

# **Love is a Line that Doesn't End**

A Rumination on Ghosts and Unreason in Search of Care Without Violence

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Partial  
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Critical Disability Studies, York University, Toronto, Ontario

August 23, 2023

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## Abstract

This body of work contemplates and explores the question, *how can care be practiced without replicating violence?* Methodologically, it can be understood as an arts-based, multi-site project that focuses on service systems that claim to care, including mental health, social service, and education settings. This work unfolds through five storytelling and arts-making projects, each created with a collaborator who, along with me, brings to this process the experiences of providing services and accessing services, of perpetrating violence and being violated as racialized, feminized, and/or queer people in the care work systems that produce the very privileges we benefit from. At its heart, this body of work is a practice of unforgetting. It is compelled by the lives and deaths of the people we have worked with and the violence we have witnessed. Drawing on the collaborative arts-making projects as well as scholarships in disability and transformative justice, critical feminist and race theories, and feminist ethics of care, this work unpacks the discourse of trauma as a dominant story about violence through the concept of ghosts: the colonial ghosts that live in the bones of people who are labelled with trauma as well as people who provide care for trauma; the ghosts rendered as such through the casting out of belonging from the category of human but persist in appearing; the ghosts about whom tales of horror are constructed as warnings to protect the boundaries of the norm. Ghost stories led this work to a contemplation of grievability as a way of love and the basis of transformative, interdependent relationships, with those who are living and the ghosts we do not forget and remain accountable for – those already dead from colonial, ableist, racist, gender-based violence, from whom we learn to build a less violent future for those not yet born.



Image is of an anatomical heart crocheted with thread in different shades of red, strung on some red threads with a twig and the thread ends hanging below it.

## Acknowledgement

All my love and gratitude to the companions, teachers and kin who supported, sustained and inspired this journey:

My grandmothers – 成群英女士 ,  
唐少薇女士

My lifeworld – Cil, Ma and Ba

My whole heart – Mike

Elene Lam, Kathryn Mettler, Virginia Jahyu, Yoonmee Han, Yvonne Simpson, nancy viva davis halifax, Rachel da Silveira Gorman, Chris Chapman, Suzanne Thompson, Sharlene Friedman, April Penny, Jacquie Compton, Kristina Borg, Jesse Pajuäär, Taylor Bourassa, Mo Thunder, Fyre Jean Graveline, Jean Tait, Jennifer Vivian, Nicole Le Bian, Jessica Vorstermans, Tammy Bernasky, Heidi Zhang, Maisa Said, Kai Cheng Thom, TATI students and colleagues

C., S., M., I., and each person I had the opportunity to walk alongside in my professionalized care work.

K. & R.

## **Love is a line that doesn't end**

A week after you passed, I told a dear friend, she said  
Grief is love that has nowhere to go.

I pictured you on the other side of time where time stands still  
Where we kept moving forward without you.

For months I pleaded with time for it to slow down  
For it to stop  
I stopped.  
So I would stop moving away from your side of time.

So maybe if I go to that room

(You know that room with the code we stole where we hung  
out for hours before class so you avoid rush hour traffic and I  
just wanted to hang out with you)

I'll find you there again, sure as day.  
Sunk into that faded brown couch  
Glasses halfway down the bridge of your nose, looking down at your phone  
Backlit by the lazy early afternoon sun through the window

You'll try talking to me when I try to work  
I'll find a message from you on my phone with a joyously dancing cat  
We'll both chuckle  
We'll both give up on working and  
We'll go for a walk  
We'll complain about the weather and capitalism and colonial division of time.

Your eyes lit up when you said I can fill a room with book pages

I said you could do the same  
We can do it together  
We'll find space, we'll do it with everyone, everyone gets to fill a page in the room  
We'll make art, we'll make it work, we'll do what we want

I thought we would have another conversation, sure as day.  
I thought we would have a million more conversations.

I made a million calls and none saved you

(Sometimes I still tell myself that I should have known better  
even though I know you would say that there's no point  
thinking that way)

The box is the colour of the sky  
The part of the sky that is clear and endless above the clouds  
It goes into the earth

A full circle  
A line that doesn't end

In my dream you returned a pen and I invited you for tea and you said  
I have to go now.

I know  
I'm not going without you.

It was never possible to go without you.  
I stopped grasping for the other side of time  
Because you are not there.

There was never a division of time

There is a line that doesn't end

Stardust to dust

Dust to stardust

In my memory we danced on the street with a million people

Under a million stars and the songs of summer cicadas

Carried by warm nighttime breeze moving through canopies of young tree branches  
and their new leaves

Rustling, underfoot in everwinding burrows and years too many to count

Nymphs of a different time readying themselves to emerge

One day, into a world they do not yet know

A world bearing our stories with our works and our transgressions and our hopes  
and our

Love for a future that is kinder to difference

With all of our unending entanglements

Till we meet again

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## 1. Unforgetting: An Orientation

Our senses, restored, never  
to be the same, whisper to us.  
They existed. They existed.  
We can be. Be and be  
better. For they existed.

— Maya Angelou (1990), excerpt from the poem, *When Great Trees Fall*

It was precisely a year ago, in September 2021, that I began reaching out to potential collaborators to contemplate and make art in response to an ethical quandary:<sup>1</sup> *How do we practice care without replicating violence?*

On an overcast September day at an outdoor patio in a neighbourhood cafe, I met with one of the collaborators, with whom I worked for several years as social workers. Like most gatherings with former co-workers in social services, after a brief catch up on each others' lives, we almost always began asking after the people we worked with, people commonly known as clients.

Do you know if they're still living in that place? How are they doing? Did they get

1. During the course of this study I have been asked many times how I could verify that violence indeed happens within care work. While parts of this body of work will discuss experiences of violence and oppression in systems that are supposed to care and help, I would like to orient this central ethical quandary that motivates the cultivation of this body of work with these words by Judith Butler (2009):

"The struggle against violence accepts that violence is one's own possibility. If that acceptance is not there, if one postured rather as a beautiful soul, as someone by definition without violent aggression, there could be no ethical quandary, no struggle, and no problem. Such a position of virtue or principle of purity would disavow or repress the violence from which such positions are wrought" (p. 171-172).

evicted? Are they connecting with the new worker after I left?

We don't forget. I don't know if my former co-workers make deliberate efforts to remember. For me, it is simply impossible to forget people whose lives I have taken part in, often more intimately and intrusively than the people would probably prefer if they had a choice in the matter. People who often had no one else in their lives except workers like me to help navigate discriminatory and impersonal medical systems, suspended social assistance payments, food insecurity, despairing poverty, threats of eviction, interpersonal conflicts, sexual assaults, police profiling, and so on.<sup>2</sup> But I also wonder if the desire and the urge to ask after people I no longer work with is shaped by care or if it stems from a conditioned entitlement to knowing about the subjugated other, an apparatus of social control carried out by the body and conduct of the worker. Perhaps there is room to contemplate both. Perhaps we need room to contemplate the desire for both care and control, and all that in between, and other forces beyond.

And on that neighbourhood patio last September, in the midst of the sounds of

2. A society forged through and grounded in Western philosophical traditions of rugged masculinized individualism may simultaneously idealize navigating life's challenges independently and attribute the loss of relationships and support to the individual's wrongdoing or psychological shortcomings (Shildrick, 1997). The positioning of independence as a virtue or a naturalized requirement of what it means to be human (Titchkosky, 2014) in turn contribute to the conditions of violence that are constituted through neoliberal policies, networks of colonial institutions, and capitalist economic systems that make life unlivable, or occlude recognition, for people whose ways of being defy the socially and state sanctioned norms, or whose value lies in their (disposable and replaceable) capacity to generate profit and uphold the social, political, and economic arrangements

cars driving by, the occasional sirens that still evoke a conditioned reflex to get up and help, the faint laughter and inaudible chatters from other tables around us, the cool breeze of summer turning into fall, my former co-worker gently and straightforwardly let me know that a woman I knew had recently passed away.

I realized that I could no longer picture in my mind what the woman's face looked like, or precisely what she said in our scheduled or unscheduled appointments. What I would later write about her in this body of work may be understood as a kind of fabulation.<sup>3</sup> Surely documentations of these encounters and other housing and healthcare records can still be found in the program's case management system, upheld as the reliable telling of a singular, objective truth about this woman's life. But how can these records, devoid of relationships and affective connections, demonstrate the ways that this woman's life and death come to matter in the social world she shared with others?<sup>4</sup> Surely, a life—her life—mattered in the world much more deeply than case files, or the workers' good intentions or momentary sentimental responses to her suffering and death. What does care for another life look like, whether we can interact with one

of the ruling class (Butler, 2009; Puar, 2017; Stanley, 2021; Stevenson, 2014).

3. Halifax et al. (2018) describe the usefulness of fabulation, a concept theorized by Deleuze and Guattari, as a methodological practice to understand complex relational and affective experiences. It is a way of resisting the privileged notion of a singular, replicable, objective truth in dominant Euro-Western academic practices, whereby the perspectives, knowledges, experiences, and truths that contradict the status quo arrangements of power are often deemed disruptive, dismissed as untruth, and subjugated. Fabulation as a form of affective and creative storytelling, while not empirically verifiable in the traditional sense, can be richly generative as it enables the cultivation of effable knowledge from important realities and truths for the storyteller, as well as insights for both the storyteller and the listener about the enduring impacts of the experiences in the story. As such, the telling and the listening allow all "to re-story the remains that accompany our lives" (p. 217), moving us to reflect on what we can do with what we know.

4. Through her anthropological study of bureaucratic and community care relations and practices in the Arctic Inuit community, Stevenson (2014) conceives of "care as the way someone comes to matter and the

another in the same temporal reality, or if we are holding each other in memory in our own different or even contradicting ways?

During some moments of her life I shared space with her. What impressed upon my memory from these moments was how conditions of violence impressed upon her body.<sup>5</sup> How abuse and discriminations on the streets and within the program where I worked and the days and weeks and months of being displaced from one shelter or housing or treatment program to another after being evicted by the program I worked for and not having the means to meet basic needs seemed to have physically impressed upon her body, as if steadily shrinking her down with pressure, over the years that I knew her. How these subjugating and undignifying experiences seemed to be held in her posture as a perpetual bracing position, in the coarseness of her voice, and the quick, sharpness of her words. How her ways of being in turn impressed upon my body and mind being in the same spaces with her, how I stuttered, froze, wanted to flee from her presence and from my own feelings of incompetence. How I embody my experiences and thoughts of her now, a heaviness suspended in my chest.

corresponding ethics of attending to the other who matters” (p. 3). This theorization dislodges the common understanding of care from good intentions and sentimental responses, thus allowing a nuancing of the discourse on care, shaped by and practiced through ambivalent desires and uncertain attempts.

5. It can be said that experiences of violence, suffering, or uncared for often involve the sensation of pain. In Ahmed’s (2004) discussion of the sociality of emotions, she argues that the surfaces of the body, the shapes that it takes and the boundaries that it extends in relation to other objects, including other bodies, are constituted through sensations that are perceived, interpreted, and intensified as painful or pleasurable. Particular to pain, Ahmed writes that “such intensity may impress the surfaces of bodies through negation: the surface is felt when something is felt ‘against’ it” (p. 27). It is an intrusion, violation, or transgression of the bodily boundary that the body responds by moving, shifting, or shrinking away from what it is interpreted as the cause of the pain, while simultaneously turning toward the sensation of pain within the body.

Elsewhere, drawing on the work of Audre Lorde, Ahmed (2010) urges that “we have to work and struggle not so much to feel hurt but to notice what causes hurt, which means unlearning what we have learned not to notice. We have to do this work if we are to produce critical understanding of how

How do I make sense of the ways that this woman's life and death, along with the lives and deaths of others I knew, come to matter in the social world that they shared with me? How do I demonstrate the ways that they mattered to me and to this world, when they have been repeatedly categorized and cast out of belonging by service systems that are supposed to care, as hard-to-serve, falling-through-the-cracks, transient, a liability, difficult, untreatable? How do I go on to live my life now that I have known them? How might remembering them shape the ways that I move through this world, attempting to practice what a different world could look like?<sup>6</sup> How can I be, and be better, because they existed?

This body of work is a way of living these questions. In some ways, it is an account of a body—my body—and its corporeality, feelings, emotions, and mutually constituting relationships with other bodies, as it works through these questions about what it means to care in the face of violence.

Care unfolds in relationships with others. The time I spent working in social services made it clear to me that the care work entails not only helping people with concrete tasks, but also creating a

violence, as a relation of force and harm, is directed toward some bodies and not others" (p. 216). She therefore calls upon readers to "attend to bad feelings not in order to overcome them but *to learn by how we are affected by what comes near*, which means achieving a different relationship to all our wanted and unwanted feelings as an ethical resource" (p. 216, emphasis in original), understanding also that we cannot know how we will be moved and shaped by various affects before we are affected.

6. Mingus (2010) similarly stresses the need to nurture disavowed parts of the self as a basis for building a radically different, more caring world of interdependent relations, in which "we will weave need into our relationships like golden, shimmering glimmers of hope—opportunities to build deeper, more whole and practice what our world could look like" (para. 10). She asks, "what is the point of connection, if you still feel isolated and alienated from your self? And what is that connection built upon and from?" (para. 7).

supportive environment for people accessing the service, and being accountable for our actions and positions within institutional relations of power as workers. Care work is therefore not a task that can be done with individuals working in isolation from one another. The driving question of this study, *how can we practice care without replicating violence*, implies the awareness that any theorization I come up with alone in response would not be adequate or even appropriate, because care is necessarily borne out of interdependence.<sup>7</sup> Care work can be understood as an ongoing process of bodies and minds engaging in the work of sustaining the well-being or lives of others and our own, all the while shaping each other into being in each of our own processes of becoming, with each of us situated differently in social relations of power. The central question of this study therefore requires the involvement of *we* as subjects who accept the responsibility to complicate our own experiences of extending or accessing care from our differing positions within institutional relations of power, and to find ways forward that can avoid or eliminate violence.

7. Feminist and disability studies theorists stress that interdependence is indispensable for human wellbeing and survival, and is the foundation of an ethics of care from which practices to dismantle mechanisms of domination and subjugation can be cultivated (Held, 2006; Kelly, 2013; Kittay, 2011; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Shildrick, 1997; Tronto, 1993; Wendell, 1996). A feminist and disability ethics of care thus resists Western philosophical moral theories that privilege a masculinized, autonomous moral agent. It is not utilitarian calculations that oblige care, but rather the ongoing re-entering into complex relational entanglement with one another that all beings co-produce an unpredictable web of interdependent care through assemblages of ordinary practices, labour, affects, relationships, and bodily contacts, which are constantly reconfigured as they multiply and expand in unevenly responding to demands emerging from relationships (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

In response, each of the collaborators I met with began by sharing stories. In our series of meetings we exchanged stories in which we witnessed, experienced, or participated in acts of violation and subjugation within institutions or service systems that claimed to be supportive, including mental health, social service, and education settings. As if the storytelling or truths-telling to one another provided release from regrets, guilt, or pain, it was always only after telling our stories about experiences of violence, complicity, or suffering that we could allow ourselves to step into imagining the cultivation of or participation in a world that is different. Tracing my own experiences of these collaborations and stories, I'm reminded of the resistant practice of unforgetting.<sup>8</sup>

To discuss unforgetting, it is important to understand forgetting as an insidious tactic of colonization. The ways of knowing and being that we are collectively enabled to forget or not to know, for Indigenous peoples and settlers alike, will cease to be passed down through the generations, across space and time, in the social imaginary. Particularly for settlers, untethered from awareness of the past that shapes our ongoing present and constitutes what we know and how we live,

8. The concept of unforgetting is formulated by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz as a way of resistance to colonialism, and further elaborated by Shotwell (2017). Dunbar-Ortiz points out that "in Greek, the opposite of truth is forgetting" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2008, p. 57, cited in Shotwell, 2017, p. 37). As a tactic of colonization, forgetting is politically and socially a way of (not) knowing connected with a way of being. What we do not know is actively shaped by particular social and political arrangements which endorse the pretense that settlers' material benefits in their everyday lives and their understanding of themselves as innocent or rightful occupants of the land and its resources are entirely separate from the genocide and ongoing state structural violence against Indigenous peoples. Unforgetting, as explained by Shotwell, is therefore not only learning about the facts of colonial history, the suffering of Indigenous

we may then, as Butler suggests, comfortably place ourselves in a position of virtue or purity that precludes a view of ourselves as complicit in perpetuating the subjugation and injustices against Indigenous peoples in the very ways we sustain our own subjecthood and livelihoods. Forgetting is therefore a tactic to sustain widespread colonial control and state violence. Since colonialism operates through and in tandem with capitalist exploitation, racist discrimination, ableist ideologies, gender-based subjugation, and environmental destructions, ignorance about the colonial past can also prevent meaningful reflections on the entangled and intersecting problems of violence in our midst.

It is my hope that this body of work may contribute to broader social justice aims in our shared world as a practice of unforgetting. Together, the collaborators are people who resonate with or find belonging in the collective of *we*—we who wish to find ways to practice care without replicating violence. We who insist on exposing the violence in professionalized care, or institutional spaces that claim to be supportive. Not satisfied with simply naming the violence, we disrupt what we're told as the correct and safe ways to

communities and others who are marginalized and harmed by structural oppressions, or even the effects of colonial continuities and our complicity. More importantly, unforgetting is telling and living the complexity of the truths of the past and of the present in ways that prioritize the needs, interests, and resistance of those who are most impacted by intersecting systems of injustice and avoid replicating the violence of imposing essentialist categories of vulnerable identities onto particular groups of people—the very tactic that enables the colonization and social control of those who don't fit the norm in the first place.



be, we open ourselves up to the messiness and anxiety of complicity in oppression and no longer knowing how to fix things. We engage with our bad feelings through arts-making to interrupt the filters of speech and discourse of professional competence.<sup>9</sup> We tell each other stories about the people we knew, the people we failed and cared for, the people who were harmed and subjugated by us and mattered to us, the people who claimed to teach and guide us and deeply hurt us, and we ask ourselves how can we carry forward the memories of the lives who touched and shaped ours in the care work we continue to extend to others who are marginalized and subjugated in our shared world. We endeavor to imagine differently, different from the confines of professional competence or self-righteousness, so that we can point the way to a better world we cannot yet imagine, so that we can practice with care what this better world could look like.

To ask the question of how we can practice care without replicating violence is to acknowledge that violence occurs through practices of care. At the start of this quest of examining the relationship between care and violence was a curiosity about how the concept of trauma was

9. Disability activists have argued that the use of the arts can be a way to facilitate collaboration with the aim of social change, by generating and critically mobilizing emotions to facilitate pedagogy about oppression as well as social justice (Kelly & Orsini, 2016), which can in turn inspire new possibilities for change “in an open-ended, undetermined way” (Rice, Chandler & Changfoot, 2016, p. 59), beyond existing legal and rights-based frames (Kelly & Orsini, 2016). For example, Halifax and Mitchell (2006) suggest that poetry is a form of embodied language that can provide “an ethical basis for understanding our being-in-the-word” (Bolt, 2011, p. 126, as cited in Halifax & Mitchell, 2013, p. 351), as a methods that can affectively move researchers and activists alike in their commitment to social justice that is shaped by a sense of relationality with and responsibility for the other.

discursively constructed,<sup>10</sup> understood, and practiced within mental health settings in response to people who have experienced violence. To me, trauma is not simply a psychiatric condition with a predefined list of symptoms, or matter-of-fact damages to the brain or alterations of the nervous system after an overwhelming event. These are stories under the heading of 'Trauma,' and these stories tell people who have experienced violence particular things about their identities, feelings, and ways of being and relating in the world. These stories also tell workers in mental health services particular things about the identities and ways of being of people who have experienced violence. These stories, like all stories, are mediated by markers of difference and social hierarchies, such as Indigeneity, gender, race, class, and disability. When I worked in mental health services that were specifically mandated for women who have experienced violence, I wondered about how professional discourse about trauma—the kind of discourse that gets translated into psychoeducation programming to teach people about what they've become, how they should regulate their thoughts and feelings, and how they should strive to heal after experiencing an overwhelming and life-threatening event—

10. In this body of work discursive construction refers to the concept of discourse theorized by Michel Foucault. Discourse includes the constructions of meaning, the structure of language, the material practices it produces and authorizes, and ways of interactions within relations of power and systemic forces (Foucault, 1990; Shildrick, 1997). According to this theorization, what is perceived as reality is never accessible outside of its expressions through the mediation of multiple shifting and conflicting discourses (Shildrick, 1997). This understanding of discourse thus rejects fixed meanings, grand narratives, and universal definitions.

is constructed based on other stories in which disabled, irrational, emotional, feminized, trans, poor people don't fit. I knew this misalignment as surely as I recognized the tightness in my throat as I facilitated so-called first-stage trauma groups, as I gazed upon faces eager to learn about what was wrong with them and how to regulate their emotions, as I struggled to project my voice from that restricted, limiting, subjugated place within myself, as a racialized woman struggling with past and present racist violence and regular episodes of mental distress that qualified for a psychiatric diagnosis. I knew I was teaching and relaying a story about hope and recovery in which I didn't quite fit. And in other conversations with women who have experienced ongoing violence and marginalization, I wondered how their expressions of profound despair, utter hopelessness for things to be different, might be related to the ways they have been told to apply a particular story about trauma to their identity and their range of possibilities for living.<sup>11</sup>

I began to wonder whether the dominant discourse of trauma contributes to the foreclosure of possibilities for living, which is a kind of violence. This body of work began as an opportunity to unpack the

11. I am routinely reminded by narrative practices, an approach that was and continues to be influential in my previous work in professionalized care, and in my current teaching work with students training in mental health services. The co-founder of narrative therapy, Michael White (2001), once explained that his interest in unpacking stories was not to contrast stories as false or true, but that his interest focused on "in the constitutive or shaping effects of all stories. Stories about life and identity are not equal to each other in their constitutive effects. It is clearly apparent that some stories sponsor a broader range of options for action in life than to others. For example, I am sure that everyone would appreciate the fact that the deficit-centred stories of people's lives sponsor a particularly narrow range of options for action" (p. 21).

dominant stories about trauma, their associated emotions that people are taught to regulate, and their histories and entanglement with other stories, particularly stories that reinforce hierarchical binaries of superiority/inferiority, competence/deficit, human/not human.

This unpacking of discourse can be understood as an examination of some parts of the genealogy, lineage, and continual unfolding of the discourse of trauma. The purpose of the examination is not only to unearth information, but also to understand how the discourse of trauma figures into broader structures of oppression and colonial continuities. The unpacking and theorizing led to a curiosity about care, about how care can be violent, in ethical decision-making, in the professionalized care practices that are shaped by understanding of ethics, and in the policies that delimit professionalized care and support for people who have experienced violence. Examining the Western philosophical traditions of moral theory, from which much of the understanding of what it means to be ethical in contemporary professionalized care setting is based, pointed me to explore the scholarship of feminist ethics

of care, which I view as a way of talking back to the traditions of theorizing ethics based on the idealization of the white, masculine moral agent.

This unpacking of discourses on trauma may also be understood as a way of unforgetting. It was not only the literature review and analysis that led to the collaborative work investigating how we might practice care without replicating violence. It was a touchstone that helped make sense of the stories that the collaborators and I shared of transgressions that codes of ethics did not resolve and kept us awake at 3 in the morning. It was the fuel that dared us to dream of a fully caring learning environment for disabled and racialized students in post-secondary education, despite seemingly endless, repeated disappointment. It was a signpost that assured us that the art pieces we created to help change conversations about helping mattered, just as people who inspired these art pieces mattered, because every conversation was an opportunity for change to ripple out, just as we were changed by the conversations we shared with them, and this work was the rippling effects.

This body of work is iterative. As described above, I was directed by what I encountered along the way as I explored the cultural meanings of trauma, violence, and care. It is a mapping that creates itself as I journey along, with my feelings and memories, with others' stories, with the knowledges of those who have come before. In the following pages, theorizations are juxtaposed with and informed by collaborative or reflective arts-making, poetry, storytelling, and thinking with scholarships in critical feminist, race, and disability studies and ethics. It moves forward on some points and circles back to others. It may even appear haphazard at times, as stories, thoughts, and feelings about experiencing violence are haphazard and entangled, not linear or logical. Unforgetting the stories of violence and care is not about making the stories logical and easy to consume so the information can be used to better manage people into liberal, productive subjects, thereby reinscribing violence. It is precisely the opposite. It is foregrounding the messiness that didn't come to matter.

This body of work is also a mapping that follows and repeats some logic of academic writing for intelligibility within the dominant frame, because this work is

made possible only by my situatedness within academia. This work is structured by and produced through a dominant system of knowledge production. The knowledge produced, however imaginative, however different, cannot exist outside of the norms of cultural intelligibility.<sup>12</sup> This work repeats the motions of going down a well-trekked path that affirms the exaltation of an educated class, which, as an exclusionary process that preclude opportunities for others, can also be thought of as a form of violence. Nevertheless, the hope is to repeat differently, because by doing so, we may happen upon gaps for subversion.

