between artwork and viewer is crucial. If the art is able to elicit a feeling from the audience, then the artist has created an excellent piece" (Ingram 2019, n.p.).

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[2] This is a terminology I have created myself as a result of the research process.

IG: Nick, earlier you mentioned that Macbeth is revered for violence and seen as a valiant soldier for his "heroic" and brutal killings. How do you feel this historical trauma is relevant in today's society?

NH: Generationally you can have inherited trauma.[3] Many members of my family are in the military. One of them was in the Secret Service, which as you know is a strange, elite fighting group whose members sometimes, under specific orders, may also murder people. At a family funeral I spoke to him and asked how he was. Basically, he had been living behind enemy lines in the mountains trying to track down Bin Laden at the time, that was his job. I asked him how he released the guilt when he had killed somebody. And what was the chain of command that enabled him to let go of some of the responsibility. He said there wasn't any, that he could kill whomever he wanted. It was so chilling to hear him say this and in such a matter-of-fact way.

Having said that, which is just one personal example, I have wondered about how different the violence in *Macbeth* is compared to violence now. In *Macbeth* the style of violence is hand-to-hand combat: stabbing, cutting heads, gouging eyes, which is just awfully physical. Macbeth and Banquo come straight from the battlefield covered in blood. They are, quite literally, butchers. Modern warfare has changed from that, it is done remotely – think of drones – and my friends and family in the military are very jealous that they never got to do hand to hand combat. It's really strange. I guess it's entirely against my nature to be that physically violent and seek it out. I have been around violence and participated when necessary in my youth. In the streets, at demonstrations, football matches etc., but it was always as a consequence of a series of events, never the thing that was looked for or the reason for being there. I had friends that purely went to football matches in the 80s to be involved in as

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3 Scholars define it as "transgenerational or intergenerational trauma" (see e.g. Caruth 1995; Felman and Laub 1992; Schwab 2010).

much fighting as possible. It terrified me. I can imagine being in the military, trained and prepared for the most physical and bloody warfare and then executing your mission by the pressing of a button or the long-range squeeze of a machine gun trigger. I can see how dissatisfied that might make me feel.

AW: Can I jump in here and continue with that thought? One of the problems with violence now – having done a lot of research on drone operators – is that the level of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is higher for individuals operating drones than one-to-one combat soldiers. There is a latent relationship with violence and PTSD: this is because individuals don't get to "embody" the violence, they live in their heads with it, they dissociate in order to manage it. One-on-one violence is there in your body because it becomes about defending yourself and your person, as opposed to killing someone who is very far away. The rationale is that it becomes a battle where you can justify surviving because it's combat face-to-face, and you have worked it through your body in a way. It is really important to distinguish between the trauma and violence in the past in comparison to where we are now. Everything shifted and changed with guns, weaponry, the sophistication of that weaponry and technology, and included in technology I imply also game playing, Hollywood movies etc., which all seem to have a disassociated relationship to violence. Research on the increasing use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) suggests that, although we mostly associate PTSD with soldiers on the front line, drone operators can also suffer high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (e.g. Lowe and Gire 2012; see also University of Birmingham 2015).

Ambition

Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* continues to remain relevant to contemporary society through its exploration of ambition – a political and

ethical value that is, ultimately, a double-edged sword, for it is both about success and failure. I think Macbeth's ambition is awakened by the prophesy of the three "wyrd sisters," setting him on a path that eventually leads to his death. I refer to the three sisters as "wyrd sisters" with consideration of the Anglo-Saxon meaning of "wyrd": fate or destiny (Mabillard 2000). By Act 1 Scene 3, the seeds of ambition have been planted in Macbeth's mind. Macbeth has just found out that part of the wyrd sisters' prophesy has been fulfilled and he has been granted the title of "Thane of Cawdor". It is then that Macbeth starts entertaining the prospect of becoming King:

> My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
> Shakes so my single state of man that function
> Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
> But what is not. (1, 3, 138–141)

During the research period, Nick and I also examined the theme of ambition. In particular, we investigated Nick's relationship to ambition and how this compared to Macbeth's ambition exhibited in the play.

IG: How do you both feel about ambition? How has the personal informed the characterisation of Macbeth?

FW: Ambition acts as a catalyst for me, it drives me forward, it keeps me searching and curious. I want to be the best human being I can be. I want to be the best director/choreographer/wife/mother/sister and friend I can be. In the past it's been about the "other", using the "other" comparatively to spur me on. Now, it's purely about me. Although the deeper I go into my uncovering of self and the stripping away of my identity, the more I realise that achieving my goals doesn't really matter. It becomes less important. But I'm human, so the ambition still sits there: I watch it and I am aware of it. I guess the difference now is that it doesn't drive me, *I drive it.* I identify with Macbeth and his need, or should I say his "want", to be King, with his

continual striving, his disappointment and his fear. I obviously don't condone his acts of violence, but I understand his drive.