12. While Butler (1990) argues that nothing can be understood outside of existing frames of cultural intelligibility and norms, in explaining the concept of iterability, Butler (2009) also offers a hopeful theorization that norms are not deterministic. Rather, iterations of particular ways of being, including violence, produce norms over time. Therefore, the call to non-violence is about “how to live the violence of one’s formative history, how to effect shifts and reversals in its iteration. Precisely because iterability evades every determinism, we are left with questions such as: How do I live the violence in my formation? How does it live on in me? How does it carry me, in spite of me, even as I carry it? And in the name of what new value can I reverse and contest it?” (p. 170). Perhaps one way to reverse or contest the norms that exercise violence is to question or even refuse to accept that the well-trekked path is the only right way forward, because paths, “as lines of thought as well as lines of motion... depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 16). Thus, as Ahmed (2017) also suggests, “to follow a queer route: you’re not sure which way you are going; maybe you let your feet decide for you. You can be directed by what you encounter along the way... You wander, haphazardly at times, but then you might acquire a sense of purpose because of what you find along the way... To proceed without assuming there is a right direction is to proceed differently” (p. 197).

## 2. The Master's Tools Will Never: Methods

For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

— Audre Lorde (1984/2007, p. 123)

*the crafting of a research question is the crafting of a story that is also the crafting of an ethics.*

— Natalie Loveless (2019, p. 95, emphasis in original)

### Everyday Encounters

People matter. Not just people in general, not anonymous populations,<sup>1</sup> but the people I met and shared life with. The people who shared with me their experiences of living through violence. The people who no longer share space with me in this temporal realm. Their lives and deaths matter. Their stories matter. This is a work that insists on these matters. This is a work

1. From this very beginning point of foregrounding anecdotes – the specific moments of encounters with specific people, and the specific shaping effects they leave on those they encounter – this work is way of resisting grand theory or universal protocols about care that construct people as faceless, anonymous populations in need of management, control, and regulation according to the norm. In developing this focus on the specificity of life, I am indebted to the anthropologic study by Lisa Stevenson (2014), on the tuberculosis epidemic in the post-WWII years and the anonymous suicide hotline system in the Arctic Inuit community. Throughout her writing Stevenson demonstrates that through the bureaucratization and professionalization of care, anonymity has “come to



that insists on taking seriously these stories as matters of ethics, as touchstones and signposts and undeserved gifts to craft conditions for living that are kinder to difference.

In traditional, Euro-Western-centric academia the stories that matter deeply to me may be categorized and dismissed as anecdotal. I am grateful to be doing this work at this time when there are numerous critical, anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-ableist, feminist storytellers, poets, arts-makers, and scholars who have come before me, tenaciously theorizing, teaching, and practicing countless ways that the personal, the corporeal, the common sense, the mundanity of everyday, the feelings and the felt, the non-human surrounds, are always political.<sup>2</sup> The lived and living experiences of people who have been marginalized within cisheteropatriarchy matter profoundly. It is through telling these stories that the capillary networks of dominating power, both brazen top-down abuse of

structure our very definition of what it is to care" (p. 85). Anonymous care, often justified by upholding notions of individual privacy and confidentiality, renders "the texture and specificity of a particular life irrelevant" (p. 86), or relevant only insofar as professional obligations are fulfilled, which people accessing care may or may not experience as helpful or caring. It obscures the failure and neglect of the state, and mitigates for the agents of the states the existential anxiety about people's lives and deaths.

2. This work is also shaped by the life works of many feminist, queer, and disability justice writers, theorists, artists, and activists. The texts that became companions on this journey are by Sara Ahmed, Audre Lorde, Judith Butler, Chris Chapman, Margrit Shildrick, and many others. I was very fortunate to have been introduced to *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983) as the very first course reading in the PhD program. The many voices from this text, along with others along the way, validated deep-seated feelings that I did not previously know how to acknowledge, and in turn inspired and sustained my hopes for what I can do with the time and space I am given in this program.

authority, aggression, and brutality, as well as insidious practices of exploitation, silencing, and erasure, can be exposed. It is through sharing stories of both violence and resistance that efforts of subversion can be crafted, collectivized, and practiced, from the bottom up, in our everyday, seemingly ordinary encounters. The encounters and practices that make up our everyday and shape our ways of being. Repeated encounters that in turn will inevitably shift our shared world, our culture, our social imaginary, with the potential toward more livable conditions.<sup>3</sup>

I am reminded here by Natalie Loveless' discussion of the driving force of curiosity in research.<sup>4</sup> She points out that the root word for curious in Latin is shared with other words that mean to care or being careful. I am thinking that to be curious is to inquire with an openness to not knowing. To be open to not knowing is to look outside of or deviate from what is already known – to believe that life does not have to be the way it

3. I understand from Lauren Fournier's (2021) discussion of anecdotal theory that it is a means of weaving, juxtapositioning, and deconstructing everyday encounters and experiences with theoretical writing that is informed by the theorizing of others who have come before. Anecdotal theory can therefore elevate the textures and specificity of everyday relationships to the realm of critical theory. As such, whether it is work that has come before, or work that is being developed through theoretical writing, feminist and queer theories are not only treated as knowledge and tools for consciousness raising, reflection, and analysis, but they are relied upon as sustenance for practice, living, and becoming. Feminist, queer, and disability theorizing for the nurturing of our capacity to act and intervene, developing work that not only describes how to act but takes the form of action (Loveless, 2019).

4. In the form of a manifesto, Natalie Loveless (2019) argues for research-creation as a way of queering the production of research, "to defamiliarize and call into question the way we do what we do in our little pods of human sociality so practiced at sedimenting the new into the naturalized that we need constant reminder that *the way things are need not be the case*" (p. 100, emphasis in original). This work is done by insisting that "we attend to those drives and desires that animate our stories – the stories that we find ourselves told by – and the ethics embedded in such modes of attention" (p. 95).

has always been, that it does not need to follow this or that direction towards a predetermined, well-trekked, happy end.<sup>5</sup> To question the ways that life unfolds in the present is to recognize that for many, the pursuit of the promise of the universal happy end, the good life in the common sense, the optimistic future that gets better, are in many ways founded upon relations of domination and power that are profoundly cruel.<sup>6</sup> It is the dangling carrot that enables the prolonged wearing out or disablement of particular bodies marked for disposability based on race, gender, disability, and class, for the sustainment of a capitalist and imperialist world order.<sup>7</sup>

Violence, in this unfolding of lives in our world in the present, is therefore more than the perpetration of bodily harms. I understand Judith Butler's theorization of ethical violence as an operation through a kind of ethics that requires everyone to manifest self-identities, including people's ways of being, values, and hopes, at all times in ways

5. The common-sense belief in the goodness of happiness is questioned by Sara Ahmed (2010) in one of her studies of how the ways things are need not be the case. She theorizes that in the contemporary, capitalist, neoliberal society, the face of happiness "looks rather like the face of privilege" (p. 11), and that "claims to happiness make certain forms of personhood valuable" (p. 11). Social norms and ideals become attached to the notion of happiness, producing the belief that relative proximity to these norms and ideals can lead to a happy life.

6. Ahmed relates to Lauren Berlant (2011) in framing happiness as a fantasy, whereby social norms that are produced by and reinforce relations of domination and subjugation shapes, delimits, and maintains individuals' "sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world" (p. 24) through the conditions of "cruel optimism" (p. 1). One may also understand conditions of cruel optimism as conditions of violence, under which individuals' desire, pursuit, and attachment to certain moral-economic ideals of a 'good life' paradoxically become detrimental to their own well-being and survival.

7. Of course, the ways that people are subjected to conditions and relations of cruel optimism are mediated by race, gender, class, and disability. Jasbir Puar (2017) explains that historically and ongoingly, racialization and feminization are deployed in the biopolitical classification of certain bodies as defective for the justification of slavery, incarceration, police brutality, colonization, military interventions, exploitative labour, and economic subjugation. The interlocking transnational operations of capitalism and imperialism require the "biopolitical scripting of populations available for

that support the norm. This justifies the foreclosure of other possibilities for living, the preclusion of futures in which disabilities and differences are desirable, and the destruction of lifeworlds that do not align with or challenge the stability of the dominant one.<sup>8</sup>

Violence is physical, verbal, or other kinds of explicit assaults, as well as colonial violence, racist oppression, cisheteropatriarchal subjugation, ableist exclusions, sanist discriminations, capitalist exploitations, structural / institutional barriers, and other conditions that systematically limit or preclude the access of resources to a liveable life for certain groups of people but not others.

It is a social practice, passed on across generations, space and time, cemented in the walls of institutions, operationalized and proliferated as policies, organizational protocols, service delivery, everyday caregiving practices, always at the horizon of

injury” (p. 64), of people constructed as anonymous masses that do not evoke a sense of curiosity or care for their ways of being in the world.

8. Judith Butler (2005) theorizes that ethical violence “demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same” (p. 56) She draws on Theodor Adorno’s analysis of the collective ethos that postulates a false universality in order to “suppress the difficulty and discontinuity existing in any contemporary ethos” (p. 12), and further explains that ethical norms that are indifferent to cultural particularities and social conditions that offer possibilities for living can impose “violence in the form of an exclusionary foreclosure” (p. 12). In the context of disability, the discourse of cure operates resonantly and in connection with the discourse of happiness, whereby being cured of disability is presumed to equal a happily-ever-after outcome. Eli Clare (2017) and Alison Kafer (2013) discuss how pervasive ableist and able-minded ideologies position disability as pitiful conditions that require overcoming or curing, thus producing social conditions that foreclose the possibilities or imaginings for a desirable and livable future for disabled people.

our social imaginary.<sup>9</sup> How, then, do we imagine differently – *How do we care without replicating violence?*

If operations of oppression and violence are embedded within institutional structures, such that people continue to experience discrimination, neglect, and outright abuse within institutions and systems that are supposed to care, despite having professional codes of ethics or standards of practice,<sup>10</sup> then I speculate that the possible answers to this central ethical quandary is unlikely to be found by simply revising existing policies that govern practices or care. Instead, this work speculates that possible answers to this central ethical quandary are found in the everyday unfolding of lives, the anecdotes of ordinary people, the intertwining moments through which care is extended and received. Particularly, I opt to follow the tradition of Black and racialized feminist explorations and theorizations by foregrounding the knowledges,

9. As summarized by Iris Marion Young (1990), violence is not merely an individual moral wrong, but a social practice and a systemic phenomenon of injustice directed towards particular groups, “always at the horizon of social imagination” (p. 62). Social practices of violence become cemented through formal policies, informal processes that have become naturalized or taken-for-granted, *the ways that things are and have always been*, which Ahmed (2017) characterizes as walls. Walls that block efforts toward justice or transformation, such as racism or sexual harassment complaints or calls for policy change, tangible and unmovable “mechanisms that allow some things to happen and not others” (p. 96), even within systems and institutions that are supposed to help people who have experienced racism and sexual violence.

10. The various artworks that the collaborators have co-created with me speak to stories of violence within institutions and services that claim to care. These artworks and stories will be discussed in the following chapters. For now, it may be helpful to point out that while the state has clearly invested in promoting the efficacy of trauma-informed care as best practice in health and social services, evident in guidelines such as the *Trauma and Violence-informed Approaches to Policy and Practice*, studies on violence against women shelters continue to show that the policies and practices in these services are often experienced as harmful and oppressive (Burnette et al., 2015; Koyama, 2006). Particularly, Emi Koyama (2006) describes how shelter policies and procedures are often biased against those who are already positioned as morally deviant or deficient within dominant culture based on gender, sexuality, class, and disability, and impose more stringent surveillance and penalization on women of colour,

voices, and experiences of people who have experienced marginalization based on gender, race, and disability. I am interested in their stories of extending and accessing care in relationships with systems and policies that are supposed to help. Stories that may have happened on any ordinary day, but that we could not forget.

This work is being done at a time when the violence within the academic institution, such as misogyny, ableism, racism, and elitism, has ongoingly been challenged, addressed, or at least brought to people's awareness. Feminist anecdotal and autobiographical writing have gained legitimacy as modes of knowledge production, in spite of and against the historical and ongoing dismissal of feminist self-reflexive productions and autobiographies as self-indulgent, unreliable as research methods, and inferior as scholarly and theoretical outputs.<sup>11</sup> While practices of silencing and dismissal of what seems different

gender and sexually diverse people, single mothers, and those who engage in sex work and substance use, who are regularly expelled from services due to alleged violation of shelter rules. While Koyama is writing within the contexts of the United States, studies on violence against women shelters in Ontario also reveal oppressive shelter policies, which are also linked to provincial policies on subsidized housing, income support, and child welfare (Burnett et al., 2015; Wathen et al., 2015). Moreover, in a state founded upon colonialism, these social policies are inevitably shaped by colonial structures and practices. National and provincial policies that claim to protect Indigenous women, girls, and communities, including state mandated psychological services for trauma, in fact reproduce state structural violence and keep communities in unsafe conditions by constructing Indigenous communities as inherently broken, untrustworthy, and promiscuous, leading to a disbelief or indifference toward their experiences of violence, followed by a failure to intervene through policies and systems (Chrisjohn & McKay, 2017; Clark, 2012; Million, 2013; Stevenson, 2014).

11. Care work, artistic practices, and autobiographical work have this in common: presumed to be associated with femininity and therefore devalued in the hierarchical binary of objective masculinity / subjective femininity, with the latter term always already positioned as inferior (Butler, 1990; Fournier, 2021; Loveless, 2019). Intersecting with race and disability, the experiences and knowledges about care and violence from Indigenous, Black, queer, trans, and disabled communities have historically been and continue to be dismissed as angry complaints or polemic (Ahmed, 2017; Million, 2013; Lorde, 1984/2007), biased or narcissistic (Fournier, 2021), population-

continue to manifest in academic spaces, I believe that decades of insistent voices of those deemed different have cultivated communities of like-minds who shifted the political and academic terrains such that when I proposed this doctoral study with autotheory<sup>12</sup> as the primary method to my dissertation committee in the critical disability studies program, I was met only with encouragement and excitement for how this study will unfold, with no questioning of how this will work, whether this is enough work, or if this will bring about reliable results.

I think this shift in academia in some ways has to do with trust. There are communities of scholars, writers, and activists who have long resisted the unquestioned trust of the god trick of objectivist empirical methods, the masculinized view from nowhere, the modernist grand narratives and fixed meanings.<sup>13</sup> We understand how enforcing as universal truth a particular story that in reality only includes or

specific (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Morris, 1993), detracting from larger anti-racist or anti-colonial movements or right claims (Lorde, 1983; Million, 2013), or subject to prejudice against difference within their own movements (Kafer, 2013; Whittle, 2006). These stories are therefore consistently made invisible and precluded from mattering within social institutions and relations.

12. Autotheory, as explained by Fournier (2021), emerged in early 21st century to describe feminist “works of literature, writing, and criticism that integrate autobiography with theory and philosophy in ways that are direct and self-aware” (p. 7). It is a mode of inquiry that integrates theory with the body, the so-called personal, and explicitly subjective modes, producing works that “exceed existing genre categories and disciplinary bounds, that flourish in the liminal spaces between categories, that reveal the entanglement of research and creation” (p. 2). It has therefore been used for its potential as a subversive or “transformative mode of critiquing institutional power” (p. 3), particularly the politics of access and power around the production and boundaries of theory, and the “reinscription of what constitute acceptable knowledge in spaces of higher learning” (p. 27). Maggie Nelson distinguishes practices of autotheory from memoir, and describes the former as “life-writing” (p. 14) – constituting life and its practices through the act of writing, rather than merely describing life events that occurred. Often written in a manifesto-like reasoning and tone, autotheory is commonly tied to social justice aims, rooted in lived experiences, and shared freely to promote wider access to information and advance certain calls to actions. Against the charges of narcissism, feminist autotheory refers not to theory of the self, but theory that emerges from the self,

benefits certain groups of people while excluding or subjugating others is a form of violence – the master’s tool that has built and sustained systems of oppression and domination. Different tools are needed, perhaps forged through a practice of trust in one another – in each other’s stories and truths-telling, in the generative potential of sharing stories and truths to resist oppressions, to dream and co-create a less violent world.

Recognizing that I have been entrusted with this work, and that I am endeavouring to contribute to the ongoing collective resistant practices and knowledge production of anti-racist, disability justice, feminist writers and artists, the methods and forms through which I produce this work require intention and care, as a member of a community doing my part. It would not be adequate to only fit my work within the requirements of academia by aligning it to an established frame such as autotheory or research-creation. If that is the case, this work would likely end here, on these pages of

insisting on embodied experiences particularly as racialized, queer, feminized subjects, talking back against the supposedly neutral standard of white cisheterosexual masculinity.

13. The perspectives that talk back against the presumed standards of the ways that things have always been or always ought to be reflect Donna Haraway’s (1988) alternative offering of the concept of “situated knowledges” (p. 590), which rejects the positivist “conquering gaze from nowhere” (p. 581). Instead, it emphasizes a postmodernist insistence on irreducible differences and multiplicity of local knowledges, the embodied and partial nature of the practices of seeing, and the historical contingencies of all knowledge claims, knowing subjects, and meaning-making. Situated knowledges are kins to the Foucauldian understanding of discourse.

Foucault (1990) rejects the binary of the rulers versus the ruled, or the idea that ruling is a result of any fixed meaning, grand narrative, and universal definition about subjects, objects, or relationships. Instead, he asserts that power is “produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another” (p. 93). Through this network of relations unfolds a symbiotic connection between power and knowledge, in which the “exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 52, as cited in Shildrick, 1997, p. 15), and “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (Foucault, 1990, p. 100). What is perceived as reality is then never accessible outside of its expressions through the mediation of multiple shifting and conflicting discourses (Shildrick, 1997).



a dissertation, having served the purpose of garnering a doctoral degree. What methods and forms might carry this work beyond academia, to take seriously the urging of feminist and critical race theorists to bridge theory and practice, to theorize in the service of practice that can transform the world? How can this work make clear that the personal is political and theoretical? How can this work make our experiences not only known but also felt, not only to be curious or to know about people's experiences, but to mobilize an embodied knowing and desire that propel actions for change?<sup>14</sup>

## **Mess**

I begin by foregrounding knowledge of people who have experienced both violence and care not only as memory, reflection, and a way of consciousness raising, but also as sustenance for practice, living, and becoming. Following the frame of autotheory as described by Fournier, this work can be

14. Research that is driven by curiosity that “erupts and takes us over” (Loveless, 2019, p. 69), by ethical quandaries relating to people who matter to us, by existential anxieties that destabilize our sense of self and place in the world, may be understood as a practice of love (Loveless, 2019). It is a process that is about nurturing the capacity to care rather than simply to know. It is not simply asking questions and knowing the facts, but asking and learning in ways that can act upon the world in order to transform it – a way of learning that Paolo Freire (1970/2000) has called praxis. It is therefore important to contemplate how and from what standpoints the questions are asked, the forms that the questions, reflections, and analyses may take. Forms that not only convey information but also to make particular experiences felt, in order to compel actions (Lorde, 1984/2007).

understood as a way of elevating the lives and deaths of people who are commonly seen as hard-to-serve and therefore easy-to-neglect to the realm of critical theory.<sup>15</sup> Of course, this work of retelling and sharing experiences of others is never unproblematic. Particularly of the narratives that I include about people to whom I was a colleague, a friend, or a service provider, I am confronted by the questions, do lives need my elevation, however it is enacted, through writing or discussions in academia, in order to matter? Who gets to speak, and why? What is the ethics of using others' experiences as a form of self-understanding? What is the ethics of this process?

To elevate everyday experiences to the realm of theory. Perhaps the words *elevate* and *realm* point to what is problematic, which is not theory per se, but the discourse of academia that constructs and exalts theory as a top-down and gatekeeping structure. Theory as structure is kept at the top to sustain classism,

15. Fournier (2021) relates the writing of everyday experiences alongside theory to Roland Barthes' *Lovers' Discourse*, which aimed to elevate the discourse of private life to the realm of critical theory. However, Fournier also points out a distrust or even a rejection of theory by feminist activists in social justice spaces, as they see theory as top-down and gatekeeping, in opposition to "getting your hands dirty and doing something" (p. 101) through anti-authoritarian or egalitarian modes of organizing and practice. As Ahmed (2017) observes within feminist scholarship, "too often we bracket feminist theory as something that marks out a specific kind, or even a higher kind, of feminist work" (p. 7), evident in the ways that the word theory itself is distributed within the academy, "how some materials are understood as theory and not others" (p. 8).

elitism, and Eurocentric tradition in academia, and as such is often promoted and seen as the binary opposite of practice, or the ways we understand and engage with everyday life situations and interactions. An idea must prove itself worthy to get past the gate into the higher realm of theory that would be deemed widely, if not universally, applicable to life situations. The higher realm of theory is perhaps also commonly recognized as the realm of rational thoughts, which are historically associated with masculinity and presumably untainted by the opposite, inferior realm of the body and emotions, which are categorized as irrational or subjective or personal or idiosyncratic or narcissistic.<sup>16</sup> It then follows that people ascribed as feminine are traditionally kept out of the realm of theory and are relegated to the realm of practice, as women are historically associated with emotions and the corporeal in western philosophical traditions. Following Shildrick, this understanding of gender and theory does not see gender as

16. In postmodern feminist investigation of bioethics in healthcare, Margrit Shildrick (1997) argues that while ethics is directed towards bodies and their wellbeing, it is derived from abstract ideals of transcendent rationality and neutrality, which are out of touch with corporeal realities and mediated by gender. Tracing medical texts and illustrations from the Renaissance, Shildrick demonstrates how the historical development of medical knowledge corresponds with an enduring western philosophical formulation of genders, in which women are ontologically constructed as imperfectly formed, deficient, and inferior versions of the male ideal. Specifically, female inferiority is grounded most firmly in the reproductive process, which positions the female body as a passive, empty container lacking in substance of the soul, existing only for the active spirit of the male body to take form, thus reflecting Judaeo-Christian narratives of creation. Through the European Enlightenment and its cementation of the Cartesian mind/body binary as fundamental to human life, men are positioned as the “self-present, self-authorizing subject... who could successfully transcend his own body to take up a position of pure reason uncontaminated by the untrustworthy experience of the senses” ( p. 26). As women are understood as more intimately associated with reproduction, they are seen as intrinsically more enmeshed with and therefore incapable of transcending their own bodies, thus leading to beliefs that women lack intellectual, psychological, and moral capacity and agency.

One may turn here to connect this western philosophical tradition of the devaluation of the feminine with the struggles of feminist autobiographical knowledge production. Feminist writing and artistic production, particularly the work of

fixed ontological categories, nor does it argue that women's bodies are exclusive targets of regulatory forces, but instead interrogates how any body, or ideas associated with that body, may become engendered as feminine or masculine, and in turn mobilized through operations of power to produce asymmetrical, unjust, or violent relationships between people or groups. Within the gendered binary logic of academic elitism, theory in the realm of thoughts defines and delimits practice of the body – what kind of practice, how useful it is, whether it is recognized as practice that matters at all.

Feminist and queer scholars and activists have long been insisting that lived experiences and practices matter.<sup>17</sup> Following the work of feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial writers, this work is not so much about elevating lived experiences to the realm of theory, but it is an attempt to subvert the hierarchical and binary logic that make theory a signifier of status or an apparatus of power

racialized feminist writers and artists, have historically and ongoingly faced the charge of narcissism. Fournier (2021) attributes the association between narcissism and femininity to Freud's psychodynamic theory, which characterizes the narcissistic person as "passive, ignorant, and stunted in emotional development" (p. 44). Women are therefore precluded from critical thoughts. Combined with Shildrick's (1997) analysis of historical medical discourse, in which menstruation and pregnancy are read as evidence of women's lack of control over the containment of their bodies (by leaking vital blood) and the boundaries of their selves (by simultaneously being self and other), one may then see how the a hierarchical binary between masculinity and femininity comes into being through a gendered and colonial logic, in its demarcation between male-culture and female-nature, with nature being wild and chaotic but conquerable through regulation and subjugation.

17. Living in this atmosphere of subjugation, feminist and queer scholars and activists have long been challenging the ruling status of theory. bell hooks (1994), for example, insists that any feminist theory must be grounded in concrete experiences of struggles and triumphs, of conflicts and connections. It is not to do away with thinking, writing, and theorizing altogether as a kind of anti-intellectualism, but to generate theory from practice that can transform oppressive conditions (Fournier, 2021). Feminist disability scholars focus on corporeality to theorize on the relationships between the disabled body and the feminized body, and their social, cultural, and political implications (Garland-Thomson, 2005; Wendell, 1996). Drawing on the work of queer scholars, Loveless (2019) writes that queer is by definition at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the

that is associated only with or can be wielded only by certain exalted groups. It is an attempt to subvert, disrupt, rupture, or otherwise *make a mess* of the apparatus of power that is mobilized through contradictions that masquerade as natural and logical: that women and feminized people, particularly those who are part of racialized and colonized groups, are charged as narcissistic or thinking too long and too much about our experiences, and at the same time not having agency or autonomy and therefore not capable of think for ourselves.

Through this mess, the goal is not the negation of theory, but a work-in-progress towards reclaiming theory such that the knowledges and experiences of the lives on the margins will come to matter on their own terms. This work attempts to subvert, make a mess, and reclaim by practicing theory in different ways, by constructing theory not as complete statements but unfinished stitches, ongoing thoughts that show up as poetry, uncomfortable feelings that turn

dominant. Queer theory is therefore fluid, situational, and open-ended in its refusal, disruption, and undoing of categories and fixed meanings. Writing on feminist theory, Ahmed (2017) insists that "The personal is theoretical" (p. 10). As theory is often assumed to be abstract, and to abstract is to distill and detach from the particulars and the details of life moments, Ahmed urges that "we might then have to drag theory back, to bring theory back to life" (p. 10) through writing that is animated by the embodied experiences of power in the everyday: "the detail of an encounter, an incident, a happening, flashing like insight" (p. 10).

into stories without resolutions. This work attempts subversion by claiming that theory is practice and practice is many different ways of living. It practices subversion by drawing on accounts of many people I have gotten to know, who have lived and cultivated many theories of survival, of grief, of joy, of connections and disconnections. This work finds its place in the interrelated network of theory-making as practices for living. In this work, I write with theory and write theory as a practice to continue living with what remains from the moments I shared with people who mattered to me.

## **Problem**

The people whom the collaborators and I write about are people who often did not come to matter, at least not within institutions that claim to help them, but often not in their communities either. In contrast, my voice matters, at least to some extent, in the institutions where I have worked and met them, and

in the academic community in which I am doing this work. The location from which I speak and write and make art about people shape both my subject position and that of the people I speak about.<sup>18</sup> Learning from Alcoff, speaking for others who are less privileged from a position of privilege is an act of representing others' needs, goals, and situation, always in some ways perpetuating the discursive constructs of who they are within relations of domination and subjugation. It is also simultaneously an act that maintains the speaker's privilege for having the authority to name who the others are and to take up space to speak at all.

If we live by the stories and theories put forth by generations of feminist, queer, anti-colonial, anti-racist writers and activists on collective care or ethics of care that we are interdependent, that everyday encounters and practices shape not only our thoughts and feelings but also our physicality and all the ways we

18. The acts of speaking for or about others are troubled and complicated by Linda Alcoff (1991), who cautions that, historically, "the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for" (p. 7). Writing 30 years ago, Alcoff points out that there was a strong, though debated, viewpoint in feminist organizing which holds that speaking for others is unethical and politically illegitimate. In her recent text, Fournier (2021) traces the increasing interest and popularization of autobiographical theoretical writing, namely autotheory, particularly since the publication of Maggie Nelson's (2015) text *The Argonauts*, which theorizes against binary constructs around gender, sexuality, and identity by writing about the life and relationship that she as a cisgender queer woman shares with her partner, who is a trans man. To Fournier, the use of transparency, honesty, or disclosure, is described as a tradition in feminist writing, particularly with the aim of exposing violence, but can also be about disclosing one's own complicities, problematics, and imperfections as the writing itself attempts to politicize personal experiences, as Nelson demonstrated. However, Fournier also points out how the rhetoric of honesty can be a way of performing oneself as a trust-worthy and self-aware subject to preemptively shield oneself from criticisms. One response in feminist organizing has been to avoid speaking about others at all, and "assert that one can only know from one's own narrow individual experience and one's 'own truth' and can never make claims beyond this" (Alcoff, 1999, p. 17), which can and has significantly limit the effectivity of political activism. The declaration of 'I only speak for myself,' or 'I can speak for this group because I'm part of the group,' is perhaps a futile

move through the world, are our stories not always dependent on and inextricably intertwined with other stories, do our stories not always carry those of others, like thread-ends being carried forward into new rows of stitching? If we truly take up and live by the theory of interdependence between beings, then is it ever possible to tell our own stories without speaking about, or even for, others?<sup>19</sup>

Alcoff identifies three ways of engaging with the stories of others in one's practices of self-representation, or storytelling of one's experiences: speaking *for* others, speaking *about* others, and speaking *with* others. When contemplating the differences between these modes of speaking, I think about the ways they may be enabled by the location from which the speaker grounds themselves. Speaking for others as a practice is perhaps related to what Haraway calls the 'god trick of the view from nowhere,'<sup>20</sup> from an orientation that believes I can represent

attempt to avoid responsibility and accountability for one's effect on others, because "there is no neutral place to stand free and clear in which one's words do not prescriptively affect or mediate the experience of others, nor is there a way to decisively demarcate a boundary between one's location and all others" (Alcoff, 1991, p. 20).

19. As Alcoff (1991) elaborates movingly, "We are collectively caught in an intricate, delicate web in which every action I take, discursive or otherwise, pulls on, breaks off, or maintains the tension in many strands of a web in which others find themselves moving also. When I speak for myself, I am constructing a possible self, a way to be in the world, and am offering that to others, whether I intend to or not, as one possible way to be" (p. 21). Therefore, the attempt to avoid the problems of speaking for others is based on the illusion of individualism, the understanding of a self that is not constituted by multiple intersecting discourses but is a unified, self-contained whole that is capable of complete autonomy, promoted by individualist ideology of the west.

20. Haraway (1988) writes that the "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (p. 581) is exercised by those occupying the ruling positions, who "claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. This gaze signifies the un-marked positions of Man and White" (p. 581), who claim authority to define and judge those who are marked as different from its invisible ideals.



others' interests because I know the truth about them and what is good for them, perhaps based on what I know as common sense or my presumed authority of the matter due to my proximity to the invisible ideals of whiteness, rationality, and middle-class respectability. Speaking about others is also a way of representing others' interests and their truths. But might it be possible to tell stories about others without asserting that my stories are the truth about others? I think this would depend on how I situate my knowledge, how honestly I disclose how I have come to understand and what are my relationships with the interests and needs of the others I speak about. Referencing Gayatri Spivak, Alcoff expresses most agreement with the practice of speaking with, which makes room for my experiences as well as those of the others that may possibly contradict mine.<sup>21</sup>

This work can be understood as a practice of speaking about others, particularly when I and the

21. In the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak criticizes the self-abnegated posture that intellectuals adopt, grounded in the assumptions that people who are oppressed can always transparently represent their self-interests in any setting, and as attempts to secure immunity from criticism (Alcoff, 1991). Spivak therefore proposes the practice of speaking to others, to which Alcoff (1991) added speaking with others, as a way for those in privileged positions to neither retreat from their discursive role nor impose their understanding of oppression as truth, but to make room for people who have been oppressed to produce new or counter-narratives from this exchange. Alcoff brings hope by adding that "errors are unavoidable in theoretical inquiry as well as political struggle, and moreover they often make contributions" (p. 22). However, choosing whether to speak for or about others still requires careful analysis of the power relations involved in the particular setting where the speaking occurs, with the understanding that "the very decision to 'move over' or retreat can occur only from a position of privilege. Those who are not in a position of speaking at all cannot retreat from an action they do not employ" (p. 24). As such, choosing not to speak is itself an exercise of privilege rather than the giving-up or giving-away of it.

collaborators write about the moments shared with people we no longer have the opportunity to talk with: people who have passed, or people who access services where we are no longer employed. Most of the people we speak or write about are also people who have been marked as hard-to-serve, treatment-resistant, altogether-nonsensical, and therefore have not been heard in the spaces where education and decision-making about professionalized care happen, where people's experiences of not being heard are in fact effects of violence within systems that are supposed to care. The location from which I write and create is situated, partial, and complex, as are the locations from which the collaborators contribute to this project. All of us are situated in positions of privilege as workers in professionalized care and/or academics. All of us have also experienced subjugation as racialized, femininized, and/or queer people in the mental health, social service, and academic systems that produce such

privilege. Some of us have been complicit in structures and practices of violence in such systems. Some of us have also experienced such violence when we access education and professionalized care. The complex experiences of care and oppression or violence are not brought together by chance. I have sought out collaborators who could speak to contradicting experiences in order to demonstrate that it is impossible to demarcate or detangle the boundaries separating one's location from others' locations. Nevertheless, when we speak about the violence we experienced and witnessed, our voices have relevance, will likely garner attention, and will matter to an extent, because of our subject positions of relative privilege. As such, choosing not to speak from our positions is forgoing opportunities to effect meaningful change against violence in systems that are supposed to care. This choice itself is a product of privilege that we can use in an attempt to secure

immunity from criticism, or wager on the chance that our creativity can contribute to ongoing feminist, anti-racist, anti-ableist struggles against violence. Centring interdependence and collective care, I believe that to think or theorize or practice differently in order to care without replicating violence necessitates making space where we can speak about and engage with complicated, entangled, and contradicting stories about our and others' experiences of violence and care, which is what this work attempts to do.

I also wonder if this work may also be thought of, in an aspirational way, as a practice of speaking with, if I were to bring to this point Haraway's idea of thinking-with.<sup>22</sup> The stories I tell come from thinking with my memories and thoughts of conversations I had with people, the words spoken to me, the moments shared with me, the feelings stuck with me. It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what effects I hope for these thoughts and

22. Discussing speculative feminism, Haraway (2016) emphasizes storytelling as a practice of "thinking-with" (p. 39). To Haraway, much of storytelling is about remembrance, remembering our relationship with those who matter to us. Haraway writes that "Without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think... It matters what thoughts think thoughts; it matters what stories tell stories" (p. 39).

stories to have on the people who may come across these stories, particularly students or workers in the care profession, on their practices and interactions with others and ethics of being in the world.<sup>23</sup> The collaborative writing and arts-making in this project are published in public forms that can be widely viewed and shared, as open access essays, images, and video on a website and social media page, and hard copies printed and mailed to anyone who requests them. As such, it can be said that this project has turned our voices, perspectives, private feelings including feelings of guilt, shame, and discomfort, into spectacle.<sup>24</sup> While we hold a collective aim to question, disrupt, and shift taken-for-granted practices, it would not be possible to know how these writings and images may be interpreted. Following Alcoff, not having control over how our work is interpreted does not absolve us from accountability. As I will discuss later, there were conversations and decisions around how stories about people

23. Alcoff (1991) argues that in order to “evaluate attempts to speak for others in particular instances, we need to analyze the probable or actual effects of the words on the discursive and material context. One cannot simply look at the location of the speaker or her credentials to speak, nor can one look merely at the propositional content of the speech; one must also look at where the speech goes and what it does there” (p. 26).

24. Referring to autotheory, Fournier (2021) suggests that writing personal experiences of oneself and of others is a risk that the writer takes to turn these experiences into forms that can be publicly read, to turn one’s voice into spectacle, to theorize the stakes of one’s own performance (Fournier, 2021). One is also never certain about the stakes of one’s performance, or how one’s voice will be received, as Alcoff (1991) writes that understanding is shaped by contexts, and we can never be certain of the contexts around which the listener, reader, or reviewer interprets our messages. However, Alcoff asserts that “a partial loss of control does not entail a complete loss of accountability” (p. 16). The speaker must still speculate where the speech goes and what it may do in taking responsibility for their speaking.

who experience marginalization are represented in our writing and artwork, how such representations may reinforce subjugating discourses that already exist, with the understanding that ultimately those we aim to support will be most impacted by the life-limiting consequences of such discourses.

The public forms of sharing our work also open up space for criticism. We may have gotten things wrong. Our ways of telling stories may be offensive to others in ways that we cannot predict or understand, because even though we have experienced unbelonging or subjugation or oppression, we do not live the life of abject poverty, we do not rely on workers to navigate healthcare, our housing security is not contingent on our compliance to program policies. I composed the essays and poems and artwork with the hope that if the people whose memories I was thinking with were to read or view my work, they would feel respected in the ways I remembered and represented them. But I will never be able to

confirm if this is true. As such, I invited the collaborators into this project and this risk of being wrong, of being critiqued. Somewhere along the way, we decided that the writing and creating is worth the risk for the changes we seek. By making room for our understanding to be wrong and for other counter-stories, this work may hopefully still make political contributions by generating new narratives through these interactions of stories. Nevertheless, this co-creating process with collaborators may also be understood as a practice of speaking-with and thinking-with, in which I exercise the power of decision-making in how the collaborative writing and arts-making will be represented in the broader project of the dissertation. Therefore, a core part of the process or methods is the collaborators' control over how their contributions are used in this project. From the beginning of our conversations, there is a mutual agreement that all notes taken during the co-creating process are shared with the collaborators, the

essays and arts-making are generated from the shared notes and drafts are discussed and confirmed by the collaborators before they are made public, and I will only draw on the published works as material for the dissertation writing.

Resonant with Alcoff, who points out that errors are inevitable in political organizing and theoretical inquiries, Ahmed validates that recognizing how we are problematic can be a difficult experience, for racialized women or feminized people who are always already cast as a problem against the invisible standards of being human. But of course she does not offer a way to resolve the problematic because there can be no resolution.<sup>25</sup> This work can be crafted with as much care and reverence as I know how to, and make space to constantly confront and bring to light instances where I am being problematic, *and* still hold the potential to become a problem for the very people I want to support and collaborate with. But the fear of being the problem

25. Writing about feminist organizing, Ahmed (2017) acknowledges that “Activism might need us to involve losing confidence in ourselves, letting ourselves recognize how we too can be the problem. And that is hard if we have a lifetime of being the problem” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 175). However, the difficulties of getting ourselves involved are necessary for generating new or different ideas, as ideas “would not be something generating through distance, a way of abstracting something from something, but from our involvement in a world that often leaves us, frankly, bewildered” (p. 12).



cannot be the reason to stop doing this work or telling these stories, because one common way that violence is sustained is by silencing. The stories must be told, and told differently and carefully, by thinking-with stories that can unravel the norms that are violent to difference. It is better to work toward another world bit by bit and imperfectly than not at all. It is better to speak than not at all for the fear of being dismissed or ridiculed as wrong or problematic.<sup>26</sup>

## Alongside

Thinking with *A Litany for Survival*, a question comes to mind: if I do choose to speak, how then do I speak, in order for who or what to survive?

Citation is a way of speaking, a manner of speech, a performance. I have been a post-secondary student for almost 20 years at this point. It is a long career in which I have become all too familiar with the ways that citation is deployed as a performative strategy to

26. In *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King (2003) writes, “Perhaps we shouldn’t be displeased with the ‘environmental ethics’ we have or the ‘business ethics’ or the ‘political ethics’ or any of the myriad of other codes of conduct suggested by our actions. After all, we’ve created them. We’ve created the stories that allow them to exist and flourish. They didn’t come out of nowhere. They didn’t arrive from another planet. Want a different ethic? Tell a different story” (p. 164). But we won’t know if the new stories we tell will necessarily produce a different ethic. Nevertheless, Haraway (2016) insists that “A common livable world must be composed, bit by bit, or not at all” (p. 40), resonating across time and space with Lorde’s (1978) poem, *A Litany for Survival*:

“and when we speak we are afraid  
our words will not be heard  
nor welcomed  
but when we are silent  
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak  
remembering  
we were never meant to survive.”

legitimize one's ideas with those of established scholars, to appear credible, to align oneself within the educated, ruling, or exalted class. I undeniably perform citations for these reasons. Who can cite and who is being cited therefore depends on who has access to what kind of knowledge. It follows that the practice of citation can also be a practice that entrenches exclusion, division, and the binaries between who can speak with authority and who must abide by such authority, between the truths that are exalted and the truths that are subjugated and silenced. I participate in this operation of disciplinary power and exclusion, and this work is not outside of the discursive structures that define the normative parameters within which my work is rendered intelligible and legitimate. Nevertheless, I think about engaging with and orienting to citation differently, or finding the space to speak differently, the gaps for the subversion of the norm as I repeat it.<sup>27</sup>

27. Following Butler's (1993) theorization of speech acts, the practice of citation is a performative act that invokes the norms through which the citation is recognized as authoritative. A performative act such as citation practice is therefore a kind of authoritative speech that puts into effect and replicates existing power relations within the political, social, and historical contexts in which the speech is uttered or written. We may return here to the discursive construction of the exalted status of theory. Ahmed (2017) explains that some work becomes exalted to the realm of theory through the academy "because it refers to other work that is known as theory. A citation chain is created around theory: you become a theorist by citing other theorists that cite other theorists" (p. 8). The binding power between the speaker and authority in a performative act, whereby the speaker becomes recognized as authoritative, comes not from the speaker's or writer's intention or will, but from their invocation of an authoritative norm that already exists in the social, political, and historical context from which they speak, from the accumulative "force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices" (p. 19). In this sense, no subject is free from or outside of norms, as subjects can only understand themselves and be understood by others, and

As I think about speaking differently, I am remembering a comment a professor once made about reading, how it is like listening to music, sometimes a lyric or melody might stick with us, and we think with it as we move through the day. I am remembering another professor who said we make kins with authors whose words so deeply resonate with us – there is a shared knowing even though we may never meet face-to-face. I am remembering the beginning of my comprehensive exams and its ever-growing reading lists and one of my supervisors encouraged me to simply start with the book I felt most excited to read and let it lead the way.

As I attempt to devise nontraditional or resistant or simply different ways of composing this document that is also called the dissertation, I am reminded that this work is only possible because of the racialized, disabled, colonized, queer, feminist, and resistant voices that paved the way. Following

therefore exist in discursive reality, through the norms. Performativity is not an option or a completely new fabrication of practice or the self, it is “a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted” (p. 22). Reiteration of the norm, however, is never a perfectly predictable replication of the invisible ideal. Butler (1993) therefore points out that it is through performativity that gaps may be opened up in the regulatory norms through the imperfect repetition of such norms. Performativity is therefore also the site “from which resistance, subversion, and displacement are to be forged” (p. 22). As such, the “task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat” (Butler, 1990/2007, p. 202), or more precisely to repeat in ways that expose the naturalization of particular operations of power, thereby displacing the norms that enable the repetition itself.

Fournier, if citation can be thought of as a practice of community-building or feminist world-making,<sup>28</sup> then this method of composing, of positioning citations not only in brackets to drop the names and prove I am well-read, not in the footnotes as if an afterthought or an optional read, is a practice of thinking-with, journeying alongside, and honouring the knowledges of those in communities of people committed to justice. Visually, as a method of organizing text and stories, it is also an attempt to centre and honour the people whose stories and memories have made possible the life-writing and arts-making in this work, such that the writing stands separately on its own terms but not independently from the ideas of those who come before that also inevitably informs the life-writing and arts-making. The two sides of the page are separate but interdependent and interrelated. They speak back and forth with one another. They move in tandem in an attempt to contribute to the becoming and survival of

28. While it can easily become (or at the same time perform as) intelligence signaling, Fournier (2021) suggests that “citation forms an integral part of a queer feminist practice of world-making” (p. 191). Referencing theory can become “a way of building communities through discourses and ideas that are intersectional, liberatory, challenging, and affirming” (p. 191), particularly within circles of racialized and queer feminist writers and activists who have not been afforded the space to speak. Through unconventional methods that make citation highly visible, such as extensive notes on the margins rather than at the end of a text as footnotes, or interwoven into artwork, citation practice can be “an antidote to histories of oppression... where ‘world-making’ means, most simply, imagining new, more progressive, intersectional, just worlds” (p. 202).

intersectional and liberatory ideas that may constitute a more just world.

The method of citation in this work is therefore an illustration, a practice, and a theory of the interrelatedness and interdependence between different stories in different lives, my own and those of others. It is a way of making visible the process of not only thinking-with but also becoming-with,<sup>29</sup> that my being and my thoughts are not self-contained, that they are constituted through the ideas, knowledges, and thoughts of others. It is therefore an attempt to talk back to and subvert the autonomous rational (masculine white) thinker, academic, and moral agent by citing with care. And if it is through others' knowledges that our thoughts become ideas become writing, if every time we write is a process of generating knowledge, with the knowledge we generate or the stories we tell shaping our practices in our engagements with the world and therefore shaping

29. Haraway (2016) encourages thinking with the notion of sympoiesis, which means making-with. She writes, "Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing" (p. 57). The becoming of each being is interdependent on that of other beings, in our living and dying on this earth, in our feelings and our thoughts, passing patterns back and forth, giving and receiving, patterning... Becoming-with, not becoming, is the name of the game... Ontologically heterogeneous partners become who and what they are in relational material-semiotic worlding. Nature, cultures, subjects, and objects do not preexist their intertwined worldings" (p. 12-13). Worlding may be understood as a process of co-creating reality, and in the realm of everyday encounters between humans, Maureen O'Hara suggests hopefully that "If we accept that when we enter into dialogue we *both* change; if it is true that we *co-create* reality, which in turn creates us – then we are called to a new kind of community" (O'Hara, 1995, cited in Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 264, emphasis in original). Recall Shildrick's (1997) analysis of the gender binary, this notion of becoming-with speaks directly against western philosophical tradition of (masculine) autonomous, self-contained personhood, and "destabilizes liberal individualist boundaries between self and others" (Chapman, 2013, p. 194). To speak or write against the established norms under which one is subjugated is, in bell hook's (1989/2015) term, to talk back, which "is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless" (p. 27), and could still render our talking-back voiceless and invisible by refusing our words intelligibility.

the world as we go, then citation practice can truly be a mode of world-making. I must therefore choose with care the ideas and theories that I hope to extend into the future,<sup>30</sup> the voices that have been silenced by the violences that this work hopes to work against, the tools crafted and forged through endurance of marginalization, to imagine and build a world where difference is cared for and valued.

This work also would not be possible without the people who shared moments and stories of their lives with me – people I was thinking with and making art with as collaborators in this work, people who have similar and different relationships with systems that are supposed to care by accessing or extending support, or both. Particularly, this project involves the collaboration of people whose voices and perspectives have been historically and ongoingly dismissed, erased, or excluded in dominant systems of knowledge production. They are women who

30. Ahmed (2017) states that “Citation is feminist memory. It is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before” (p. 15). She describes citations as “feminist bricks” (p. 16), materials to create our dwellings, to make a world. She describes as “companion text” (p. 16) that which have contributed to the genealogy of feminism and anti-racism, including works that have been cast aside because they do not follow the well-trekked disciplinary paths, and therefore help us find our way. She describes the ways books make communities as spaces of encounters, in which we are touched and impressed by ideas, ideas that talk back and therefore risk annihilation. It matters what thoughts think thoughts, what stories make stories (Haraway, 2016). If we tell different stories, then we can possibly make a different world (King, 2003; Loveless, 2019). Feminist citation practice is therefore an ongoing co-creation of “an archive whose fragility gives us responsibility: to take care” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 17).

live the intersections of racialization, immigration, disability, and queerness. They are women I have met or worked with previously in mental health services or the academy. Women whose work and practices I admire. Women I knew who would care. This contradicts and disrupts the idealization of researcher objectivity and the presumption of the unbiased blank slate through a lack of relationship. But this project is already biased. This project is already taking a stance in defining neoliberal practices in professionalized care and education settings as forms of violence. This project does not try to prove that injustices and violence happens in spaces that are supposed to care, but by describing forms of injustices and violence in these spaces, it attempts to figure out how we can practice care differently. This project, therefore, sought out collaborators who are *already there*,<sup>31</sup> with me, in the conviction that *what has always been need not be the case*, with a level of mutual trust that we know

31. As Ahmed (2017) writes, "It is the practical experience of coming up against a world that allows us to come up with new ideas, ideas that are not dependent on a mind that has withdrawn (because a world has enabled the withdrawal) but a body that has to wiggle about just to create room. And if we put ourselves in the same room, how much knowledge we would have!" (p. 18)

violence, albeit from differing experiences, and we share the same goal toward a less violent future, albeit our ideas of how we get there may also differ. As such, this project recognizes the people involved not as research participants but as collaborators and co-authors. This too is a way of defiance against the requirement of anonymous participation as the only ethical way of doing research in Euro-Western scientific traditions. While many may wish their participation in research projects to remain anonymous, depending on the research focus, an automatic assumption that anonymity is the right way of doing research can also lead to an erasure of the contributors' involvement and a subsumption of such involvement and knowledges under the name of the primary researcher. This may be a particularly salient concern for groups whose voices have historically and ongoingly been marginalized in knowledge production. As co-authors, people who collaborated in this project had input and control over every



aspect of what was being published. This too is a way of community-building by working alongside, world-making beyond the confines of this document that is called the dissertation within the discursive structures that is called the academy. In this project each woman's name can be cited by others to advance the broader feminist and disability justice movement. Each woman's words against institutional racism and violence make feminist bricks. Each woman's voice does not only speak of dreams about the future but can change minds and shift practices and build that future we wish to see.

## **Arts-making**

This project involves collaborators as co-authors and perhaps co-researchers. Collaborations are necessarily participatory, and the aim of our collaborative arts-making is social and political change, but I do not consider this work a participatory action research project,<sup>32</sup> because many steps and components of the

32. Participatory action research, in the strictest sense of the term, is a set of research methods that involve the input and collaboration of research participants as co-researchers in every aspect of the research project, from planning, to research design, to implementation of methods, to analysis of data, to dissemination of findings. The goal of such projects is to effect social or political changes that would benefit or contribute to the liberation of the community of which the co-researchers are a part (Institute of Development Studies, n.d.).

project have already been determined before people agreed to collaborate, including the insistence in the use of arts-making. An investigation into the material and corporal realities of care, like the practice itself, necessarily involves entanglement, contradictions, mess. This work therefore defies a neatly defined and contained research design. If some kind of parameter must be named, then this work may be broadly and loosely understood as arts-based research, drawing from disability arts, critical arts-based inquiry, research-creation, and feminist and disability ethics of care. I will return to the interwoven theories about care and the arts in research toward the end of this chapter. At this juncture, perhaps it is more important to name and explain how this work is most strongly rooted in the biased place of my own lifelong relationship with arts-making.