NH: I had no sense of personal ambition until the moment "something" was potentially unfolding. In this moment I realised I was ambitious, because I really wanted this "thing". I think it's something about not wanting to say out loud the "thing" I want because I believe I am so far away from it; I might appear ridiculous. However, when I get closer to it, events seem to overtake me, the "vaulting ambition" Macbeth refers to in the first soliloquy I performed starts to make sense, something inside me allows me to say it out loud. In my experience, individuals who are ambitious and hugely successful express clearly what it is they want. I think Macbeth is happy where he is. He is a revered warrior, hero and man seemingly at the "top of his game". I don't think he ever imagined he would want to be in politics. When the possibility of being a leader is close to him, he allows his irrational ambition to operate within him and push him forward. A bit like Macbeth, my ambition feels like it is something disembodied from me, that lives in me, that I allow to take me along for the ride, unless I decide not to.

Concluding Note by Fin Walker

Through the process of presenting and opening the discussion around my research, it is evident that touching and delving into the personal experiences of violence and ambition of the performer informs the fictional language, the manner in which the narrative is told, and the representation of the character Macbeth. Through the improvisations, Nick's past experiences of violence and ambition became conscious. Awakening these memories and giving form to them through movement, and subsequently the fusion of this movement and the text, helped not only to situate Nick in his body but also to extrapolate the meaning of the text through the movement. It also

added an extra dimension to Nick's performance because he was holding these "fresh" memories of violence and ambition in his body.

I take this new knowledge forward with me, when interpreting other characters within the play, in my continued exploration of the contemporary relevance of Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*.[4]

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4 I have been awarded a 3-month grant from Arts Council England for the project "Violence Through Bias: Gender, Racial and Disability" to continue, with three actresses, my exploration of female characters in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

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Contributors

Eden Almasude, MD is an Indigenous (Amazigh) community organizer and child psychiatrist in New Haven, CT working for immigration and labor justice. She brings theater games and play to her work in the clinic, hospital, and organizing spaces. During her adult psychiatry training at Yale University, she began a Spanish-language theater and storytelling program called ¡Cuéntanos! and contributed to the Husky for Immigrants coalition to end discrimination from health insurance access on the basis of migration status.

Marta-Laura Cenedese is currently a researcher in the Kone Foundation project "INTERACT: Intersectional Reading, Social Justice, and Literary Activism" (University of Turku) and Associate Researcher at the Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin. She studied at the University of Venice Ca' Foscari and Sciences-Po Paris before completing a PhD in French and comparative literature at the University of Cambridge. Marta is an interdisciplinary scholar whose research focuses on twentieth- and twenty-first-century postcolonial literatures, cultural memory studies, multimodal storytelling practices, critical medical humanities, death studies, and writing methodologies. She co-edited the special issue "Connective Histories of Death" (*Thanatos* 9:2, 2020) and is the author of the monograph *Irène Némirovsky's Russian Influences: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). She is the coordinator of the study circle Narrative and Violence (Nordic Summer University, 2020–2022).

Orlaith Darling is a PhD candidate in the School of English, Trinity College Dublin. Her doctoral project – funded by the Irish Research Council – examines neoliberalism in contemporary Irish women's short fiction. Previously, Orlaith obtained an MSc. with Distinction from the University of Edinburgh (2019) and a BA (Hons) with first-

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Eric Doise is an Associate Professor of English at Southwest Minnesota State University. There he teaches literature, composition, and ELL classes as well as mentoring high school English teachers. His work appears in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma* as well as journals including *The South Central Review, Extrapolation,* and *Film Criticism.* His current book project examines what testimonial fiction can reveal about testimony.

Abigail Fields is a writer, translator and poet, currently pursuing a PhD in the Department of French at Yale University. Her work is situated at the intersection of literary criticism and the environmental humanities, examining environmental thought and literature of the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries. Her dissertation undertakes a literary history of agriculture in the long nineteenth century, recentering the land, the peasant, and agrarian labor in our critical understanding of French modernity. She is also writing about the environmental underpinnings of the work of two Algerian writers, Yamina Mechakra and Samira Negrouche, recovering a radical decolonial ecocriticism present in their oeuvres. In addition to her academic work, Abigail organizes for the campaign to win a graduate worker union at Yale, an experience that continues to shape how she thinks about relationships and care inside and outside of the University.