I don't remember a time when I didn't make images, pencil on paper. I only remember the times

when my mother let me know that we didn't have money to buy fresh pieces of paper so I would just have to draw on the backsides of the paper that have been drawn on, and if the backsides were already filled then draw in the spaces around, and if all the spaces are filled, then draw in the margins of newspapers. Overlapping lines, entangled stories of the everyday. I made images to resolve memories about situations I could not resolve in the moment with my words, primarily situations in which I was bullied by stronger children with sharper words and no words or sound could come out of my mouth except weeping, accompanied by feelings of embarrassment and shame.<sup>33</sup> For I was always told that if I were stronger, then people wouldn't push me around; if I didn't cry, then people wouldn't laugh at me; if I didn't take things personally, then other children wouldn't alienate me; if I spoke better English, then I would blend in and other classmates wouldn't see me as a target for mockery or assault

33. Loveless (2019) discusses how research is often driven by curiosity and care about life's unfolding. She draws on psychoanalytic theory to suggest that curiosity and care are in turn driven by love, drawn to love, or cultivated from particular loves or desires of the researcher, which is shaped by the researcher's specific stories or contexts of their becoming. Loss and grief figure into the emergence of love and desire, as they are constituted by "a compulsion to repeat, a drive to return to the scene of (primary maternal) loss as a way to metabolize, and somehow work through, that moment in which the *loss* of the mother in fact *creates* the mother as a site of desire and value" (p. 81, emphasis in original). Freud may have been referring to the mother literally but we may interpret the figure of mother, in a gendered cultural context, as representative of basic, fundamental provision of care. Something a human would expect from another fellow human, which is lost when one human inflicts violence against another human. As such, a research project about care may be driven by a deeply rooted desire and grief for the care that was repeatedly lost. The anxiety of not knowing whether care can be found drives the repeated return to the scene of loss. According to Lacan, this anxiety is manifested in a repetition compulsion, "something that continues, repeats, recurs, and that must be hauled again and again, or, rather, that hauls *us*, repeatedly" (p. 81, emphasis in original). Rather than positioning the recurring thoughts driven by anxiety and grief as a pathology, Haraway (2016) draws on ethnographer Thom van Dooren and suggests that "Mourning is about dwelling with a loss and so coming to appreciate what it means, how the world has changed, and how we must *ourselves* change and renew our relationships if we are to move forward from here" (p. 39, emphasis in original).

(but they would anyway because I learned that they perceive the Chinese accent by seeing the colour of my skin not by hearing the sound of my voice even when I knew I had perfected mimicking the Canadian accent). So I made images in which it wasn't my fault and I was vindicated by my parents, a teacher, or a kind classmate. When I didn't have paper I made stories in my mind with endings that were different from the reality I experienced. Over time, I developed a habit, or even compulsion, of acting out these imaginary endings, rehearsing the words of talking back to the stronger classmate or the teacher who told me to stop crying or the parent of the other child who called me oversensitive or the mean girls who spat on my clothes. For a long time I thought of this habit or compulsion as a kind of madness, which I attempted to curb and hide with many means, including not eating (to distract from the thinking), psychiatric treatment (to stop the thinking with brain-altering chemicals), and therapeutic self-

improvement (to be compassionate to the thinking in order to eliminate it). I can attest to the fact that none stopped the thinking, imagining, circling back. But I learned that it grows more tenacious as I age. And I learned how the violence from others is mirrored in the violence I inflict on myself. These learnings led me to this work. And through this work I am beginning to see that perhaps the thinking, the imagining, the circling back, this way of being-with the world, is a work-in-progress, a practice, an insistent expression of a desire for a different and less violent future through speculative fabulation.<sup>34</sup>

My relationship with arts-making is therefore also a relationship with violence. My curiosity about care, or perhaps more precisely my insistence on caring about care, is also entangled with this relationship with violence. The violence not only of casting out of belonging those who look or think or speak differently, but also of attributing the cause of the violence to the person on the

34. Haraway (2016) applies SF as a theory to structure other theories about learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying with damaged relationships on a damaged earth, about cultivating the ability to respond to such damages, about practicing different patterns of living-with and becoming-with one another that may lead to a more livable world. To Haraway, "SF is storytelling and fact telling" (p. 31) as it stands for multiple concepts, including speculative feminism, speculative fabulation, string figures, and science fiction. Similarly, Walidah Imarisha (2015), in an introduction to an anthology of science fiction writing by social justice activists, writes that "Whenever we try to envision a world without war, without violence, without prison, without capitalism, we are engaging in speculative fiction. All organizing is science fiction. Organizers and activists dedicate their lives to creating and envisioning another world, or many other worlds" (p. 3).

receiving end of such violence. Isn't this the primary mode of how domination operates? Indigenous, racialized, poor, disabled, gender diverse people are subject to discrimination, exploitation, regulatory control, removal of rights, denial of personhood, justified by historical, ostensibly scientific theories (which are also a kind of science fiction) of biological differences that makes particular people inferior, deviance, a drain or even a danger to society.<sup>35</sup>

Subjugating power also operates affectively through shame to keep people feeling inferior, incapable of talking back, content with their subjugation supposedly for their own good. I will return to the story of the circulation of shame as a colonizing tactic later. But it is important to note here that it is no coincidence that I, as a child who was seen to be different, experienced violence through tactics that mobilize shame in the colonized lands of both Hong Kong and the Canadian state. Violence is a social practice that is

35. For example, Eli Clare (2017) traces how in the 19th century and during the Civil Rights Movement, rubrics of colonial desire, ableism, and racism are cast as medical truth through the invention of psychiatric diagnoses such as "*drapetomania*, *dysaesthesia aethiopica*, and *protest psychosis*" (p. 25, emphasis in original) to incarcerate and punish Black people who refused to work, escaped from enslavement, and expressed "repudiation of white civilization" (p. 24). Unpacking how the notion of madness was historically and discursively constituted, Michel Foucault (1960/2009) explained that the asylums in 18th and 19th century Europe were not medical institutions but were "an instrument of order" (p. 49) that indiscriminately confined "the poor, the unemployed, the criminal and the insane" (p. 47), where religious ideologies mixed with the newly emerging "bourgeois will" (p. 52) to manage the poor through "a duty of charity and a will to punish" (p. 52). Poverty became a moral crime, and "madness was seen through an ethical condemnation of idleness" (p. 72). Elsewhere, Foucault (2003) describes the establishment of illness through medical discourse and practice as "the scientific fabulation of total illness" (p. 240). Both Ahmed (2019) and Stevenson (2014) extend the theory around the condemnation of idleness by pointing out that, for social theorists and policymakers in the 18th and 19th century, the perceived idleness or nonuse in people who are expected to labour – the poor, the colonized, the enslaved – as well as "the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick" (Darwin, 1871/1992, p. 161, cited in Ahmed, 2019, p. 100), is not only to be punished, but it is to be segregated from the rest of society through confinement, and eliminated through forced labour, colonial education, and domestic training, in order to protect the human species from degeneration. It is

always on the horizon of our social imaginary.<sup>36</sup> The relations of domination and operations of conquest through shame that constitute the governing colonial power are replicated through the everyday practices of their citizens, knowingly or unknowingly, in how they sustain their livelihoods in relation to one another. How, then, can we imagine differently, to practice care towards a world that is less violent?

Following Thomas King, the response can be simple: if we want a different ethics, or different ways to relate to other human and more-than-human beings, then we need to tell a different story.

Specifically, to tell different stories in ways that are resistant or subversive to domination requires that we attend not only to what is being said, but also how it is said.<sup>37</sup> Research that tends toward a more just and livable world than the one we know requires tools that can open the way to build what we do not

obvious that what was vehemently protected as biological traits required for the survival of human civilization are socially constructed norms founded upon religious and capitalist ideology, mediated by class, race, disability, and gender. Regarding trans people's commonplace experiences of profound discriminations, social exclusions, coercive medical interventions, as well as psychological and bodily harms due to widespread and deep-seated heterosexism, transphobia, and homophobia (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Namaste, 2006), Namaste (2006) argues that "a perceived transgression of normative sex/gender relations motivates much of the violence against sexual minorities, and that an assault on these 'transgressive' bodies is fundamentally concerned with policing gender presentation through public and private space" (p. 585).

36. We return here to Young (1990) who theorizes that violence is not an attribute to a particular person's will or intention, just as authority is not an attribute to a person (Butler, 1993), but it is a social practice, replicated over and over again across generations, space and time, operationalized as policies, classroom management strategies, social arrangements, cultural norms, parenting habits, always on the horizon of our imagination.

37. Speaking on research and knowledge production, Loveless (2019) urges researchers to question whether the habitual way of writing, conditioned by the academy, is the most appropriate way to represent, express, and share what is produced, and whether it is the most effective mode to move knowledge across time and space, to reach, to connect, and to build community with others. Many are aware of the often-cited quote about the master's

already know, for *the master's tool will never dismantle the master's house*. If habitual ways of writing and citing conditioned by academic discipline has historically been mobilized as gatekeeping to maintain hierarchy and exclusion, then forging new tools requires a disloyalty to euro-western research methods of structured data collection, objective interpretation, and academic reporting as a privileged form of producing and representing knowledge. Disloyalty does not mean disregard. Disloyalty can mean guarding against attachments that dismiss contradictory possibilities emerging through the unfolding of creativity, relationships, and care needs. What the arts can offer in the forging of new tools and new stories are processes of exploration and expressions of that which exceeds our imagination, that which allows us to imagine differently.

In order to persist in imagining differently, it is important to guard against the attachment to habits

tool will never dismantle the master's house. My hope is that this discussion about telling stories differently can open up possibilities for living into this quote.



that try to straighten the unfolding of arts-making into the well-trekked path of scientific research, as a vehicle to represent findings, as tools to generate data to be collected and analyzed with tried-and-true formulas, as an appendix for optional viewing. In these ways, the research in arts-based research is not grounded in the arts but based in the objective to produce the star of the show that is the written output, the academic writing.<sup>38</sup> If the arts, like carework, are always already feminized and devalued in the circuits of knowledge production, then elevating the status of the arts or the artist into the realm of theory and research by rendering them servants to the dominant structure will never dismantle the structure itself.<sup>39</sup> Can parts of this structure that devalues the creative and emotional and feminine be dislodged if both written and arts-making components are equally weighted as research outputs? What if the written components are also a form of arts-making? What if the parts are made so that they cannot be taken apart, so

38. Discussing how the arts can fit into a qualitative research design or how they can legitimately be a qualitative research methodology in their own right, Nana Osei-Kofi (2013) tells us that arts-based research has been defined in the following ways:

“an effort to explore the potentialities of an approach to representation that is rooted in aesthetic considerations and that, when it is at its best, culminates in the creation of something close to a work of art” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 1, as cited in Osei-Kofi, 2013, p. 136).

“a set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation... these emerging tools adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address social research questions in holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practice are intertwined” (Levy, 2009, pp. 2-3, as cited in Osei-Kofi, 2013, p. 136).

“a mode and form of qualitative research . . . that is influenced by, but not based on, the arts broadly conceived” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 59, as cited in Osei-Kofi, 2013, p. 136).

39. Commenting on the increasing currency of arts-based research for signalling inclusivity in academia and organizations, Loveless (2019) argues that “giving ‘art’ the status of ‘research’ does little more than echo early feminist interventions into the canon that took the form of ‘add women and stir’ – a tokenistic gesture of inclusion that does nothing to change the logics that structure these exclusions in the first place” (p. 6). She points to projects in which written and arts-making components are weighted

their entanglements refuse to be straightened out? What if we bend the rules that make things straight?

It matters what forms the stories take. The point is not only to resist, to be difficult or defiant. We resist in order to move others into actions of resistance. Following the urging of Loveless' manifesto, we insert voices and practices into a disciplinary structure in ways that trouble the established, regulatory network of knowledge/power, with the hope that the resistance does not end within the boundaries of this dissertation, that what we insist matters will continue to matter beyond this dissertation. In this way, it can be said that this project aligns more precisely with a research methodology that is called critical arts-based inquiry, in the ways that theoretical stances of social critiques are enacted through collaborative, self-reflexive arts-making with the aim of advocacy.<sup>40</sup> The collaborators were invited into the project with the premise that the

equally as research outputs as examples of resistant creative research practices.

40. As a form of arts-based research, critical arts-based inquiry is further specified as a methodology that is likely to "consider social, political, and critical aspects of pedagogy and to enact theoretical stances of dialogic, experiential, transactional, emancipatory class and race theories, and/or feminist critical critique" (Finley, 2012, p. 143), as well as an ethics of care as its primary value. While there are no prescribed methods of conducting critical arts-based inquiry, it is described as centring "inclusivity, reflectivity, advocacy, and the potential of such inquiry to inspire various types of actions" (Finley, 2012, p. 145), such as critical dialogues surrounding lived experiences, and public pedagogy that resist hegemonic traditions in language, education, and political thoughts.

contemplation of the question, how do we practice care without replicating violence, is not merely an intellectual exercises. Disability arts activism has taught us to move beyond; it has taught us that we can imagine beyond.<sup>41</sup> They were invited into a process in which knowledge would be generated and brought back into the communities in which we worked, communities that taught us and moved us to care in the first place. The collaborators joined this project with the desire to share what they knew in order to move others to keep asking the question, *how do we practice care without replicating violence*, thereby noticing the violence in our midst, noticing our complicity, and finding ways to think differently about our helping and caring, to care differently.<sup>42</sup>

As an arts-centred methodology, research-creation is kin with arts-based research and critical arts-based inquiry.<sup>43</sup> Its insistence on continuous emergence and unfolding – the iterative process of responding to and being

41. Disability activists have argued that through accessible and collaborative engagement, the arts can generate and critically mobilize emotions to facilitate a form of non-didactic pedagogy about oppression as well as social justice (Kelly & Orsini, 2016), which can in turn ground social movements with new possibilities for approaching “the project of obtaining rights and freedoms in an open-ended, undetermined way” (Rice, Chandler & Changfoot, 2016, p. 59). The use of the arts as activist, pedagogical, and political tools can therefore open up space for reimagining and enacting social change beyond existing theoretical, legal, and rights-based frames (Kelly & Orsini, 2016). For example, artistic expressions of anger, rage, and shame in the face of unimpeded discrimination and inadequate legal interventions can destabilize ableist understanding of disability as always evoking sympathy and pity and move activism and policy response beyond charity or inspiration narratives (Kelly & Orsini, 2016).

42. What research-creation offers, according to Loveless (2019), is “the work of defamiliarization and the time it takes to *ask questions differently*. Research-creation, at its best, has the capacity to impact our social and material conditions, not by offering more facts, differently figured, but by finding ways, through aesthetic encounters and events, to persuade us to care and to care *differently*” (p. 107, emphasis in original).

43. Research-creation is described by Loveless (2019) as a process that foregrounds emergence, a process that is generative of outcomes that exceed the original constituting parts. It draws from multiple discipline-specific knowledges and lived histories to craft questions, theories, and practices that exceed the boundaries of the disciplines, producing outputs

accountable for what arises in the process, the thinking-with and becoming-with uncertainties, complexities, and inevitable shortcomings – resonates with feminist ethics of care. Research-creation persistently asks who and what are emergent through relationships in the crafting and re-crafting of questions and responses. As it persistently opens up spaces for the historically devalued practice of arts-making to exercise influence and mobilize change, to question the academic regime of truth that delimits what can be legitimate research questions and how knowledge should be produced, research-creation actively resists the profit-driven, disciplinary systems of othering and categorization in the neoliberal and corporatized environment of the academy, which privileges social scientific modes of thoughts and knowledge dissemination to maintain the exclusionary access to knowledge and position of authority for the privileged class.

that “work not only across discursive fields but challenge the norms of those fields” (p. 827), while insisting on the complexities and impossibility of fully accounting for all the fields and histories it is entangled with. It is therefore always in the process of unfolding, and “always in need of new ways of accounting and rendering accountable” (p. 648), in re-envisioning and re-telling alternative stories about a more livable world that is not yet known. Parallel to feminists’ insistence for the recognition of carework as fundamental to collective well-being, scholars engaging in research-creation within academia, as evident in Loveless’ manifesto, have been pushing for the recognition that artistic processes and production are equivalent in value to traditional western knowledge-production practices, namely academic publications.

I have previously noted that this project may be broadly and loosely understood as arts-based research, drawing from disability arts, critical arts-based inquiry, research-creation, and feminist and disability ethics of care. It may also be defined as a form of practice-based research, a methodology that works in tandem with research-creation, in which knowledge is generated through arts-making.<sup>44</sup> The ambiguity of what this project is methodologically points to a refusal to pin down its form. The stories we tell matter. To the people whose stories we held in memory while creating the stories in this project, and to the people who were creating the stories, as well as those who would be moved by these stories to reflect on their relationships with and practices of violence and care, whether this work is called research-creation or critical arts-based inquiry or arts-based research won't matter. The stories we tell matter. The stories are multiple, different, overlapping, contradicting. Imposing rules to

44. Practice-based research is defined by Creativity and Cognition Studios at Loughborough University as “an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice. In a doctoral thesis, claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes in the form of designs, music, digital media, performances and exhibitions. Whilst the significance and context of the claims are described in words, a full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the outcomes” (cited in Loveless, 2019, p. 5). Practice-based research is related to research-creation along with practice-led research, research-led practice, creative-praxis, arts-driven inquiry, artistic research, and so on. Loveless (2019) concludes that these definition distinctions and debates “matter not to the making of research-based art in general, but rather to the use of artistic forms and methods as *the rendering public (publishing)* of research within a university context” (p. 5, emphasis in original).

frame the stories in a particular way for legitimacy within the academic structure can limit imagination and freedom, in the creation as well as the perception of this work, which reinscribes the domination of said structure.<sup>45</sup>

This work does not promise definitive answers to the question, how do we practice care without replicating violence. It only tells stories about possible ways that may lead to a more caring and less violent world.<sup>46</sup> These stories build upon, echo, and carry on the countless stories, the countless ways that feminist, anti-racist, disability activists and writers and artists resist violence and practice collective care. There have been countless ways, and we will continue to generate countless ways. Power of domination is never totalizing, as the replication of norms that produce conditions of violence is never perfect. Even if the structures cannot be completely dismantled, even if we are to be modest in our

45. Osei-Kofi (2013) stresses the importance of working against a “fixed, singular, and rigid definition of ABR [arts-based research]” (p. 136), and that “a refusal of any totalizing philosophy of ABR is essential” (p. 136) to collaborative social justice work.

46. Following Haraway’s (2016) theorization of SF, speculative feminism, speculative fabulation, or science fiction, this project attempts an enactment of “patterning of possible worlds and possible times” (p. 31) for a different future of “finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness” (Haraway, 1988, p. 579).

flourishing, *the master's tools will never take us down*. That is a promise.

**Figure 1**

*Leak Everywhere*



*Note.* Patricia Ki, *Leak Everywhere*, 2021.  
Collage and embroidery on a crumpled  
presentation script on hysteria,  
approximately 10"x11". From art prompts  
by Tammy Reynolds and Margeaux  
Feldman.



wandering womb, menstrual blood  
flooding the brain, wind, earth, sea,  
growth, raging fire underneath, self-  
destructive rage, ever-burning candle-  
lights in mourning, for the lives and deaths  
and unheard voices of those before us,  
vigilant reptilian eyes, survival instincts,  
circle of life, circle of relations, phoenix  
rising, always coming back, always  
coming home, to the shadows, to the  
body, to bloodlines

it's a chaotic leaking, it's a strategic  
leaking  
a happenance, a mess, while  
threading/treading carefully  
It is an art

for if we destroy the ground, we destroy  
ourselves  
let's not forget how we benefit, how we are  
sustained from  
this grounding  
for nothing exists outside of discursive  
intelligibility  
there's always a limit to our everywhere,  
but

finding gaps, tracing cracks in the wall,  
seeping through  
the walls immersed in our stories  
the white walls stained by our lives

mycelium running  
the bloodlines  
tilling, tilling, tilling  
we turn over the world

### **3. Ghost Stories: Trauma's Discourses**

Ask the colonial ghosts if they live in your bones

Ask the colonial ghosts what they took.

— Rae Spoon (2008)

When those frames that govern the relative and differential recognizability of lives come apart—as part of the very mechanism of their circulation—it becomes possible to apprehend something about what or who is living but has not been generally “recognized” as a life. What is this specter that gnaws at the norms of recognition, an intensified figure vacillating as its inside and as its outside?

— Judith Butler (2009/2016, p. 12)

To write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories. To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects.

— Avery Gordon (2008, p. 17)

### **Living With Ghosts**

Stories about trauma are full of ghosts. The colonial ghosts that live in the bones of the people inheriting the effects of imperialist and racist violence alongside the people who wield the discourses of trauma as tools for care work. The ghosts

rendered as such by dominant rules that took their misalignment with the norm as justification for the violent erasure of their personhood. The ghosts rendered as such through the casting out of belonging from the category of human but who persist in appearing in the peripherals of mainstream recognition. The ghosts about whom tales of horror are constructed as warnings to protect the boundaries of the norm. The ghosts we do not forget and remain accountable for: those already dead from colonial, oppressive, ableist, racist, gender-based violence, from whom we learn to build a less violent future for those not yet born.<sup>1</sup> Ghosts and their stories entangled in non-linear relations of time and space. Avery Gordon writes in the sociological study, *Ghostly Matters*, that the connections between institutions or social structures and the everyday life of their subjects are mediated by hauntings. The forces and conditions produced through the violence of social life that we do not see, that barely register in our thoughts, that nevertheless animate our actions; that which is invisible haunts us with

1. Jacques Derrida (1994) discusses responsibility as “beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism” (p. xviii). For Avery Gordon (2008), ghosts are not only dead or missing people, “but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us” (p. 8). Drawing on Toni Morrison’s argument that invisible things are not necessarily not there, Gordon suggests that it is important to investigate “how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence... what is at stake here is the political status and function of systematic hauntings” (p. 17-18).

its seething presence. Particularly for women-identifying people who have experienced violence like myself, perhaps we are drawn to care work because of the ghosts we live with: the memories of violent uncaring that haunt, and the legacies of feminine normativity, colonial regulations, and capitalist productivity in our bones propelling us to work, to take care of others, in our god-given position of servitude as the inferior feminine other. But perhaps committing oneself to the caring of others also offers possibilities for the partial pacification of the impossible ethical quandaries about how to live the violence of one's history in ways that do not repeat such violence.<sup>2</sup> Following Gordon, committing oneself to care differently, or to figure out what can be done otherwise, then requires unpacking the stories of trauma and seeing them and relating to them differently. To me, this unpacking involves a hesitancy to accept trauma's popularized and visible representations as a psychiatric entity, an event bound by time and space that exists in the past, an

2. I return here (and will again and again in this work) to Judith Butler's (2009) discussion of the call to non-violence: "when one is formed in violence... and that formative action continues throughout one's life, an ethical quandary arises about how to live the violence of one's formative history, how to effect shifts and reversals in its iteration. Precisely because *iterability evades every determinism*" (p. 170, emphasis mine). This resonates also with Gordon's (2008) theorization of ghosts and hauntings, which contends that "Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible... to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future" (p. 22). Further, Gordon asserts that to make any contribution at all to change we must "learn how to make contact with what is without doubt often painful, difficult, and unsettling" (p. 23).

individual pathology. It involves a refusal to take these representations for granted as directives or authoritative knowledge that dictate practices of care. It involves an investigation of how such representations that are positioned within the rhetoric of care can occlude violent forces that annihilate lives and lifeworlds. As such, unpacking the stories of trauma necessitates making contact with and making sense of what it means to be living with that which is disturbing and unsettling.

It is important to make clear my position before I go on further. I am an immigrant-settler living and working in Tkaronto at the time of writing. In the Mohawk language, the word Tkaronto means *the place in the water where the trees are standing*.<sup>3</sup> Having learned its meaning, speaking the name of this land always brings to my mind an image of the standing trees, branches reaching up to the sky. Through the rustling leaves, glowing and translucent against the sun, we can see clouds that hold and shed raindrops, that fill the ponds and the

3. Selena Mills and Sara Roque (2019) share the history of this land and its name, and reflect on the importance of truth-telling through acknowledgement of the land and Indigenous peoples in the video, *Land acknowledgements: Uncovering an oral history of Tkaronto*.

lakes, that find their ways through  
the earth, that meet the roots of the  
trees, through the trunk of the trees,  
to the bright green leaves again,  
which releases oxygen and – along  
with the raindrops that find their  
ways to rivers and pipes, to facets  
and the cup of water that sits on the  
kitchen counter – nourish us and  
offer us life.

This land known as Tkaronto – the  
earth, the waterways, the air, the  
plants, the minerals, the more-than-  
human beings – is on the traditional  
territories of many Indigenous  
nations, including the Mississaugas  
of the Credit, the Anishnaabe, the  
Huron-Wendat, the  
Haudenosaunee, the Chippewa,  
and the Métis. It continues to be  
home and gathering place to many  
Indigenous peoples. Since  
European contact, it has become  
home and refuge to newcomers  
from many other nations, including  
my family.

This land is covered by the Dish  
With One Spoon Wampum Belt  
Covenant, a treaty between the  
Anishinaabe, Mississaugas, and

Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land in the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect. During my time at York University I had the chance to attend a meeting in which Professor Ruth Green offered the teachings of the Dish With One Spoon Covenant.<sup>4</sup> It reminds me, an uninvited settler, to live into the responsibility of sharing with and caring for ourselves and one another without violence.

I was born and raised in Hong Kong, a former British colony. Since my family's immigration in 1995, I have relied on a multitude of unearned privileges and gifts from this land. I have also inherited many gifts from my ancestors, who were labourers and academics from Dongguan, China, as well as Indigenous Hakka fishers and farmers from New Territories, Hong Kong. All of these gifts enabled me to survive displacements, distress, and subjugations; sustain relationships with family, friends, and mentors who care for me; and secure employment and extended education opportunities over the

4. Professor Green's sharing of the teaching, as well as other Indigenous educators' and students' reflections on land acknowledgement as a practice of truth-telling, can also be viewed in the video created by the Centre for Indigenous Student Services (2019), *Understanding the Land Acknowledgement*.



past decades.

In many ways, this work contemplates the entanglements between my occupation of stolen physical and epistemological spaces as a settler; my survival of psychiatrization and racist violence; my subject position as a racialized, woman-identifying mental health service provider, student, and educator; and the stories of violence that I have witnessed within the mental health and social services systems. This work is an effort to take accountability for my complicity, through my care work, in the further oppression of people who are already subjugated through the widespread cultural devaluation of feminized, racialized, and disabled bodies and their ways of being.

### **Colonial Ghosts: Founding Violence of this State**

On this land from which I am writing, there can be no ethical discussion about the discourse of trauma without exposing the historical and ongoing violence of settler

colonialism. The experiences that are commonly known as trauma—physical injuries, psychological pain, overwhelming events, repeated attacks—constitute the ground on which the Canadian state is built.<sup>5</sup> It is widely known that divide-and-conquer is the foundational principle from which many colonizing tactics are devised. However, it is not often acknowledged that divide-and-conquer as a colonizing tactic is deeply gendered, and requires the decimation of matriarchal social arrangement and inferiorization of the feminine personhood.<sup>6</sup> Women, children, and feminized people therefore bear the brunt of the violence produced through the colonizing, nation-making project that forms the Canadian state. The subjugation and violation of the feminine are not simply strategies to impose, legitimize, and coerce submission to the euro-western patriarchal social order. More insidiously, they are enduring arrangements to make sure certain communities and lifeworlds do not survive or revive, through gendered, racist, Eurocentric discourses that are state-sanctioned and

5. Dian Million (2013) offers a quote by filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, “we have to look at the bad stuff, and what has happened to us, and why... we cannot do this without going through the past, and watching ourselves and analyzing ourselves, because we are carrying this pain that is 400 years old. We’re carrying the pain of our fathers, our mothers, our grandfathers, our grandmothers—it’s part of this land” (p. 67).

6. As Natalie Clark (2016) clearly points out, “It is well recognized within critical scholarship that in order to get to the land, the colonizers had to remove the power and central role of women in Indigenous communities” (p. 3). She further explains, “Colonization required the silencing of Indigenous women, as the matriarchal and co-operative societies did not fit within the individualistic and patriarchal ways of the colonizer. To get to the land, they had to remove the women and children” (p. 3).

entrenched by policy that have direct material impact on the communities' survival. In the Canadian state, the Indian Act is constructed as the primary policy that attempts to govern and regulate Indigenous peoples' access to land and resources, social arrangements, and relationship with one another and the state. As the construction of a policy is a construction of problems,<sup>7</sup> the Indian Act aims to reduce diverse cultures and nations into a knowable population of colonized subjects as a problem to be managed. Drawing on Bonita Lawrence's theorization, Dian Million calls the violence that is operated through the Indian Act a form of normative and regulatory violence that continues to undermine Indigenous self-determination, collaborative community-building, and collective resistance by enforcing gender-based oppression as normative.<sup>8</sup> The colonial ghosts continue to haunt and restrict the ways of the living by continually invoking the social horrors they started.

If the colonial project's ultimate aim

7. My understanding of social policy follows Carol Bacchi's (2016) poststructuralist policy analytic approach, "What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR) (p. 1). The framework interrogates "the governmental problematizations that constitute what 'subjects' can become" (p. 5, emphasis in original). Informed by a Foucauldian understanding of discourse, the WPR approach aims to understand the ruling or disciplinary structures of knowledge and practices that shape the ways problems are constituted and represented as truth in policies, as well as the inclusions and exclusions within the particular ways equity is defined, thereby exposing the processes of othering and subjugation within the very policies that purport to enact universal equity.

8. Bonita Lawrence describes the Indian Act as "much more than a body of laws that for over a century have controlled every aspect of Indian life. As a regulatory regime, the Indian Act... [is an] organizing... conceptual framework that has shaped contemporary Native life in ways that are now so familiar as to almost seem natural" (as cited in Million, 2013, p. 6). Million (2013) asserts that the Canadian state is legitimized through racialized, sexualized, and gendered discourses that collapse "the rich diversity of Indigenous polities into a unified subject 'Indian,' mobilized and managed from birth to death in the Indian Act" (p. 6). Further, the Indian Act operationalizes a form of normative and regulatory violence that "coalesces in the evisceration of Indigenous women's constitutive power to inform their own Indigenous nations. It is regulatory power that affectively

is to extinguish the sovereignty of the people Indigenous to the land it attempts to colonize, then its tried and true weapon is sexual violence. Indigenous and feminist scholars have theorized how rape is not only an assault to the body, but it is a violation of the person's ontological integrity, an act of violence and terror that coerces the person into taking up the inferiorized position of femininity in their self-image. This brings to mind my previous discussion engaging Margrit Shildrick's analysis of how bodies become engendered as feminine or masculine, and how asymmetrical power relations are in turn produced, through hierarchical gender binary cemented by medical discourses from the European classical and enlightenment eras.<sup>9</sup> In such founding discourses that shape gender relations, the figure of femininity is marked by a fundamental lack of boundary and containment, an inherent vulnerability to violation and subjugation, an always already damaged self, inferior to and defenseless against its masculine counterpart. This idea of the

positions Indigenous women as the figurative centre of any Indigenous nation's inability to govern... Gender inequality and gender violence haunt the constitution of new polities in the articulation of any Indigenous self-determination" (p. 7). Normative violence is enacted through the hierarchical patriarchy, compulsory heterosexual norms, and gender inequalities that are embedded within the Act, which fundamentally alter gender relationships in Indigenous communities, and in turn figure into the unchecked violence against Indigenous women as well as gender diverse, Two Spirit, and trans people. As Million writes, to take a stance for Indigenous self-determination "requires that we understand the increasing gender violence perpetrated against Indigenous women as more than an attack on individuals, and as a mobile but durable feature of colonial power relations" (p. 7).

9. It may be helpful to repeat here that, according to Shildrick's (1997)'s analysis, female inferiority is primarily grounded in medical interpretation of the reproductive process, which emphasizes the uterus to render the female body as a passive, empty, soulless container, existing only for the active spirit of the male body to penetrate and take form. Furthermore, menstruation and pregnancy were presented as evidence of women's lack of control over the containment of their bodies (by leaking vital blood) and the boundaries of their selves (by simultaneously being self and fetus), thus painting a picture of the feminine body as inherently weak and vulnerable as opposed to the spirited, self-contained masculine subject. Connecting the construction of gender binary to rape, Sara Murphy (2007) theorizes that rape "can be understood as violent re-enactment of sexual difference upon the bodies of its victims, in a version that seeks to

damaged self is crucial in the discourses of trauma and the resulting regulation-as-care, to which I will return in due course. In regard to sexual violence and rape, the damage to the self and the vulnerability of the self are intensified through bodily violation, psychological terror, and emotional distress, in how the person experiences themselves and the world, as the intended outcomes of colonizing tactics. If we follow feminist theorization of interdependence as fundamental to human survival, that the continual becoming of each person is shaped by their interactions with other people, then rape can be described as a profound ontological severance from relations that sustain life and the will or faith to go on living.<sup>10</sup> The reliance and belief in the ability of human relations to sustain life may be understood as having faith in people. If faith is lost through such violent severance from the ability to connect with life-sustaining relations, then rape is also an act of spiritual devastation. As Dian Million argues, individuals' spirit to endure and to go on is directly related to a

reduce those victims not to their own bodies but to a fantasized body of woman" (p. 75). She further suggests that rape in the contemporary social imagination "has come to figure the traumatic itself, conveying a particular assemblage of anxieties" (p. 74), which often reinscribes patriarchal discourse of sexual difference in positioning the feminized as "fear-frozen in mind, weak in body, threatened pervasively, has no way out of assault" (p. 79), both at risk of lawless men and in need of protection provided by masculine institutions.

10. Million (2013) links the sexual violation and rape of Indigenous women directly to the evisceration of Indigenous sovereignty. She writes, "Within the actual embodied physical violation, there is an affective disintegration. Rape interrupts and dissolves the ontological presence of person and community, their desire to be, to go on, to endure, to have integrity. Rape strikes fear in the relations that make community" (p. 37-38). Drawing on the writing of Sarah Deer, Million theorizes that rape specifically attacks the crucial and primary role of mother in Indigenous nations' reproductive powers to continue itself in sovereignty and self-determination. Sexual violence and rape are therefore heteropatriarchal colonial tactics that are "profoundly insinuated into the most intimate of relations" (p. 38) to devastate a nation's ability to reproduce itself through child-bearing, parenting, and community well-being that supports each community member to continue living. Beyond Turtle Island, across histories of colonization in Africa, Asia, and Australia, violence against and sexualization of women Indigenous to the land have been "constitutive to the founding of western nation-states" (p. 38).

nation's ability to also go on. Particularly for communities and nations founded upon matriarchal social arrangements, combined with the Indian Act and policies that promote patriarchal control and the devaluation of feminine social roles, rape and sexual violence further destroy intimate and care relations that are necessary to sustain community and enable a nation to reproduce itself. Sexual violence and rape are therefore tactics to ensure that Indigenous lifeworlds do not go on into the future. As many anti-racist, anti-colonial scholars have pointed out, sexual violence and rape are weapons of genocide.

From Shildrick's work we learn that the devaluation of feminine ontology, the corporeality discursively engendered as female, means the social and cultural degradation of subjects who are constituted as feminine, namely, women and people who seem to deviate from the identity markers of masculinity. Colonization and capitalism are conjoined networks of operations toward totalizing domination and control of resources

and labour across the globe for the maximization of profit benefiting the ruling class. The key argument in Silvia Federici's study of European capitalist development asserts that the witch hunt in 16th and 17th century Europe, constructed as a crime of femininity against society, has been instrumental and foundational in the widespread growth and domination of capitalist social order, not only within Europe but also in the colonized Americas, Africa, and the Caribbeans.<sup>11</sup> The witch hunt only made sense to communities that witnessed it, people who allowed torture and violence to take place against their own relatives and fellow human beings, or even supported the operations of violence and dehumanization, because of that which had come before proclaiming as truth.

The violence that was perpetrated against mothers and grandmothers, sisters and daughters, had its foundation and scaffolding in the religious as well as pseudoscientific belief that feminized bodies are marked by weakness and lack, as if

11. Through a detailed study of the transitional period between European feudalism and capitalism, as well as the colonization of the Americas, Africa, and the Caribbeans during the same period, Silvia Federici (2014) argues that the construction of femininity in terms of maternal functions and unreason is integral to the historical development of sexual division of labour and patriarchal order, which enabled the widespread growth and domination of the capitalist social order. She theorizes how, following drastic declines and disruptions in the labour force by the Black Death, famine, and peasant revolts, women's bodies, sexuality, and reproductive labour were disciplined and subjugated for "the accumulation and reproduction of labor-power" (p. 16) through the widespread practice of witch hunt in the 16th and 17th century across Europe. According to Federici's study, those who were accused and murdered during the witch hunt in Europe were primarily peasant women; "for more than two centuries, in several European countries, *hundreds of thousands* of women were tried, tortured, burned alive or hanged" (p. 169, emphasis in original), accused of charges so grotesque and unbelievable that cannot possibly be commensurable with any criminal motivation or easily explained away by cultural superstition. Moreover, the crimes of witchcraft were often based upon accusations of sexual transgression and deviation from heteropatriarchal reproductive norms, as religious doctrines claimed that "women were more prone to witchcraft because of their insatiable lust" (p. 129-130), due to their moral and mental weakness. At the same time, Federici tracks the ways witch trials spiked during times of peasant and labourer uprising or protests and the consequent increase in food prices. She therefore asserts that, considering

not fully human: lacking in boundaries, lacking in containment, lacking in will, lacking in autonomy and rational judgment.<sup>12</sup> As such, feminized bodies were thought to be akin to, as well as vulnerable to, forces of nature that are deemed deviant or evil. Following this gendered, religious, and patriarchal logic, ways of knowing, caring, and healing that come from relationships with more-than-human beings, such as animals, plants, and the earth, would then be demonized as sacrilege against patriarchal Christian doctrines. As Federici argues, the primary goal of the witch hunt was to discipline and subordinate the feminized body and its reproductive labour for capitalist accumulation and reproduction of human labour, through violence and terror. The widespread practice of witch hunt in the 16th and 17th century across Europe was deployed to weaken peasant resistance against capitalist control of their livelihoods, at times literally by murdering their women relatives and loved ones, but more importantly and insidiously through tactics that positioned women who

the “historical context in which the witch-hunt occurred, the gender and class of the accused, and the effects of the persecution, then we must conclude that witch-hunting in Europe was an attack on women’s resistance to the spread of capitalist relations and the power that women had gained by virtue of their sexuality, their control over reproduction, and their ability to heal” (p. 170).

12. Referring to western moral theory, Judith Butler (2021) writes that “women are never identified with forms of thinking, since forms of thought and embodied forms are meshed in the masculinist geometrical imaginary. If women do think, they are muddled, or they are figured as monstrous or masculine (or monstrously masculine), or beneath their reason it is assumed that they are driven by irrational passions and unbridled metonymy” (p. 49). Similarly, Federici (2014) analyzes Descartes’ theory on the rules of reasoning and explains that “in the great ontological divide which Descartes institutes between the essence of humanity and its accidental conditions, the body is divorced from the person, it is literally dehumanized. ‘I am not this body,’ Descartes insists... in his philosophy the body joins a continuum of clock-like matter that the unfettered will can now contemplate as the object of its domination” (p. 140).



deviated from reproductive norms, such as the practice of birth control or sexual engagements that deviate from heteronormativity, as threatening to social and economic stability. It is important to note that the vast majority of those accused as witches were peasant women, and the crimes they were accused of were often described in terms of sexual lust. The witch hunt as a violent operation of domination is therefore not an attempt to control all women's bodies equally, but it is specifically an act of violence and control against the bodies of people who are both feminized and poor. The discipline of bodies for capitalist use is not only a matter of gender, but it is also constituted through class and race, as this is also a disciplinary operation essential for colonization. I will return to this point about class-based extraction of use from bodies at a later time. At this juncture, it is clear that this violence is enacted through the sexualization of the feminized body. As Million and Clark have pointed out, murder and sexualization of women and girls are primary tactics of colonial conquest to destroy communities'

social organization and self-governance. In the case of the witch hunt, community members began to surveil, discipline, and punish their own mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, friends, neighbours; divisive sexual politics between masculinity and femininity were entrenched, whereby women and the feminized others were subordinated as mentally and morally deficient or deviant, thus requiring control. Within the patriarchal capitalist logic, it made sense that many of those who had been accused as witches were midwives, naturopaths, and wise women who were traditionally keepers of reproductive knowledge and helpers who supported women in exercising their choices and control in childbearing.

It is therefore not surprising that the colonization of Indigenous peoples, which enabled the capitalist extraction and accumulation of resources from lands and peoples, was justified as a righteous, moral, even spiritual, conversion mission.<sup>13</sup> It is also not surprising that women and the feminized others were

13. Connecting the rise of capitalist relations in Europe and colonial conquests that occurred during the same time period, Federici (2014) argues that the source of imagination that constructed the figure of the witch was not the Renaissance magicians but the colonized Indigenous peoples in the Americas and the enslaved peoples from the Africa continent. Both peasant women in Europe and colonized and enslaved peoples were seen as potentially “providing for capital the seemingly limitless supply of labour necessary for accumulation” (p. 198). Religious ideologies and witch-hunting operations were brought to the Americas “to break the resistance of the local populations, justifying colonization and the slave trade in the eyes of the world” (p. 198). In turn, colonists constructed stories about Indigenous peoples to persuade European authorities “to believe in the existence of entire populations of witches, and instigated them to apply in Europe the same techniques of mass extermination developed in America” (p. 198). Particularly, historical documents reveal that on colonized lands women were “the staunchest defenders of their communities” (p. 198) and were therefore particularly targeted by witch hunts. It is not difficult to imagine that the ideology of witch hunt quickly became merged with discourses of racism, such that in popular media in 17th century Europe and onward, the devil was often depicted as Black or brown, with an “abnormal lust and sexual potency” (p. 200).

primary targets of the persecution techniques of the witch hunt transported from Europe to suppress resistance, coerce submission, wipe out cultural knowledges and practices, and extinguish the sovereignty and sustainability of Indigenous nations. Indeed, Federici's study illustrates that the witch hunt in Europe and the colonization and enslavement of peoples in the Americas, Africa, and the Caribbeans were reciprocal operations that reaped benefits from one another. As an operation founded upon patriarchal, male-centric ideologies, the witch hunt specifically aimed to destroy matriarchal social orders through the hypersexualization of the racialized and feminized others, the demonization and criminalization of the sexuality of the racialized and feminized, and the murder of the racialized and feminized as a result of such criminalization and demonization.

## **Fabricating Ghosts: Dehumanization for Conquest and Use**

Federici's study of the witch hunt is important when thinking about the ways that the Canadian state is founded upon violence, and the continuities of such founding violence, the colonial ghosts that still haunt and terrorize and influence the present. Understanding how tactics of the witch hunt, as forms of violence against the feminized others, are inextricably connected to the development of capitalism may allow us to also see how these tactics are still used to enable unchecked violence against and indifference toward Indigenous peoples, particularly women, girls, and Two Spirit peoples, for the benefits and maintenance of the colonial social order.<sup>14</sup> Particularly important to me, as I hold in mind Million's description of sexual violence as an act that eclipses a person's will to go on living, are the underlying ideologies and resulting strategies that aim to *dehumanize* a person. Following Shildrick's, Butler's, and Federici's work, it has

14. Million (2013) discusses how "a tsunami of literature, narratives, and analyses [had been] produced by Native women themselves over the past four decades" (p. 33) about the rape, murder, abuse, daily violence, and disappearance of Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit peoples in both the Canadian state and United States. For example, the Native Women Association of Canada held a database initiative called *Sisters in Spirit* (SIS) to gather and document stories and details of disappearance and deaths of Indigenous women in the Canadian state (Shotwell, 2016). When SIS was defunded by the federal government, community organizations No More Silence, Families of Sisters in Spirit, and the Native Youth Sexual Health Network carried on the work by launching a community-led tracking database of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse peoples (Shotwell, 2016). In *Reclaiming Power and Place*, a final report published by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIGS, 2019), over 2380 witnesses, family members, and survivors of violence identified that the indifferent, discriminatory, racist, and even abusive treatment of law enforcement, legal system, child welfare services, social services, and healthcare services, combined with underlying social and economic marginalization of Indigenous peoples rooted in historical dispossession from land and culture and its resulting increased vulnerability to violence, have perpetuated the innumerable, staggering, and unchecked incidences of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse peoples. The witnesses in the report told their interconnected truths about the ways that the Canadian state has long been demonstrating "a blatant lack of moral and political will for real

been established that women and those positioned as feminine in the gender binary are always already positioned as a kind of *lesser human*, or *less than human*. Federici's work particularly demonstrated how, intersecting with ideologies and contexts of race and class, poor and non-white women and feminized peoples were constructed, criminalized, violated, and exterminated as *not human at all*, particularly through the hypersexualization of their bodies. Clearly, this dehumanization justified the breach of a fundamental, even Christian, ethics that prohibits against taking the life of another human,<sup>15</sup> which should have been widely read by the colonizers, who would be mostly of the educated ruling class, and positioned themselves as a species superior to those they call savages local to the land. If stories were fabricated and naturalized as truths over time, in which the colonized, racialized, and feminized others figure as not-human – as in not one's own kind, not in the realm of the living, not made in the image of God, as demons or witches or

change" (p. 116). Deaths and disappearances of Indigenous peoples, "some never found after decades of inquiry... barely register as crimes to the Canadian justice system" (Million, 2013, p. 34). This is not a matter of oversight, complacency, or laziness. As it is stated in the opening statement of the report: "These violations amount to nothing less than the deliberate, often covert campaign of genocide against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people" (NIMMIGS, 2019, p. 5). This is a systemic, coordinated erasure of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis rights and sovereignty. The national inquiry called the meetings, hearings, and witnessing processes that generated the report a "Truth-Gathering Process" (NIMMIGS, 2019, p. 61). The many truths and memories of families, Elders, and loved ones of those who have passed or disappeared, as well as survivors of violence, gathered as resistance to dispossession, institutional forgetting, and dehumanization (Shotwell, 2016).

15. The Christian religious text, the Bible, includes many moral rules and grievous warnings against the taking of human lives. Perhaps one of the most well-known is "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13, NIV) in the Old Testament. Before this, in a story about the great flood, God commands Noah, "And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind" (Genesis 9:5-6, NIV). In the New Testament, the teachings of Jesus, which formed the basis of the Christian religion and subsequent conversion missions

ghosts, as terrors and threats to social safety and survival – then extermination of such beings would be justified and sanctioned.

If, as Federici suggests, the goal of colonization is to secure unlimited labour-power for capitalist accumulation and reproduction, then it will not work to kill off entire populations. It will however benefit the colonial and capitalist systems in the long term to convert generations of people into submission and subordination, to ensure that labour and use can be continually extracted from them in the easiest way possible for the colonizers. In the Canadian state, it has been well established, with growing public awareness especially over the past decade, that the historical Indian Residential School (IRS) system as well as the present-day child welfare system are important tools through which the state continues to attempt conversion of Indigenous peoples into subordinate citizens. As it is infamously known, the ultimate goal of the IRS is to 'kill the Indian in the child.'<sup>16</sup> Thinking with Federici's study on the European witch hunt,

('Christians' as in the followers of Christ), spoke of non-violence and unconditional hospitality, perhaps the most famous being, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34, NIV). Even as western society became secularized during the enlightenment era, which took place in the 17th and 18th century after the witch hunt, colonists could have been exposed to the writing of Immanuel Kant on moral philosophy in the late 1700s, the set of normative rules that is said to determine the righteous way of living, including the "Ethical Duties to Others" (Battersby, 2021, p. 115), which begins with "our duties to other humans simply insofar as they are human beings" (Battersby, 2021, p. 115). But of course, just as I have selected examples of moral teachings here to illustrate a point, it is commonly known that the Catholic and Protestant churches have made selections and interpretations of scriptures and moral theories for hundreds of years as justification for abuse and massacre, as compelling means for colonial ends, to destroy other lifeworlds in order to continue one's own ways of life. As Butler (2021) identifies, in the practice of ethics the "larger problem seems to be the hegemonic rule of egology and the assumption that the self is arelational and that its drive toward self-preservation licenses the violence it unleashes in the name of defending or continuing its own life" (p. 57).

16. Eric Hansen, Daniel Gamez and Alexa Manuel (2020) offer one of the many documentations of the history of the Canadian Indian Residential School system, an education scheme that was designed to "kill the Indian in the child" (para. 3). The term Indian in reference to Indigenous peoples on Turtle

'killing the Indian' may be understood as analogous to the idea of exorcism, an expulsion of spirits that are thought to be threatening to the social good, to humanity. The extinguishment of a spirit. How might a spirit be extinguished? Like the way a flame is extinguished, by removing what feeds it, what nourishes it, what sustains it. By removing children from their community and those they love and are interdependent with, by forcibly taking away their languages and ways of expression and communications and connections, by depriving them of familiar or any food that nourishes their bodies, by forbidding the spiritual and cultural practices that sustain their beings, by withholding basic care – the colonizing ruling class attempted to extinguish Indigenous children's and peoples' spirits to go on living. The goal, of course, was not to extinguish life altogether. Through the inferiorization and demonization of groups who were deemed racially and culturally different and the simultaneous exaltation of whiteness, many of the IRS administrators certainly believed

Island is commonly believed to have originated from Christopher Columbus, who in his late 15th century expedition to Asia had mistaken the Caribbean for India; thereafter, European colonizers persistently used the term 'Indian' to describe the Indigenous peoples of lands they attempted to occupy and conquer in North, Central, and South Americas (McCue, 2020). In the Canadian state, it was only in 2016 when the Canadian government accepted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that the terms First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples have become widely used, but Indian continues to remain a legal term carrying citizenship status according to the Indian Act. As Hansen, Gamez, and Manuel (2020) retell, attendance at IRS was made compulsory in 1920 in the Indian Act. Survivors of the IRS spoke of being forbidden to speak their own languages and interacting with other children who were their friends and family, being given other names, and their hair being forcibly cut. They recall violent punishments when they defied the rules, as well as constant emotional and psychological abuse, physical assaults, and sexual abuse. Children were taught to labour, rather than learning from the education curriculums provided to other Canadian children. It is through labour as well as segregation by gender that strict and normative gender roles were enforced in the IRS. For example, "Girls were primed for domestic service and taught to do laundry, sew, cook, and clean. Boys were taught carpentry, tinsmithing, and farming" (para. 8). Following a capitalist logic, if the goal is to produce a labouring class for profit, then the investment into this production would be kept at minimal. It therefore made sense that the IRS facilities were severely underfunded, with "overcrowding, poor

that religious and moral indoctrination and assimilation would be healing to people who were deemed in need of rescue and salvation.<sup>17</sup> So strongly did they believe in their mission that they carried out their disciplinary tasks with fervent and even violence, resulting in the deaths of many children. When the abhorrent living conditions and horrifyingly high death rates of children at the IRS became more widely known and challenged by the public, the state continued the practice of removing children from their families but shifted to placing children in white, middle-class foster families rather than residential schools. This demonstrates how the aim of the colonial project was ultimately not education (even though the project was moved forward by white teachers who acted from the belief in one's superior responsibility to improve those who are different), nor was it the extermination of entire populations as some form of spiritual warfare (even though the project was also propelled by church administrators who may have rationalized their violent actions

sanitation, and severely inadequate food and health care" (para. 9). The children's unpaid and involuntary labour maintained the operations of the school. By the 1950s, the devastating effects of IRS and the lived experiences of Indigenous young people and communities became more widely recognized against the backdrop of civil right challenges. As a result, the 'work/school' system was progressively phased out, while "conceding power to the provinces to apprehend children, and transitioning from the school system to a 'child welfare system'" (para. 14). Commonly known as the Sixties Scoop, this time period of transition involved the systematic removal of Indigenous children from their families without the consent of their parents. Hansen, Gamez, and Manuel also commented that the children were sent away from the IRS at 18 and were discouraged from pursuing further education "because those who wanted to attend university would have been enfranchised" (para. 14), which is a legal process through which an Indigenous person would lose their Indian status under the Indian Act and be conferred Canadian citizenship. This resonates with Ahmed's (2019) analysis of how capitalist exploitation and subjugation are enabled by and mutually constituted with racism; the colonized subject is "required to be like the master, using his words, achieving his manner, but without becoming him (differences of "blood and color" cannot be transcended)" (p. 123). Drawing on Homi Bhabha's statement, "almost the same but not quite, almost the same but not white" (Bhabha, 1994, cited in Ahmed, 2019, p. 123), Ahmed explains that to require that a person be like the ideal is to simultaneously declare that the person does not align with the ideal.



against children based on this religious belief), but it was the replacement of one way of living with another way of existence that allows the ruling class to endlessly extract use from bodies.