Anastassia Kostrioukova is currently completing her PhD at the departments of Comparative Literature and Russian and Slavic Studies at New York University, with an affiliation at Humboldt

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Jelena Nolan-Roll is a violence prevention expert, a creative writer, career coach, empowerment self defence trainer and amateur kickboxer. She is a psychologist by profession (University of Belgrade) with a doctorate in education (University of Bristol). She is interested in human and social stories, as well as the power they give us – or the power we give to them as a society or as individuals. In the domain of violence prevention she has led expert teams and participated in global projects, with participants from Silicon Valley to India. Her story about a woman leaving an abusive relationship, "Nesreća", won first place in the competition of the Association of Independent Writers of Serbia. Her book of short stories was published in September 2022. As a coach, she works with clients from various domains, from teachers to Olympians (drnolanroll.com). She is also an Empowerment Self Defence trainer working with women and girls.

Silvia Pierosara is Associate Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Macerata, Italy. She studied the theory of recognition, narrative ethics and relational autonomy, as well as contemporary forms of social and political emancipation both on a local and a global scale. She is interested in the ethical implications of narratives as paths to personal and social emancipation and in the exploration of the structural features that make narratives violent or tolerant, inclusive, and attentive to suffering. She actually explores the link

between emancipation and relational autonomy. She is the author of some monographs and several essays. Her current research focuses on the possibility of a "narrative autonomy" which values the concept of self-authorship and scales back that of self-ownership. Starting from a definition of "narrative autonomy", she is planning to devote a research to the topic of nostalgia. She teaches History of Moral Philosophy and Theories of Justice at the University of Macerata and Narrative Ethics in the Master in Narrative Medicine organized by the University of Macerata and the Polytechnic University of Marche.

Roxanne Tan, LLB (Hons), University of London (2019). Roxanne is an MA student at Yonsei University under the Global Korea Scholarship programme in the English literary and cultural studies track. Her research interests include narratives of violence and identity politics in Southeast Asia and East Asia, Asian literature in English and popular culture studies of East Asia. As an undergraduate student, she won 1st prize in the student essay category of the 5th World Congress for Hallyu, titled "Korean pop culture and politics – international relations, national politics and *Hallyu*" (2017). She has also published an article titled "Changing Tides, Turbulent Times: The Discursive Practices of Feminism in South Korean Media and Society" (*Culture and Empathy: International Journal of Sociology, Psychology, and Cultural Studies*, 2019).

Anna Walker, PhD is an artist, writer and researcher working in mixed media, specifically moving image and sound. She has been exploring trauma in her arts practice research for many years, how the body responds to overwhelming traumatic and stressful situations and how it reorganises itself to cope with or manage the trauma. She was awarded an MA in Fine Art from Southampton University in 1998, and a certificate in Psychotherapy from CBPC, Cambridge, in 2010. An interest in the effects of trauma on the body led her to a

PhD in Arts and Media at Plymouth University, which she completed in May 2017. Her arts-practice balances the auto-ethnographic with the critical, utilising personal experiences to facilitate a greater understanding of memory, trauma and its wider cultural implications.

Fin Walker is a director, choreographer, educator, and a qualified Energy Healer. Through her creative work and teaching she investigates "human behaviour" and how past experiences impact the present. Working with the moving expressive body of the performer, her aim is to communicate to an audience the visceral, sensual resonance of what it means to be an emotional being through movement, words and story. To better understand the energetic body and the interplay between thoughts, the physical body, emotions and spirit she has studied numerous somatic practices as well as Energy Healing and Core Somatics – more widely known as body psychotherapy. Her work is devised in collaboration with other artists, creating live performance and film. She also works in theatre, opera, commercials and television. Recently, she worked as Physicality and Expression coach with Ralph Fiennes on his one-man show *Four Quartets* (T.S. Eliot), which opened at Harold Pinter Theatre (London) and toured the UK in 2021. Fin's most recent project is research and development on "A Macbeth", a multi disciplinary performance piece with eighteen performers (actors, dancers, and musicians), which tells the story of the tragedy of Macbeth from a female gaze.

This volume explores the bodies that are subjects and objects of violence; bodies that, by simply being, narrate their traumatic experience. Contributors attune to the dialogic and hybrid relations that connect bodies and environments, and to the horizons of imaginative, future-worldbuilding possibilities that they open through acts of transmission, translation, and transfer. Refracting to something other than the body's own physicality – to multiple (multidirectional) networks – the chapters in this volume map and weave an ecosystem of interlacing bodies that are human, animal, vegetal, natural and technological; that are both singular and collective (i.e. a social body); that are situated in both the physical and virtual space; that are mythological and ephemeral; and that express naturecultural entanglements.