It is no coincidence, and may therefore be important to note, that as the practices of dehumanization to achieve subordination through the witch hunt gained momentum in the 15th century, the term 'Indian' apparently arose and persisted from one of Columbus' expeditions in which he misrecognized the Caribbean for Asia. I imagine the Europeans quickly realized their mistake as they pulled their vessels to shore: this is not India, the people here are not Indians. Yet all peoples, from different lands, with different customs and cultures across North, Central, and South Americas, were apparently from that point on referred to as Indians by European colonizers. In the Canadian state it wasn't until 2016 that the government formally changed its use of terms according to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A mistake that stuck for almost 600

17. Chris Chapman and A.J. Withers (2019) use the term "The ethic of the healing power of domination and imagined moral superiority" (p. 151) to help make sense of how masses of people who claimed to be helpful and loving as Christians and educators would collectively and willingly enact severe violence and cruelty against Indigenous communities and children within the residential school system, and against racialized peoples in broader social service settings. They explain that such ethic emerged through the architecture of settler colonialism, which twisted the ethic to care for another based on the simple recognition of their humanity that existed in various ways across most cultures into a particular sense of superiority and responsibility to improve people who are different. This resonates with Hansen, Gamez, and Manuel (2020), who write that "Church and state officials of the 19th century believed that Indigenous societies were disappearing and that the only hope for Indigenous people was to convert to Christianity, do away with their cultures, and become 'civilized' British subjects" (para. 12). It is however difficult to believe that the western Judeo-Christian sense of responsibility and intentions of helping could amount to the violent punishment inflicted on children, such as chaining them to their beds, putting needles in their mouths for speaking their own languages, or sexual abuse (Hansen et al., 2020). Unpacking the architecture of settler colonialism, Chapman and Withers (2019) also discuss how the Crusades transformed practices of Christianity such that warfare became a way of devotion. They explain that in the first call to all Christendom to Crusade, Pope Urban II called for the destruction of Muslims as a "vile race" (p. 164) commanded by the will of God. To frame a group of people as a 'vile race' is to set the group apart

years is curious. It is curious that the Europeans never bothered to correct their mistakes in their letters home, in diaries, in documentation, in reports to the empire, in policy-writing for years on end. It is curious because the European ruling class had claimed authority, and had long been attempting, to identify and categorize and document every species, every genus, every family of beings under the sun, every star they locate in the sky, every disease visible or invisible in the body, every parcel of land they demarcate on the map, in the name of empirical science. I can only imagine that the continual conflation of Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and South Asian peoples living in India was not a matter of oversight, complacency, or laziness. A mistake that stuck for almost 600 years can only be deliberate. As Million writes, collapsing the rich diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples into a unified subject 'Indian' is instrumental to colonial domination and population management. Persistent misrecognition can be understood as an intentional act of dehumanization and demonstration

from one's own kind as humans. It is a tactic of dehumanization and demonization. It may then follow that this legacy of dehumanization, as part and parcel to warfare as devotion, legitimizes cruelty and violence against children in the IRS. Church staff fervently carried out their tasks of 'killing the Indian,' much like exorcizing evil spirits, even at the cost of taking the lives of the children. Schools reported 25-75% of mortality rate in the early 1900s (Hansen et al., 2020). While the state began shifting away from IRS by placing children in foster homes instead of mandating attendance at IRS in the 1960s in order to mitigate the high rates of death in IRS (Hansen et al., 2020), thousands of countless children have died while attending IRS from diseases and abuse; countless because of poor recordkeeping and lack of information provided to families (Hamilton, 2021), for people who were not counted as people. Moreover, children were systematically removed from their homes, often without the consent of their families, and placed in white middle-class families; as such, the same mission of converting, improving, and otherwise 'killing the Indian' in the child continues in an even more widespread colonial operation known as the Sixties Scoop (Hansen et al., 2020). As Ahmed (2019) writes, "This history of how children were circulated, used, and abused as objects is a history available only in glimpses at the edges of the archive. But glimpse it, we must and we can" (p. 140).

of domination – to position people as subordinate by refusing to recognize them on their own terms, to remove and transport them as properties, to exterminate them or let them perish if they become too inconvenient or costly to manage, *to treat them as objects without faces and without names.*

Just as education in colonial India was never about transforming local Indians into white subjects, the IRS was never about providing the same education to Indigenous children as it was for white children in the Canadian state. Moreover, unlike colonial India, the goal was certainly not to create a ruling class of local people to disseminate white imperial norms and laws, nor was it for Indigenous children to grow up participating in society alongside white people as equals. The goal was to produce a subordinate class of colonial subjects who follow European middle-class values, beliefs, desires, habits, and ethics *through labour*. In fact, the incarceration and forced labour of the children kept the schools running. When schools were open,

staff were employed. As such, the IRS was an industry. Already in the training of the labouring class the capitalist state was extracting use from the subordinated and incarcerated bodies for the benefit of the ruling class. Perhaps the IRS can also be thought of as an arm of colonial capitalist expansion akin to the witch hunt, both aim to produce an unlimited supply of the labouring class, to extract resources from the land and its peoples to sustain the colonizing state.

### **Hauntings: Annihilation Through Regimes of Life**

If colonial capitalist expansion is about producing an unlimited supply of the labouring class for the benefit of the colonizing state and the ruling class, then colonization is a task of ensuring mutual survival. In order for the colonizers to sustain their livelihoods, the colonized must live, as a living resource that self-reproduces. Perhaps, as a settler on this land and inextricably implicated in Indigenous-settler relations as I daily benefit from the colonial history and continuities of this land, I have a

tendency to be reductionist in attributing the complex problems of domination, violence, and dehumanization to capitalist economics and materiality, as if I would be off the hook if I were not an owner of the means of production, that I am not a member of the ruling class. But am I? Is class division ever clear-cut? I think about my work as a social worker or even a therapist. I don't make the rules, but I interpret them. In interpreting the rules to meet any given situation in ways that secure my own moral status, I also make them. I make the rulings when I interpret whether someone's experiences of violence can be categorized as trauma. Does the word trauma come up in my mind more readily if the person appears to be a woman, if the person appears to be racialized, if the person appears to be Indigenous? I don't know for certain, because the word trauma shows up in my mind before or without these interpretations registering in my mind. When trauma is evoked, I interpret the person's actions and words within the frame of trauma's

discourse, its commonly known effects, the permanent damages to the brain, the erratic and irrational behaviours, the proneness to aggression or violence to self or others. The person expresses what I interpret as frustration or distress in an interaction with me. I make the rulings about whether the person's experiences are ordinary and expected symptoms of trauma and therefore require pacification through the encouragement of self-regulation techniques (tea, bath, deep breathing). I assess where the person is at in terms of levels of risk for acting violently to themselves or me or others. I make the rulings about whether providing services in so-called and obligatory trauma-informed ways means that I would 'call for extra support' which translates to calling emergency services, even though I know that by calling an ambulance police will likely also arrive, even though I know the person had experienced violence by police. I would call emergency services and defer to state authorities, because I have come to believe, in this colonial state, that it is the only and best

option for preventing harm or death, and that I as a citizen of the state cannot morally fail to prevent a death, even if fulfilling my moral responsibility to prevent a death means coercing someone to hospital confinement, even if I know clearly that *this itself is violence*. This means that by fulfilling my moral responsibility to prevent a death, I am subjecting someone I know who has experienced violence to more violence.

So, am I a member of the ruling class?

I belong to a class of people that make a living upon making these rulings about life and death. I don't make the rules. The rulings or decisions I make are shaped by other rules, many of which existed long before my existence. But when I speak of the ruling class, I realize that I am not outside of it. I look in the mirror and I see ghosts. The shock, the horror, the disbelief, the affective experience makes it impossible to unsee or forget what is seen; I can therefore only confront it.<sup>18</sup>

18. Drawing on psychoanalysis and its notion of the uncanny, Gordon (2008) describes the unsettling feeling evoked by one's own self becoming strange, the recognition of oneself as another, "as a stranger, the arrival of the person from elsewhere, from the world outside [oneself], from what we call the social" (p. 54). For Gordon, the concept of haunting is useful and important, because a haunting is an experience that "pulls us affectively into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience as a recognition" (p. 63). This recognition is not just any recognition, but particularly the recognition of a violent, oppressed past that has been made invisible until this moment of recognition, "what seems dead, but is nonetheless alive, operating in the present, even if obliquely, even if barely visible. Upon recognition, the oppressed past or the ghostly will shock us into recognizing its animating force" (p. 66). The shock is recognizing the animating force which lives in us to perpetuate the violence and oppression that we claim to fight against.

The question then is *how* the oppressed past, the ghosts, can be confronted. One can simply be aware of ghosts and refuse to engage. Pretend they are not there, declare that I don't believe in them, like naming the oppressions, the laundry list of isms, and vowing never to enact them in my care work and encounters. Or one could avoid where they encountered the ghosts. I can move from one profession to the next. Though that itself is a haunting, one of the ways that I benefit from stolen physical and epistemological spaces in the Canadian state. And those familiar with the horror genre in film or fiction would know that moving houses does not stop the haunting. Ghostly forces will follow. Moving my life from social work to academia does not remove me from the ruling class. The same kind of colonial ghosts are in the walls of academia, the memories of imperialist domination deep in its foundations. Following Gordon, confronting such ghosts then involves asking how their memories were produced in the first place, how these memories shape



imagination, in order to create counter-memories toward a different future. How do colonial ghosts persist in their hauntings through the generations? How are colonized peoples made invisible yet living, and for what purpose?

Both Dian Million and Lisa Stevenson write that colonialism operates and persists through affective, or felt, experiences that infuse and shape the social imaginary and everyday relationships.<sup>19</sup> Thinking about the witch hunt, Indian Residential Schools, and the ongoing state inaction regarding the staggering number of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, trans, and Two Spirit peoples over the past centuries, perhaps it is the complex feeling of fear mixed with repulsion – like an encounter with an otherworldly being presumed to be malicious – that is evoked by the demonization of racialized feminine sexuality that mobilizes or animates the dehumanizing torture, the deprivation of basic care, and the blatant indifference to the life or death of particular groups as though

19. Colonialism is theorized by Million (2013) as “a *felt*, affective relationship” (p. 46, emphasis in original). According to Million, Canadian colonialism is a broad range of nuances and practices shaped by stigma about race, gender, and sexuality that are attached to Indigeneity, and when in operation through everyday interactions, the practices and nuances generate emotionally charged meanings that are registered as common knowledge about Indigenous peoples. Drawing on Fanon’s analysis, Stevenson (2014) suggests that “colonialism works on and through the psyche, in the way the colonial imagination infuses everyday relationships” (p. 96). Colonialism as felt relations is connected with Ahmed’s (2004) theory of the sociality of emotions on broader terms, which defines emotions not as psychological states that reside within bodies, but as social and cultural practices that are shaped through relationships between bodies, which in turn produce subjectivities, reinscribe relations of power, and sustain particular knowledge as natural or matter-of-fact. For Million (2013), it is such felt knowledge, or knowledge that “feels *right*” (p. 47, emphasis in original), knowledge that is particularly mediated by discourses of racialized sexuality, that fixes Indigenous peoples as a “‘profane’ figure, dehumanized and not worthy of regard” (p. 48).

they are not fellow humans. At the same time, following Gordon, these tactics of removing people from their home communities, confining them in deplorable conditions, threatening their lives with torture, and obscuring their deaths from public or official knowledge also intend to evoke profound, existential terror in those subject to these tactics.<sup>20</sup> To make someone disappear by removing them from their world and everyone and everything they are connected with is to shatter their world. As the person disappears from their community, the community also disappears in their lives.

*The world as you know it is gone. Your home, your parents, your siblings, your friends, everything that makes up your life doesn't exist here. You don't exist, nobody remembers you, you are nothing.*

Families were told that children had been taken to residential schools, but when they didn't come home they did not know what happened to their children. Family and community members went missing

20. Drawing on the organized system of political repression known as disappearance, a term that describes the illegal and secret abduction, torture, and death of political activists by police and military, which has arisen from but is not limited to the political repression in Guatemala between 1976 and 1983, Gordon (2008) analyzes different components of disappearance as parts of the architecture of domination. She writes that abduction is a “violent, frightening, and a world-shattering interruption of one’s normal life” (p. 75). She refers to this fearful state of being as “death-space” (p. 78), characterized by “the reminder, constant and loud, that you were disappeared, lost to your world, without any hope of retrieval” (p. 78), and that “*Since we disappeared you, you’re nothing. Anyway, nobody remembers you. You don’t exist*” (p. 78, emphasis in original). The disappearance is of course known to the person’s community, but it is unacknowledged and invalidated by the state, which makes it a “shadowy knowledge” (p. 79), a public secret that “simultaneously announced terror’s power and normalized the impossibility of living in a constant state of fear” (p. 75). Disappearance therefore “terrorizes a nation’s population to a large extent through the uncertainty that such a publicized secret harbors, but the state and its various representatives claim to know nothing” (p. 79). Gordon’s account focuses on the disappearance of activists, it is important to hold in mind also the genocide and massacres of Indigenous communities, especially those of Mayan origin, during the same period, fueled by the imperatives of terrorizing and suppressing anti-government rebels, as well as imperialist exploitation of land and resources (Guatemala Human Rights Commission, 2022; USC Shoah Foundation,

or were found dead and the state would not investigate or register their disappearance or deaths as crimes. To disappear someone is to annihilate the person from being. The shadowy and uncertain felt knowledge about others' disappearance and deaths keep people in a constant state of imminent annihilation.

*If you go missing, you are lost to your world, there is no hope of finding you. This can happen to anyone anytime. You can disappear at any time, if you are out of line, or if you appear to be out of line. You disappear if you appear as the person you want to be. You stay invisible or you disappear.*

The constant threat of annihilation terrorizes people into submission, thus suppressing dissent. Either way, the subordinated group is denied their claim to personhood and sovereignty. The felt relation of terror between the state and the subordinated class which the threat of annihilation evokes is therefore integral to the architecture of domination.

2023). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail the colonial, cultural, and political contexts of the Guatemalan Civil War and genocide, and recognizing that there are always erasures and disappearances that I will never know about and therefore participate in the erasures through not knowing, it is important to recognize the entire communities and lifeworlds that suffered brutal tactics of erasure and disappearance, with the hope that even a brief acknowledgement in a dissertation, in the process of knowledge production, is an effort to resist against the tactic of disappearance itself.

At the same time, colonialism as a felt relation also seems to involve emotions and desires connected with responsibility and care. Stevenson's study in the Arctic connecting the tuberculosis epidemic and the high rates of suicide illustrates how the Canadian state has been intervening in the Inuit community, from the post-WWII years to the present day, propelled by bureaucrats and health workers who express a deep seated sense of moral responsibility to care for the colonized.<sup>21</sup> Indigenous scholars Roland Chrisjohn and Shaunessy McKay as well as Renne Linklater separately interrogate the state mandated and funded suicide prevention programs and mental health services implemented in Indigenous communities across the Canadian state in recent years, but similarly illustrate that these are not forms of care coming from a place of genuine interest in the others as equals.<sup>22</sup> These are forms of anonymous care that does not distinguish between one person or another as long as the others stay alive, or improve according to standardized tests and psychiatric

21. Stevenson (2012) tells the stories of how this enduring sense of moral responsibility has mobilized and sustained healthcare programs, social welfare systems, suicide hotlines, counselling programs that are presented as benign. She describes these programs as bureaucratic and biopolitical "regime of care" (p. 597), whereby the demand for cooperation and the colonial desire to monitor, measure, and classify the other as an object of knowledge pose as a "moral inevitability" (Paine, 1977, p. 12, as cited in Stevenson, 2012, p. 595) in extending material and policy provision for the custodianship of the colonized. Inuit people are thus constructed as an inferior class and helpless "vectors of disease" (p. 592) to be collected en masse in the hospitals, residential schools, and the welfare system. Through these systems of categorization, regulation, and surveillance, the Inuit community is subordinated and reinscribed with Canadian citizenship to support Canada's claim to sovereignty over the Arctic and its national image of benevolence.

22. A possible response to the social conditions that demand one's own subjugation is to refuse (Butler, 2005). Death is postulated as a form of this refusal: "Although I want to die, I am not suicidal. I do not belong to your calculations. I want at least to own my own death, and my pain" (Stevenson, 2014, p. 96). Paradoxically, while colonial logic and moral norms require the colonized to adopt anonymous identification systems that annihilate their personhoods, suicide is considered a kind of "self-murder" (Chrisjohn & McKay, 2017, p. 17) that the state exerts focused efforts in prohibiting and condemning in Indigenous communities, as demonstrated also in Stevenson's (2012; 2014)

criteria, in order to contribute to statistics claiming the successful management instituted by the state. This form of care does not distinguish the varying identities, textures, histories, and desires of the lives it purports to care for, but it does distinguish what is worthy of care. Following Chrisjohn and McKay as well as Linklater, the worth of the object of care is contingent on the desire of the funders, the sense of moral responsibility that is a form of colonial continuity to care for the inferior and helpless class. This sense of moral responsibility is affectively shaped by the presumptions and inclinations toward results that would produce good, fellow feelings from rescuing or saving people from dire situations of suffering. The popular understanding or social imaginary of the notion of mental illness may be an example of such dire situations that evoke an affective response, a sense of responsibility to rescue and save. But of course, to prove that one's suffering is indeed dire, the suffering must be verified by medical authorities. Within this logic

study. Founded upon traditional western, religious, and moral conceptualizations of suicide, which largely theorize those who end their lives as cowardly, selfish, heretical, and insane, Roland Chrisjohn and Shaunessy McKay (2017) have found that practices of care and ethics in responses to Indigenous suicide are driven by individualistic understanding of psychological symptoms and personal responsibilities. As such, such practices do not effect "any substantive change in the conditions that had given rise to suicide in the first place" (p. 36), including social, political, and economic marginalization, as well as historical and ongoing genocide against Indigenous peoples, through the annihilation and denial of personhood, systematic indifference, and state neglect. More insidiously, the imposition of individualist conceptualization of suicide on Indigenous peoples perpetuates violent colonial relations by sustaining the social imaginary of "the Broken Indian" (p. 6), a passive container "filled with various gremlins, and that these gremlins... command the mechanical control of our bodies and manage our moment-to-moment activities" (p. 44). Gremlins figure centrally in Chrisjohn and McKay's description of individualist yet anonymous care. Gremlins are imaginary internal states, part of the social imaginary about Indigenous peoples, that are reified as causes of Indigenous suicide. Gremlins are depression, low self-esteem, despair, predispositions such as "weak wills, bad genes, character flaws" (p. 6). They are understood to appear out of nowhere rather than produced through "the economic, political, social, and legal machinations of mainstream Canada" (p. 54). However, programs that are imposed on reserves do not even correspond to research on suicide-causing gremlins; instead, as funders will "cherry-

of rescue-as-colonial-project, it makes sense that funding allocation would be contingent on the psychiatric diagnoses given to those accessing services. Psychiatric diagnoses are theorized as gremlins, according to Chrisjohn and McKay. Perhaps gremlins are akin to ghosts. They appear to the colonizer as strange and shocking, evoking fear, coming out of nowhere. Their appearances seem to defy logic, so it does not matter where they come from, it does not even matter what kind of ghosts they are – be it depression or borderline personality disorder or alcohol dependence or post-traumatic stress disorder – it only matters that in the act of banishing them the colonizer achieves a feeling of mastery over the living and the dead.

In Stevenson's juxtaposition of the numbered identification system instituted upon the Inuit community during the tuberculosis epidemic and the present day suicide hotline in the same community, we can glimpse at the nuances of anonymous care as an important

pick research findings that confirm their presumptions and inclinations" (p. 34) or need for cost effectiveness. Moreover, as Renee Linklater (2014) and the practitioners she interviewed observed, despite reports of positive results by Indigenous communities in some state-funded mental health programs, funding was often quickly discontinued, forcing services to terminate. When funding is distributed it is often conditional upon reporting on psychiatric diagnoses (Linklater, 2014), a further entrenchment of the gremlins as truth. Therefore, state care, which establishes itself as the main source of sustenance for communities depleted by colonization, is dispensed based on the condition that people shape their identities around illness, or reconfigure the impacts of colonial violence as mental illnesses (Butler, 2005; Linklater, 2014; Mills, 2017).

apparatus of colonial mastery and domination.<sup>23</sup> Its operation involves the erasure of personhood, the emptying-out of the spirit to go on in one's own ways of being, not only figuratively but literally and violently, through the removal of names, the removal from home and community, the removal of sustenance for the individuals and the community. Stevenson's storytelling particularly illustrates how naming for the Inuit community is a way of life that sustains a community's knowledges, ways of being, and the spirit to go on, through ongoing, non-linear, relationships between the living, the dead, and the not yet born that exceed western conceptualization of time and space. The serial identification system was therefore an operation of genocide – the annihilation of lives and everything that gives meaning to those lives for generations to come, whether the physical bodies survive or not – fueled by an utter indifference to the lives of the others. This erasure and emptying-out makes it possible for the person to be filled with gremlins that make the colonized and subordinated intelligible and

23. Regarding anonymous care, Stevenson (2014) particularly examines the parallel stories of the numbered identification system instituted in the Arctic Inuit community during the tuberculosis epidemic in the 1940s, and the present-day suicide helpline established in the Inuit community, to contemplate the colonial functions of anonymous care. Finding it difficult to understand, record, and track Inuit names and people with the rise of tuberculosis, in 1941 the Northern Territories Council instituted a system of numbered identification discs all Inuit people were required to wear around the neck. At the heart of the bureaucratic and colonial administration, it did not matter who the Inuit are, what the names of the Inuit were, or who they were related to, "it simply mattered that a system be developed that would allow administrators to enumerate them... the ability to replace one item in a series with another," to "designate lives (and deaths) that somehow *belong* to the state" (p. 27, emphasis in original). As large numbers of Inuit were transported away from their community to hospitals due to tuberculosis infections, the numbered disc was part of a series of biopolitical population management tactics that chart rates of death but not identities of those who die. It was common for tuberculosis patients to die during their weeks-long travel by ship to the hospital, or to die at the hospital. Without records of the patients' names, it was also common for families to not be given information about how the person died, or even news that their loved ones had died. Beyond mere identification, naming is in fact central to the sociality of Inuit community "in which one's very life depends on being given the name of someone who has recently died" (p. 107), whereby those who are living are sustained by those who have passed,

manageable, to produce another way of life that fits within the logic of imperialism and domination, that perpetuates or intensifies the felt relation between imagined moral superiority and presumed inherent inferiority, between rescue and indebtedness, between master and interchangeable property.

Within this kind of anonymous care, it does not matter what the recipient of care needs or wants, it only matters what the caregiver desires to provide and to save. Following Judith Butler, anonymous care can also be understood as a form of ethical violence, which I understand as ethical norms, or pervasive interpretations and enactments of moral responsibility, that are indifferent to cultural particularities and social conditions that offer possibilities for living for particular groups. In fact, ethical violence operates by foreclosing possibilities for living by excluding or removing livable conditions and life-sustaining relations from someone's world,<sup>24</sup> in order to foreground what the colonizer desires for the colonized to become – manageable,

with hopes for those yet to come. Touted as lifesaving measures, for the Inuit such anonymizing systems of regulation and surveillance “actually effaced who they were, their histories, their cultures, their desires” (p. 28), and were therefore murderous and genocidal. This violent legacy continues to haunt the present through the anonymous suicide helpline. Through interviews with helpline workers, Stevenson describes how the principle that anyone will be cared for, regardless of who the person is, has become morally exalted, such that the worker understands and experiences themselves as working for a higher good, saving a stranger, beyond one's own self-interest. Simultaneously, “the suffering of the person on the other end of the line is circumscribed by anonymous relations in such a way that no claims are made on the volunteer nor the caller after she hangs up” (p. 84). While the workers' moral value is elevated, anonymous care “makes the texture and specificity of a particular life irrelevant, or relevant insofar as the survival of the other is ensured” (p. 86). Through both the numbered discs and suicide helpline, Inuit life “becomes an indifferent value [and] it no longer matters *who* you are, only that you cooperate in the project of staying alive” (p. 82, emphasis in original).

24. As I have discussed previously, Butler's (2005) theorizes ethical violence as that which “demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same” (p. 56). I relate this statement of requiring others to do the same in manifesting self-identity to her discussion of universality. Drawing on Theodor Adorno's analysis of the collective ethos that postulates a false universality in order to “suppress the difficulty



disciplined, even grateful, desiring for the same white middle-class liberal individualist respectability. Desiring, but of course never getting there. *Almost the same, but not white*. Disciplined to improve, but expected to fail. Required to live, but expected to die.

The colonial imagination that Indigenous peoples are the *walking dead*, as theorized by Stevenson,<sup>25</sup> can be traced back to the assumption that arose at early European contacts, as discussed by Hansen et al.: Indigenous communities were already disappearing; to avoid perishing altogether they must be converted to western ways of life. The disappearance of the colonized is imagined as inevitable, a destiny bound to happen. And yet, the bureaucrats, healthcare workers, social workers, and volunteers alike ongoingly extend time, resources, and opportunities claiming to save Indigenous lives, from homemaking and cleaning skills training in the tuberculosis epidemic, to mental health services and suicide prevention hotlines. The racist

and discontinuity existing in any contemporary ethos" (Butler, 2005, p. 12), Butler further nuances the effects of universality by explaining that while it is not violent by definition, ethical norms that are indifferent to cultural particularities and social conditions that offer possibilities for living can impose "violence in the form of an exclusionary foreclosure" (p. 12).

25. Quoting the remarks from a filmmaker in the Canadian Arctic town, Stevenson (2014) points to the paradox that the Inuit are simultaneously prohibited to die and yet not expected to live: "According to Igloolik's yearly suicide rate there are at least five or six young people walking around town today who will probably be dead by next Christmas" (p. 95). Stevenson therefore suggests that "Inuit are tentatively imagined as the walking dead... Suicide is at once prohibited and awaited" (p. 95). She relates this "prognosis" (p. 95) of failing to live in the present day suicide prevention discourse to healthcare agents teaching western housekeeping methods to Inuit but expecting them to never meet the standards of colonial norms on cleanliness and tidiness. As a social worker noted in 1962 about an Inuit woman who survived tuberculosis and returned home, "She carefully hung up parkas on hooks instead of throwing them down on a bed. She dumped garbage into the empty oil drum out in the yard instead of just throwing it out the door. Still, she never quite managed the way white women did" (cited in Stevenson, 2014, p. 66). Why, then, would the state provide resources and opportunities to the colonized but expect failure? Drawing on the words of an Inuit man, Stevenson concludes that the

assumption that expects Indigenous ways of life to fail, that believes Indigenous ways of life have already failed, justifies ongoing care as discipline. In the logic of care as discipline, to be given resources and opportunities to live is to be continually reminded that one will always fail at living.

purpose was for the Inuit “to understand that anything he could do the white man could do better” (p. 67).

Care as discipline positions the others not only as in need of care but also in need of fixing. There is something inherently wrong with *them*. Through the very act of classifying and positioning someone as in need of fixing, the person is fixed in being identified as always failing to embody the ideal on which the fix is based. Care as discipline, or *care to fix*, is therefore an operation of colonialism to uphold the values of the colonizers, to sustain the imagined moral superiority and god-given destiny to, in Gayatri Spivak’s words, *right wrongs*, to foreground the social practices and organizing principles that sustain themselves and the colonial rule. Within this social order, if righting wrongs is the manifest destiny of the ruling class,

then failing to live is understood to be the manifest destiny of those deemed racially inferior. While Stevenson connects this felt experience of colonial relations to the idea of living-in-prognosis, it may also be akin to Gordon's discussion of death-space, the constant sense of imminent death evoked by the enduring reminder that one has already disappeared, already lost, already a ghost, without hope of revival. The colonized, racialized, demonized appear in this circuit of care only to recede, to be removed, to be made anonymous and invisible, to be perceived as a lost cause, already gone, only to make space for the exaltation of white imperialism.<sup>26</sup>

Logically, sick bodies infected with tuberculosis cannot labour, and people under constant suicide watch also cannot supply a labour force. Imperialist accumulation is therefore not only about reproducing a labouring force. More crucially, it is about reproducing a population that makes a nation, that upholds a nation's sovereignty, that supports an ever-expanding exertion of

26. In the essay, "Righting Wrongs," Gayatri Spivak (2004) discusses how humanitarian interventions and education are premised upon the belief that righting wrongs and dispensing rights are the manifest destiny of the ruling class. Paulo Freire (1970/2000) had previously theorized that the third world others are constructed as peoples of "absolute ignorance" (p. 72) based on racist and classist assumptions. The subordinated class is therefore presumed to require rescuing by the morally superior ruling class because of their incapacity and ignorance. Their wrongs are consistently brought up to highlight and uphold the rightness of their white counterparts. As Therí A. Pickens (2019) writes, the construction of madness based on Blackness as the binary opposite of the rationality of whiteness, "this person is meant not only to occupy space but to be consistently removed from space in order to make room for the more recognizable subject: the white able body" (p. 29).

ownership and authority over lands, resources, and peoples. As such, here we return to the idea of mutual survival. For one to take up the position of ownership or rulership, one must have something or somebody to own, to rule over. As such, the colonized must survive, in order to make a nation. The subordinate body parts are needed to support and uphold the rest of the social body.<sup>27</sup> The subordinated body parts give, so that the ruling parts can take – the basic premise of colonial conquest. Care as discipline, care as fixing wrongs, is a way to keep subordinated parts consistently under the social body in order to hold it up. Accordingly, those who fail to submit to this social body, this project of nation-making and modern progress, by demonstrating different ways of life that challenge the stability of the normative liberal ideal, are judged as too willful in their irrationality as well as lacking the skills to live according to the common good. Both excess and lack require regulation and discipline, framed as ethical responsibilities of the ruling class to realign people to their

27. Here we return to the discussion of ethical violence through the social norms that subjugate and limit possibilities for living by posing as universal social duty (Butler, 2005). Ahmed (2014) discusses the idea of the general will, defined as a moral collective body united by common interests, or a shared commitment to the common good. As Ahmed suggests, “Caring for others can thus be a technique for keeping others *under* the social body as subordinate parts” (p. 106), as a form of “discipline *as* care” (p. 106, emphasis in original). When the will of the ruling class is generalized as the norm, the ruling class is freed “not to support the whole body when others provide this support” (p. 112). The ethics of a general will is therefore an important tactic of nation-building in capitalist settler colonialism.

duties of contributing to the common good, to straighten their paths, to right wrongs. In Stevenson's study the Inuits' survival proves that the state is demonstrating its moral superiority in ruling its people – that it *has* the Inuit on its hands<sup>28</sup> – and therefore justifying its sovereignty, particularly its political claim over the Arctic. The deaths of the Inuits, by tuberculosis or suicide, reflect an administrative and moral failing of the state. As such, the colonized must be saved. It doesn't matter who they are, only that they make up the statistics that make up the successful management by the state. The lives and deaths of the racialized and colonized come to the foreground only to recede and make space for the sovereignty of whiteness.

The colonial is seemingly in the past, seemingly dead, but it is actually very much alive. It haunts not only the Indigenous communities and the reserves, but also every social relationship in which care is discipline, the persistent and ever-expanding exertion of authority over social

28. In Stevenson's (2014) study she repeatedly returns to the phrase that appeared in a historical document written by healthcare bureaucrats during the tuberculosis epidemic to appeal to the state for housing improvement in the Inuit community, "Do you want to have a dead or live [Inuk] on your hands?" (p. 33) She points out that the verb, *to have*, invokes a sense of "propriety – as the 'right of possession or use'" (p. 33). *To have* dead colonized others on your hands, like having a failed crop, or having damaged inventory, which are reflected to the outside world in stately statistics, thus points to bureaucratic failure.

order, practices, and people. When I call the so-called emergency services, whose desires come to the forefront in this scene? In the act of calling the police knowing that it will probably result in violence against someone who already experienced violence, whose interests and needs are perceived as deserving preservation, and in turn, what kind of social order is upheld and reinforced? Whose life recedes to the background, not mattering what they will experience as a result of the call, only to make space for the confirmation and exaltation of a worker's professional responsibility and imagined moral superiority? What does it mean to benefit from the pain that is part of this land?

## Figure 2

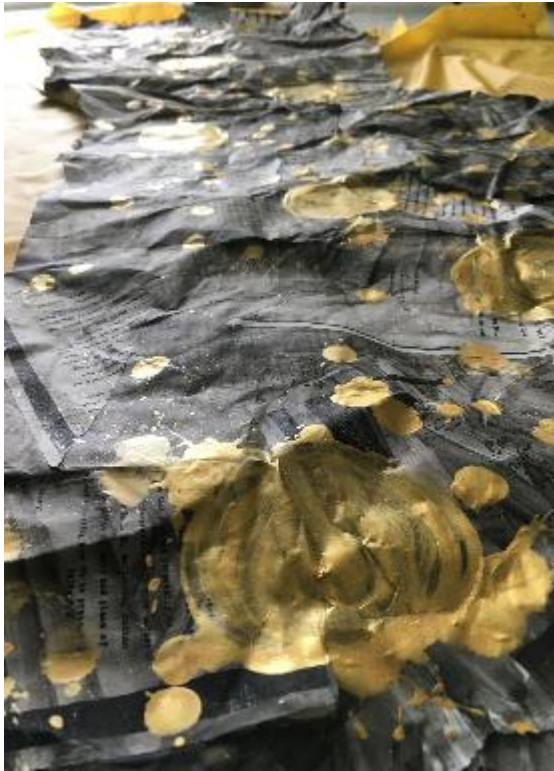
### *Truths Arise*



*Note.* Patricia Ki, *Truths Arise*, 2021. Acrylic, India ink and embroidery on paper collage, approximately 7'x2'. Art response to the call-for-response from the memorial gallery, *Remember Our Children*, and poetic inquiry, *When I Heard the Horrific News*, by Dr. Fyre Jean Graveline, at LIFE as Medicine: Circle of Indigenous Healing Arts: <https://lifeasmedicine.ca/remember-our-children/>

**Figure 3**

*Truths Arise (detail)*



This feels big, this needs to be big, bigger than any space I can offer or hold. So this stretches as far across my living room as it can contain.

Nevertheless, I wanted this to be laborious, to take work, effort, time. A settler's desire to do something.

Pages from historical treaties and books demarcating land and rights and knowledge pasted on the stretch of paper that is the ground, with India ink and broad strokes—

Indian.

An imagined figure

A fabricated ghost

An ostensible legal status

A material reality of social horror

Cemented layer on top of layer on top of layer



**Figure 4**

*Truths Arise (detail)*



Across the stretch of the paper  
Extending extending extending  
Generation after generation  
after generation

Crumpled and trampled,  
uneven grounds, treacherous  
history haunting the present,  
upon which gold paint landed  
and splattered, lifeworlds  
shattered and displaced.

So too were my ancestors and  
I subject to colonization. But  
my family had an alternative  
destination to call home away  
from a different kind of  
colonialism and political

subjugation because of the colonization and destruction of lives and livelihoods on  
this land.

So what will I do in this place

So who am I in this place?

All I knew how to do was to trace each circle

Each a spiral galaxy of lifeworlds and relations and connections

Beyond space and time

With stitches.

Because it is how I learned to carry grief.

My grandmother taught my mother how to sew, knit, and crochet, knowledge that my mother then passed on to me when I was a child.

My grandmother belonged to one of the many Hakka villages that originally inhabited the island and surrounding lands now known as Hong Kong Island, Kowloon Peninsula, and New Territories. She was born decades after British colonization in 1897, but I wondered about the many ways that her life was impacted by the decimation of the livelihoods of fishers and farmers in her community, the complete reshaping of the mountains and ocean shores that were parts of her home, by the government's land redevelopment and industrialization projects.

I knew that people in her village were forced to relocate to the city. And before that, she was sold to another family to work as a servant because her family was devastatingly poor. I knew that she was married to my grandfather through arranged marriage and worked like a servant in many ways until the final few years of her life when she was too ill to perform housework.

My grandmother raised me alongside my mother. For most of the past 25 years my grandmother and I have been oceans apart. But we share ghosts in our bones, no matter how far we are apart, through time or space.

Colonization, capitalist expansion, destruction of local people's livelihood, deeply rooted patriarchal social order that was entangled across European and Chinese cultures, racial inferiority instilled and internalized through colonial education since birth.

We must make ourselves useful

We must submit our will to the will of the others better than us

—what we can do men can do better, what we can do white people can do better—

In order not to perish

In order to have value

In order to belong  
In order to deserve love

This is the inheritance.

But so is stitching. My grandmother taught herself how to stitch and then taught my mother and my mother taught me.  
Stitching in all different ways.

Stitching by hand, crafting, making art, are often seen as unproductive, unless products are created for profit. Stitching, a craft, an art, practiced by women, by the feminized others, and the relational spaces they generate by creating together, teaching each other, are devalued, because the emotional and unwaged work of women has historically been devalued and dismissed by patriarchal social order.

Stitching is therefore an act of defiance, a practice of defiant commemoration and unforgetting. We refuse to forget our inheritance of craft, of creativity, of relationships cultivated and stories shared, of care extended in the quiet, steady movements of the needles and hooks. The clicking of the needles when they meet to bring loops of yarn together making a sweater for the first day of school. The swooshing only audible to the sewer when bringing the threaded needle up and down the patch of pants being mended to last another year. Even the louder, persistent clunking of the sewing machine that matches my excitement for a new dress to wear at my aunt's wedding.

Stitching into paper already damaged, soaked by ink and water, crumpled under feet, requires that I tread, or thread, lightly. Stitching inevitably requires a surface to hold the threads that traverse through. I need these pages, this ruined landscape. I cannot sew on air (or can I?). Defiant practice and ruined landscapes are therefore entangled together, impossible to separate.

**Figure 5**

*Truths Arise (detail)*



My sewing needle would not  
penetrate the ground so I used  
an awl to punch the holes for  
which the yarn will thread  
through  
around

.. .. ..  
.. ..

heartbeat

and breathing with each stitch  
-- inhale up -- exhale down --

What does it means to journey  
alongside people from whose  
oppression and subjugation I

profit as a settler and worker in the care/trauma/survivor industrial complex

-- for now --

Holding the spaces in between  
With my whole being  
My inheritance  
My ancestral lines  
The ghosts and the gifts

Sometimes not sure which is which but still  
I traverse this earth in relations

Sometimes my mother tells me stories about my grandmother. More than once she recounted how my grandmother refused to be sold and, after being delivered to her employer's house, walked miles over the mountain to return to her home village. I think about her outspoken ways yet never in complete opposition to my grandfather or her sons, for the most part because she was economically dependent on them. I think of the people I worked with in the community and the constant negotiation between compliance and resistance in their relationships with professionals who had control over their disability benefits, housing, healthcare. I think of my own engagement with psychiatry as both a service user and a worker, and how I know to be a good client who is easy to support, a model patient who gets to be released, a hardworking employee who goes above and beyond to prove that she is deserving of her credentials and pay. I think about how we tread lightly around ghosts.

We draw threads from those who come before to regenerate upon a ruined landscape. Perhaps this is one way of telling the stories of our kin, through our own embodiment of how they support and sustain us. I draw from the memory of my grandmother's survival, resistance, and tenaciousness in crafting my path of resistance against subjugation and devaluation, from where I am situated now, remembering that we are never fully autonomous in deciding where we lay roots, where our paths begin, where they end.

**Figure 6**

*Truths Arise (detail)*



We cross paths, walk alongside  
connecting for a moment and parting  
ways in another  
All the while getting caught in the  
orbit of compulsion to repeat

Always remember how insidious  
the ghosts driven to dominate  
are, will be

Always remember to  
resist •• resist •• resist ••  
-- divert -- divert --  
divert -- from well-tread paths

All the while taking care  
not to tread over the stories, the truths, the ways of life  
we pledge to uplift.

All the while taking care  
not to bury the stories, the truths, the ways of life  
that make up who we are  
that carry us here today.

Converging  
Each of us made of stars

Galaxies more numerous and brilliant than

minds can contain

Dancing in the light of every new day

Arising

off the cemented institutional grounds

that try to bury them.



## Persistent Spectres

They become ghosts but they are not gone. Colonial ghosts and those who have been rendered ghostly, inhuman, or invisible, keep haunting the work of the living.<sup>29</sup> I understand the hauntings of colonial ghosts as affective, embodied experiences of repression, repulsion, or fear that justify and perpetuate the subjugation, stigmatization, violation, and even annihilation of those deemed other, which in turn sustain relations of colonial domination. However, in the face of violence and suffering inflicted upon others, contrary to the social imaginary grounded in the basic ethics that prohibits the killing of others, recognizing our own acts of violence can also produce a shock, like seeing a ghost in the mirror. Such experiences of jolting disconnect or misalignment can evoke the realization of and desire for the kind of social world we have lost but never had. What if the Europeans who first landed on the shores of Turtle Island respected the sovereignty of the land and of the peoples instead of desiring to

29. Drawing on Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, which describes the legacy and continuities of the enslavement of African Americans through the story of a haunting, Gordon (2008) theorizes that "if the *dead* start to take the living back to the past, *it is connected to the labor aimed at creating in the present a place (a past or future), a something that must be done...* The something to be done is not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present, a reckoning with that which we have lost, but never had" (p. 182-183).



take, subjugate, and dominate?  
What would the world look like now,  
if First Nations were sovereign in  
their own right, like any independent  
nation in the world? What would life  
look like for migrants and settlers  
then? What were the lifeworlds that  
could have been, the dreams that  
never materialized, the opportunities  
for a better life that never came to  
pass? And grappling with these  
unknowns, what are the things that  
need to be done in the present?

One of the collaborators, Elene  
Lam, is the co-founder of a support  
organization for Asian migrant sex  
workers named Butterfly (遷蝶,  
literal translation: butterfly  
migration). Our contemplation of the  
question, how we can practice care  
without replicating violence,  
necessarily invokes many stories of  
violence against sex workers,  
fuelled by longstanding xenophobia,  
racism, sexism or misogyny, and  
demonization of sex work. Lam  
shared that she founded Butterfly  
when she learned that an Asian  
migrant sex worker she was  
supporting at the time was

murdered in Toronto. This memory is threaded with another memory of a funeral for a sex worker, years ago in Hong Kong, at which Lam was the only person in attendance as the woman's social worker. *Not even the family was there*, I recall Lam's voice exclaiming, across the screen as we met over Zoom, the shock still in the body, tears still lodged in the throat, mixed with a bitter laugh to cover over the heartbreak, years later. Two lives brutally shattered, the ghosts demanding that *something must be done*.

And years later, the question that remains: why didn't the family come to the funeral? Why didn't anyone? Were they ashamed of how she lived and how she died? Did they consider her forever gone, a lost cause, already dead, long before she died, as soon as she entered sex work? Why there was no one attending the funeral turned out to be an important question in the conversations between Lam and me. A question that haunted the crafting of our theories with our stories from memories. That which

appeared absent in the space was in fact a seething presence.<sup>30</sup> The seething judgment that is ever-present in the patriarchal, white middle-class regulation of feminine sexuality and gender role; its dehumanizing effects rendered the women's lives unworthy of mourning.<sup>31</sup>

Following Butler, the apprehension of grievability, or the affective understanding of, '*I will grief this person if they were lost,*' precedes or is intertwined with the recognition of the inherent precariousness of the person's life, or the realization that '*this life can be lost; this life is therefore vulnerable to harm.*' In this sense, grievability forms the basis of an ethic that stops us from taking or violating other lives, that may even compel us to care for other lives in order to sustain them or to protect them when we perceive that they are exposed to real or potential harm. I will return to the centrality of grief in an ethics of care in the next chapter. For now I would like to contemplate why and how certain practices of care contrarily enact violence toward the people that

30. "the ghostly haunt gives notice that something is missing—that what appears to be invisible or in the shadows is announcing itself" (Gordon, 2008, p. 15).

31. Extending the theorization that "specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living" (Butler, 2009, p. 1), that these lives are considered "never lived or lost in the full sense" because they are not "conceivable as lives within certain epistemological frames" (Butler, 2009, p. 1), Butler (2009) further suggests the centrality of grievability in the mattering of lives. She writes that there can be no celebration or valuing of a life if there is no grief when it is lost; grievability can therefore be understood as "life's emergence and sustenance" (p. 15). Without grievability, then, "there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life. Instead, there is a life that will never have been lived, sustained by no regard, no testimony, and ungrieved when lost. The apprehension of grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of precarious life" (p. 15).

such practice aims to protect. Perhaps the question that such practices point to is not whether they are caring, but caring for whom, caring to sustain whose lives or lifeworlds ultimately.

Looking at the history of migrant sex workers of Asian descent living in the Canadian state, one might perceive on the surface that this group has been extended care and protection from the state and local organizations. What Lam and I have attempted to uncover, however, is a sociopolitical structure and moral imperative of *discipline as care*.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, through this uncovering we realize that this discipline as care, imposed upon Asian migrants in the forms of material and policy provisions, effectively obscures the inherent value and grievability of their lives in the social imaginary. Lam and I begin this uncovering by retelling the little-known stories of the Chinese Rescue Home.<sup>33</sup>

The project of the Chinese Rescue Home was certainly not widespread, at least not in this precise form, across the Canadian state, as the

32. Here we are reminded of Ahmed's (2014) theorization of care as a technique to uphold the interests of the ruling class. She writes, "Bodies can be supported in order that they can fulfill their duty to provide support. Caring for others can thus be a technique for helping others under the social body as subordinate parts" (p. 106), as a form of "discipline as care" (p. 106, emphasis in original).

33. Chinese Rescue Home operated in Victoria, British Columbia from 1886 to 1923, as a project of the Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church (Lam & Ki, 2022), likely one of the many Canadian women's groups that took up social care work to advance an evangelical agenda in the late 19th century at the rise of the social work profession (Chapman & Withers, 2019). Later named the Oriental Home and School, the explicit goal of the project was to "rescue, convert, and civilize Chinese and Japanese women and girls who were engaging in, or deemed at risk of being sold into, sex work and domestic labour" (Lam & Ki, 2022, para. 4). From

Indian Residential Schools were. As well, Asian and Chinese peoples were migrants rather than Indigenous to and sovereign of this land, and therefore benefited, or at least survived, off of the resources of the land that were stolen from Indigenous peoples. However, it would not be difficult to understand the Chinese Rescue home as an offshoot project of the Canadian Indian Residential School system, as part of a broader colonial strategy of eradicating subjecthood through racialization, while collecting bodies for their use and productive value in upholding Eurocentric norms, imperialist domination, and white supremacy. Asian women in sex work, or deemed susceptible to sex work, were multiply subjugated in the frame upon which the Chinese Rescue Home was structured.<sup>34</sup> Following Lam's work, however, we can understand that the definition of susceptibility, or the line between those who require regulations and those who can be permitted to live life on their own terms, can be quite elusive, or questionably non-existent in some sense, when it comes to

historical studies of the Chinese Rescue Home such as the work of Shelley Ikebuchi (2015), Marilyn Whiteley (1993), Erika Lee (2007), and Coly Chau, Elene Lam and I have found, however, that this moral impetus to help Chinese and Asian peoples and women specifically was largely shaped by racist ideologies that arose with the increase of global migration beginning in the mid-19th century. East and South Asian peoples were despised as unassimilable others who would burden and contaminate white societies with job competitions, unsanitary living habits and disease, and immoral lifestyles stemming from a non-recognition of the western Christian religion. The 1923 Chinese Immigration Act and the 1908 Continuous Journey Regulation are two blatantly racist policies that essentially removed the possibility of immigration from China and India to Canada by imposing stringent eligibility requirements (Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, 2023a; Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, 2023b).

34. As the project was enabled by the rise of the social work profession particularly as a field for white women to become involved in the workforce, the aims of the Chinese Rescue Home was clearly to impart middle-class, white, Protestant moral norms, and gender role expectations through the removal of Asian women and girls from their communities and training in domestic skills. Arranged marriage with Chinese Christian men was deemed the ultimate successful completion of the residential education. Following Elene Lam's (2018) analysis of prejudice against Asian migrant sex workers, the positioning of Victorian feminine and domestic norms as ideal is specifically aimed at and shaped

Asian women and feminized others. We have learned from the work of Federici and Million that sexualization, particularly of women and feminized others, is a tactic to justify regulation, subjugation, and even demonization. Sex work is therefore always already condemned as morally sinful in the social imaginary of the west. Along with the particular racist characterizations of Chinese women as unsanitary, ignorant, uneducated, and passive, perhaps it does not matter whether the woman is in fact engaged with sex work, or whether the woman is engaging in sex work by choice or coerced into the work, she is *always already* deemed susceptible to the exploitation and demoralization of sex work because she is *always already* seen as morally and intellectually deficient, *not quite able to manage like white women do*.

For me, the colonial strategy of eviscerating subjecthood to extract use from the body is crystalized in the moment in which the Chinese woman was told to call the white matron who was responsible for her

by racist stereotypes of Asian, particularly Chinese, women as passive, ignorant, naive, and promiscuous. This intersects with the logic of eugenic in terms of moral imbecility, which aimed to eliminate, or eliminate by assimilation, those identified as sexually deviant or defiant of Eurocentric cisheteropatriarchal norms (Chapman & Withers, 2019). Indeed, older white women were often hired as staff or matrons at the Chinese Rescue Home; women and girls, regardless of their ages relative to the matrons, were told to call the matrons 'mama,' thus subjugating the residents to a child-like position in an imitation familial hierarchy which Whiteley (1993) called maternal imperialism, in which the 'children' become reformed in the image of their 'mothers,' the white middle-class Christian housewife.

captivity '*mama*.' Such moments may appear to be anecdotal. But it is in these countless, daily, seemingly mundane, seemingly benign anecdotal moments that relations of power become deeply entrenched, one person at a time, spreading across the community and the land over time. The moment Chinese women in captivity were told to call another strange white woman 'mama' was a moment of non-recognition and denial of a person's own intimate relations by coercing the person into a relationship of closeness and obligation that they did not choose. It was a severing of the person's community ties by forcibly removing the person from their home and replacing these connections with one in which it does not matter who the person is so long as they obey the rules and enact the norms. It was therefore an annihilation of the person's identity that was formed in relations with those who were meaningful to them by removing these relations and then imposing upon the person a subjugated identity. Furthermore, it was not any other subjugated identity, but one

that aligns perfectly with the imagined characterization of an inferior group whose purpose was to disappear and highlight the superiority of the white ruling class, to continually justify the enforcement of *discipline as care* toward this group. It was a moment in which a person is made permanently child-like, silenced and subordinate, seen and not heard, seen only as an imagined caricature of the inferior class.

Through the unfolding of the conversations between Lam and me, a storyline emerged. The video does not simply tell the story of the Chinese Rescue Home. It exposes its structure which does not end with the closing of the home but remains through space and time. It is a story of how its ghosts continue to haunt the present-day, widely supported human trafficking policy directives and practices that claim to protect migrant sex workers.<sup>35</sup> We imagined moving pictures and sound effects, reminiscent of the radio drama and commercials we both grew up listening to in Hong Kong in the 80s and 90s, a work of fabulation that

35. While there is no doubt that the trafficking and various forms of exploitation and violation of people happen across the Canadian state and the globe, it has long been widely documented and reported by grassroots organizations and sex workers that law enforcement and policy practices enabled by state sanctioned anti-trafficking legislations result in concrete deleterious effects on the very people these legislations are claiming to protect (Lam & Ki, 2022). Intensified racial profiling, surveillance of Asian migrant sex workers and massage workers, violent raids and shut-down of workplaces, and violations of human rights through unwanted contacts, physical and sexual assaults, and degrading treatments by law enforcement are clearly not practices of care and protection (Lam & Ki, 2022). Ironically, such violent policy and law enforcement practices are built on and justified by the very construction that migrant sex workers are helpless victims in need of protection, as exemplified by the advertisements that depicted women who have experienced trafficking as packaged meat (Rindels, 2018). One may argue that these operations are in fact intentional tactics for eliminating a particular group based on longstanding racist stereotypes justified by the moral imperative of the ruling class who believe they possess the manifest destiny to right wrongs (Spivak, 2004).



reflects the lived, affective experience of simultaneous disbelief and matter-of-fact. *'How can this still be happening?' 'Not even the family was there!'* juxtaposed with *'of course we help trafficking victims and keep them safe.'* Like a dream. Like a dream in which case files take the shape of meat packages of Saran-wrapped women. It's absurd. But is it? The images of the Saran-wrapped women were real advertisements once distributed by a non-profit, anti-trafficking organization. They were images that stood out in Lam's memory and became the focus of our conversations, what we asked what then becomes of the identity of the Asian migrant sex worker in the social imaginary, in the donating public that the ads are aimed at, in the eager-to-help social service workers who are writing case notes in their non-profit jobs? The strategy repeats itself, like a recurring dream. *We want to help you. You are safe with us. You must leave your life and relationships behind, and take on this new life we give you. We can help you, but you must realize that you are a helpless, ignorant victim*

*that we know you are. You must behave like a proper woman, like a white women.*<sup>36</sup>

When asleep, enveloped by the enchantment of a dream, everything feels matter-of-fact, no matter how strange or foreign they seem in our waking life. When we wake from that dream, in the few minutes that our minds can still hold on to the details and flashes of images and sounds and textures and our actions and even thoughts while we reconnect with waking life, we suddenly recognize the absurdity of the dream and our parts in it. The video calls for the viewers, particularly those who work in social services and professionalized care settings with migrants and sex workers in the Canadian state, to pause and stay awhile in this liminal space, to recognize or even just consider the absurdity of disguising anti-Asian racism and misogyny with the rhetoric of benevolence, to see the people whose voices and subjecthood have been rendered invisible but are never truly gone. Look how they point to the colonial ghosts that show up in the figure of

36. Anti-trafficking organizations and social services may be understood as capillary outposts of law enforcement with their involvement in rescue operations. Such operations often result in the separation and removal of migrants from their own supports, resources, and community through detention, criminalization, deportation, or the requirement to sever ties from their employment and contacts before they can be eligible for support services through the non-profit organizations (Lam & Ki, 2022).

the matron continuing to walk the halls of social services and animate the workers' desire to help and rescue. Look how they persist in telling us that something must be done.

**Figure 7**  
*Hundred-year Dream*



*Note.* Elene Lam & Patricia Ki, *Hundred-year Dream*, 2022. Digital collage, poetry, and video. Video and accompanying essay at <https://mappingcare.art/hundred-year-dream/>

Colonial violence in the Canadian state is perhaps also enacted through an imperialist and liberal conceptualization of human rights, whereby particular groups would only be considered as having the rights to care and resources if they align with the subjugated identities that uphold dominant norms and white supremacy.<sup>37</sup> This demonstration of alignment can be embodied as an imitation of the white liberal masculine ideal (but never quite the same), or as the binary opposite of the white liberal masculine ideal (but working to get there), or as any iteration along the spectrum (but always looking toward the white liberal masculine ideal on the horizon). From the conversations between Elene and me, the non-profit and social service organizations that corroborate with law enforcement often identify as operating from a feminist standpoint or framework. The video that Elene and I have created actually aims not only at social service workers but especially those who work in feminist spaces. We would expect that organizations and individuals who identify as feminist would be able to identify underlying misogynistic

37. Regarding western human rights norms and monitoring activities, Tanya Titchkosky (2014) critiques that rights-bearing citizens are defined in western human rights frame as “a type of human for whom the ascription of human rights must be ‘seen’ to be achieved... in getting married, going to school, securing employment” (p. 128). In other words, these ascriptions of rights are manifestations of self-identity that uphold the liberal ideal and capitalist market. The others who are seen as unruly, ignorant, and unable to ‘do human’ are then rendered unrecognizable as human, subject to neglect or economic and military coercion (Butler, 2010; Spivak, 2004; Titchkosky, 2014). Legal provisions that focus on punishing specific groups or states for human rights violations thus obscure the historical contexts and global economic inequities that give rise to such violations, thereby depriving all groups of “the very critical and historical resources we need to imagine and practice another future” (Butler, 2004, p. 10). It seems, therefore, that much of humanitarian activities of the west, such as human rights education or monitoring activities, do not mitigate the oppressive situations experienced (Freire, 1970/2000). Instead, they often aim to perpetuate the production of colonial subjects and the global governance of postcolonial states through threats of sanctions and promises of economic partnership, which often do not resolve but instead intensify conflicts within and between states (Spivak, 2004).

ideologies in law enforcement and policy practices. However, awareness of gender-based subjugation and violence seem to be regularly eclipsed by the forces of racism and Eurocentrism intersecting with classism, which perhaps reflects the legacy of racism within feminism of the west in human rights advocacy.<sup>38</sup>

But of course, as persistent as the forces that attempt to replicate norms and self-identities that support relations of domination, Butler reminds us that reiterations of norms can never be perfect. The liminal moment in which we realize that the Chinese Rescue Home is not a dream—that the Indian Residential Schools are not a dream, nor are they things existing only in the past, that they have very material impacts in the present, that *ghosts are real*—is perhaps the moment at which the frames that govern the recognizability of life come apart from their intended ways of circulation and reiteration.<sup>39</sup> There are those who are not recognized as grievable, not recognized with values of a life in the fullest sense, but are nevertheless living, something living that is other than life, that gnaws at the

38. Chandra Mohanty (1988) points out that feminists in the west have advanced their political standing by unilaterally constructing the third world women as a homogenous powerless group in need of rescue, in contrast with the white, independent woman as the norm, thus re-enacting colonization and conquest through the imposition of cultural values on the other (Butler, 2004).

39. We return here to Butler's (2009) theorization of the iterability and circulations of norms. She writes that "the frames that, in effect, decide which lives will be recognizable as lives and which will not, must circulate in order to establish hegemony... When those frames that govern the relative and differential recognizability of lives come apart – as part of the very mechanism of their circulation – it becomes possible to apprehend something about what or who is living but has not been generally 'recognized' as a life. What is this specter that gnaws at the norms of recognition, an intensified figure vacillating as its inside and its outside? As inside, it must be expelled to purify the norm; as outside, it threatens to undo the boundaries that limn the self. In either case, it figures the collapsibility of the norm" (p. 12).

norms of recognition, that is constantly  
exorcized to keep the norms pure, that  
persistently reappears and threatens  
to undo the boundaries of what is  
understood to be life itself. The ghosts  
that keep pointing to the collapsibility  
of norms and the amount of violence  
that it takes to hide it from recognition.

## **Don't Help**

I remember you

Sitting across from me

In this dimly lit room, walls

surrounding us

If I stretched my arms to the east and

west my fingertips will touch the cold

concrete painted green to induce

calmness (or so they say)

If I stretched my arm forward I will

surely reach you

My job is to reach you

My job

But how

should know  
don't know (but you do,  
surely you do  
you must)

Shift, shift, shift

Be still, breathe, how  
were you taught?  
What did your  
teacher say?

Don't wring your hands, don't wring  
your hands, not even under the table,  
don't wring your hands.

"go with Patricia, she will  
sit with you,"  
says the housing worker, nudging you  
toward me.

Sense of relief.  
Footsteps  
fading away: make her  
behave, make her  
behave, make her  
stop before  
she starts, disarm  
the threat, disarm the  
threat

The ticking time bomb.



Now in my hands

Should be good hands

Don't wring your hands, don't wring  
your hands, not even under the table,  
your lack,

they  
sense.

Maybe you think this person can help:  
This person, how clean are her hands  
under the fingernails. Never spent a  
day on the street, never slept on the  
concrete, never had a drop of anything  
unprescribed in her veins, sat at home,  
went to school, learned about being  
poor from books. Maybe she can help.  
Maybe with some things. After all,  
what other options do you see

around here?

Everyone goes home after 8pm,  
save one staff.  
Anything / anyone goes out of order,  
one staff saves.

So

Here I am, sitting across from you.

I learned you are  
experiencing withdrawal

From a book: Chapter 3. Irritation,  
anxiety, agitation, paranoia.

I learned you are traumatized from  
years of sex work

From your case file  
From the staff lunchroom

Here you are  
Skin and bones, flesh and blood  
On the edge of the chair  
Eyes wide like you're about to teeter  
off the edge of  
life itself

Reminds me of my fear of height and  
deep water.

I make myself look down every time I  
find myself on a high-rise balcony or  
on a ride in a ferry as if looking over  
and over and over can cure fear.

Practice, practice, practice.

I once told a supervisor that, besides  
height and deep water I'm also afraid  
of people being upset with me, and  
they said, "yet you chose a profession

where you're going to see people  
upset everyday, so

What does the universe have to teach  
you?"

Eyes like black holes of elusive,  
shapeless, shapeshifting fear that  
exceeds my comprehension of the  
world and at the same time  
draws me in like an invisible lasso  
tightly wound around my desire  
to help

A bleeding heart takes pride in its  
ability to bleed at the sight of suffering.

So

Here I am sitting in front of you

Looking, practicing, learning---

**"Don't look at me!"**

Your voice pierced through the space  
between us  
Followed by the sound of my own  
voice, like reflex, "ok I'll look outside."

I forced myself to lean back in the

chair and turn my head toward the  
door, left ajar

In case you want to leave anytime. In  
case I need to leave anytime.

“If you need some space to sit here on  
your own, I can leave. I’ll just be right  
outside ---”

“No no no no no no, don’t leave.”

I leaned back, my body lets go before  
my mind does  
Before my mind realizes that I don’t  
help.

If you want me to stay, if you want me  
to leave, if you use this room for 5  
minutes or 5 hours, I don’t help. The  
people who pay me to do this work  
don’t help. The walls that house my job  
don’t help. The structures that hold up  
these walls and these people in their  
jobs

Don’t help.

Your skin and bones are not my  
training ground  
Your suffering is not the hurdle upon  
which I practice overcoming fear

To learn I grasp and I'm empty handed  
because there is nothing to grasp  
here.

"You got any water?"

Yet you threw me a lifeline.

The only thing there is to hold  
is the space between us, two humans  
drinking water.

One afternoon, under an overcast sky,  
I learned of your passing.  
It was in the news, I was told.  
You died by an act of violence at the  
hands of those who were supposed to  
protect you and  
help you, I was told.  
I cannot look up the news  
I cannot look

I won't look.

And I can no longer remember what  
your face looked like  
But I remember you.

Don't help.

Hold

The theorization by Titchkosky about certain people not being recognized as human with rights because the ascriptions of human rights are not seen to be achieved brings to mind several people I worked with in housing and shelter services. People who were not going to school, not employed in a tax-paying sense, not attached within cisheteropatriarchal relationships recognized and privileged by the state. Not having use value in a capitalist social order, morally deficient according to the Protestant work ethics and the institution of marriage and family. Abjectly poor, often disabled and in distress, they are always already constructed as either a drain or a threat, which justify discipline, regulation, or banishment in the forms of denial of services and eviction. Passed from one agency to another, banned from housing programs to shelters to drop-ins, moving from place to place one day at a time. In my stories, the everyday experiences of the people I have come to know, those who are seen as unable to or will not 'do human' are often denied access to basic human needs, the rights commonly understood as inherent to all humans, such as food, a roof over

the head for the night, respect and care.

Clearly, usefulness is a crucial criterion of human worth. However, people are not expected to be useful in the exact same ways. To Ahmed, the ways that people are supposed to be useful are defined by race, gender, and class.<sup>40</sup> The poor and the labouring class are expected to labour in order to be useful. The unwaged are expected to earn their living with labour. Care for those who are seen as unable or unwilling to be useful according to their position on the class hierarchy, gender norms, and racial stereotypes is made to be stringently conditional. One may argue that it has been many years since the establishment of the 1834 poor law in Ahmed's analysis, and the world is a different and more caring place now. One can tell me what is caring then, about the rates of social assistance in Ontario, for unwaged people with no employment and asset and in need of financial aid, for a single individual, being capped at a maximum of \$343 per month for basic needs and a maximum of \$390 per month for shelter allowance in 2022, when the average rental cost in the

40. Theorizing on the concept of use, Ahmed (2019) draws on moral theory, Darwinism, and eugenics to illustrate how the perception of "disuse becomes degeneracy when something is not being used that is *supposed* to be used" (p. 98, emphasis in original). With an analysis of English philosopher Herbert Spencer's theorization of social Darwinism, Ahmed argues that the link "between disuse and unworthiness is fatal" (p. 99). Influenced by eugenic ideas, Spencer (1873) believed that "the quality of a society is lowered morally and intellectually, by the artificial preservation of those who are least able to take care of themselves... For if the unworthy are helped to increase, by shielding them from that mortality which their unworthiness would naturally entail, the effect is to produce, generation after generation, a greater unworthiness" (p. 606, as cited in Ahmed, 2019, p. 99). As such, the classes of people who are "assumed as unable or unwilling to use their faculties" (p. 99) for the ways they are supposed to be useful, "by the law of use and disuse, *they should cease to be*" (p. 99, emphasis in original). This social Darwinist and eugenic logic is also traced in Jeremy Bentham's design of the English poor law, which prescribes that "any relief or charity given to the poor must be painful rather than pleasant... The implication of this argument is that poor laws should make the lives of those seeking relief more wretched in order to dissuade pauperism" (cited in Ahmed, 2019, p. 126). Within capitalist logic, employment is a crucial, if not the only, way through which a person can be useful according to the way that they are supposed to be used. Bentham therefore associated moral health with

Greater Toronto Area is \$2667 per month at the time of writing.<sup>41</sup> One can tell me what is caring then, about shelters banning people from access and housing programs evicting people whose sole income is social assistance. Care is therefore set up to be readily withdrawn or withheld from particular people who are deemed unworthy in the first place—unworthy not only of the professionalized care services, but unworthy to access resources that sustain their continued existence as humans.

It is true, however, that particularly in feminist social service organizations, there may be greater willingness and efforts to practice egalitarian, genuinely respectful approaches to professionalized care. What we know today as ‘trauma-informed care’ is deeply indebted to decades of feminist organizing to bring awareness to ubiquitous gender-based violence, misogynistic discrimination, and patriarchal norms in many societies, including Black and racialized feminist writing about the intersections of racism and sexism.<sup>42</sup> It is generally recognized that poor and disabled people, particularly those who are also

employment, and “to be unemployed—in the specific sense of not to be in a profession or have a job—is to risk mental as well as physical degeneration” (p. 130). Employment thus becomes a “normative commitment” (p. 130) to life and happiness—not only individual happiness, but also the happiness of the greatest number, the reproduction of a society of people who find happiness in employment, usefulness, and prosperity in terms of capitalist accumulation. The imperative of employment is therefore upheld by utilitarian ethics. However, Ahmed also writes that “not everybody is required to be useful... for those who are not laborers, use can become more creative, more detached from the requirements of a system” (p. 133). According to theories of education written also by Bentham and other social theorists, the formation of a middle-class disposition is “described as an aesthetic disposition that privilege form over function” (p. 133). Utility is therefore distributed unevenly across a social body whereby enjoyment of beauty or aesthetic pursuits is understood as the performance of usefulness for certain classes, but the same activities performed by other classes are condemned as vacant-minded or degenerate idleness. As such, “the lower you are in a class hierarchy, the more you are supposed to be determined by function” (p. 133).

41. Current rates for Ontario Works can be found at the City of Toronto (2023) website: <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/employment-social-support/employment-support/employment-seekers-in-financial-need/ontario-works-rates/>

Current average rental rate in the Greater



racialized, routinely experience violence and abuse not only in the community and on the streets but also in social services, healthcare, and mental health systems. A foundational principle of trauma-informed practice is universal assessment: to approach every person based on the assumption that every person who comes through the door of human services has experienced violence.<sup>43</sup> The person's actions, even if they appear unwilling to cooperate or aggressive, are to be understood as survival mechanisms rather than deficits.

Trauma can therefore be understood as a proof of one's worthiness for care. The person is not intentionally unproductive and willfully unwilling to fulfill their expected social roles if they are understood to 'have trauma.' If we follow the logic of universal assessment, then every person who accesses professionalized care would be deemed inherently worthy of care. However, if every person should be universally recognized as worthy of care, then why are some people continually banned from food and community services, bounced from shelter to shelter, evicted from their

Toronto Area is reported on CP24 (Wilson, 2022): <https://www.cp24.com/news/here-s-how-much-average-rental-prices-were-across-the-gta-in-july-1.6042212>

42. In the 1970s and 80s, strong feminist advocacy arose in North America demanding public awareness of gender-based violence and advancing the politicized concept of trauma that links women's experiences of psychological distress with patriarchal oppression and misogyny (Appignanesi, 2008; Murphy, 2007). There is no doubt feminist political activism has contributed enormously to the establishment of the the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), also known as the international bill of rights for women, in 1981 (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2020). Since then, the concept of trauma-informed care or practice has become increasingly commonplace in legal, social service, and mental health care settings (Goodman, 2015). However, tracing the history of this feminist consciousness-raising efforts around the concept of trauma, Lisa Appignanesi (2008) noted that such advocacy inadvertently essentialized fear and vulnerability as fundamental to femininity, thus reinforcing women's self-image as powerless. As capitalist and neoliberal social order of the west sustains itself by assigning individual responsibility and solution to social and political matters, the problem of gender-based violence led to the rise of an entire industry of therapists, psychotherapists, counsellors, and social workers to diagnose and root out memories of events that are categorized as trauma, thus

homes with no options other than returning to decade-long housing waitlists? What justifies cutting off people's access to resources for basic human needs?

Trauma is also said to be a subjective experience. Not everyone who has experienced a life-threatening event will experience the nightmares and flashbacks and intrusive thoughts that are understood within the category 'trauma.' Not everyone who has accumulated experiences of oppression will identify their embodied, psychic, and spiritual sufferings under the category 'trauma.' What if the person does not identify as 'having trauma' and does not cooperate in the service plans, in the program goals, in the therapy sessions, in the medication regimen, but still, inevitably, has human needs? Do we then insist, at least to ourselves, and therefore continue to impose upon this person a 'traumatized' identity, in order to apprehend them as worthy of care? Or would we apprehend them as unworthy of care if we somehow come to the conclusion that they don't 'have trauma' and are simply morally deficient, as evident in their

depoliticizing gender-based violence. I will continue on this point in the next section.

43. Broadly defined, trauma-informed care refers to an approach of human service delivery that incorporates an understanding of the complex and ongoing effects of violent or harmful events in individuals' lives (Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre [MTIEC], 2013). Particularly, a core practice or protocol of trauma-informed care is the use of "universal screening" or "universal precaution," which suggests "that we relate to everyone based on an assumption that they have had traumatic experiences" (MTIEC, 2013, p. 113). It is also emphasized that "how a person responds to these circumstances is unique to that individual's social history, genetic inheritance and protective factors that may be in the person's life at the time" (MTIEC, 2013, p. 6), and that actions that may seem harmful to others and the self ought to be understood as "coping mechanism developed to manage intense emotional pain" (MTIEC, 2013, p. 75) and to ensure survival. Such practices of care also require the recognition that survivors of violence often re-experience violence in healthcare, psychiatric, mental health, child welfare, legal, and social services.

unwillingness to fall in line with the common good and the general will, unwilling to fulfill their duties as a member of society, unwilling to ‘do human’? What if we understand people as both experiencing the effects of violence and unwilling to conform to social expectations? What then informs how we judge whether the person is worth our care? How do we know one way or another? How do we judge? Who are we to judge?

There is a long history behind this judgment between conceptualization of trauma and worthiness of care.<sup>44</sup> From workers building the railroads, to soldiers in the wars, to women defying normative femininity and disrupting the boundaries of Victorian sexuality, to people receiving Ontario Disability Support Benefits, rent-geared-to-income housing, free meals at the drop-ins, a bed at the shelter—the gaze of judgment persists with the manifest destiny of the ruling class to identify and right wrongs, to discern whether someone is genuinely sick or malingering, tragically victimized or morally corrupt, deserving of care or banishment.

44. According to Foucault (2006), hysteria and trauma are not only examples of the ever-expanding nosological classification system, but are central in “a whole series of techniques of supervision... to insure against accidents and illnesses in order to extract maximum profit from bodies” (p. 313). The conceptualization of hysteria as a neurological disease caused by injurious events is proliferated by the work of Jean-Martin Charcot in the 19th century (Ley, 2000). In an industrializing society, the diagnostic criteria of hysteria are useful for verifying whether a worker is genuinely suffering from a traumatic workplace accident and in need of medical care, or malingering and deserving of punishment (Foucault, 2006). Through a comprehensive review of trauma theories, Ruth Leys (2000) has found that from the Vietnam War era model of inflammatory response to shock, to the recent neuroscientific theory of a literal wound etched on the brain, bio-psychiatry has been persistently attempting to adjudicate the reasons for a person’s non-participation in expected social and moral roles, even though “the theory of the literal nature of traumatic memory continues to gain widespread adherence, even as it remains inadequately formulated and weakly supported by the scientific evidence” (p. 265).

However, as discussed previously Ahmed's theorization that some bodies can be more detached from the requirements of the system according to their social rank, I am reminded that not everyone needs to prove themselves traumatized in the same way to get the help they need. When a person occupies a higher position in the class-race-gender hierarchy, they can access resources for their well-being without having to prove themselves worthy. The lower the person is on the social hierarchy, the less resources they have access to, the more they will need to cooperate and align with particular identifiers that would justify their misalignment with expected social roles and allow them access to resources for their continual survival. Trauma, in this sense, is therefore *not* a universal assessment, nor does it result in universal access to care.

### **Prove yourself worthy to join the party**

"Doesn't it feel good,"  
You asked,

“To just go to work, and then lay your  
head down on your pillow at night  
knowing you helped people?”

We sat around your pet rabbit in its  
cage on the table in our office  
You told us your plan to go to school  
for social work and become like us.

Part of me hopes tomorrow will be a  
good day for you too.

Part of me hopes you actually believe  
that I help people, that I help you.

Part of me questions which part of you  
believes that I ever helped you.

Part of me allows me to let go into the  
imagination of you sitting across the  
table from another person with another  
pet rabbit talking about their plan to go  
to school, you nodding and smiling and  
believing

For a moment.

“Get me a glass of water,”

Your voice, hardened and cold,  
seeping through the receiver.

“Can you try using your wheelchair?”

Don't get pushed around.  
She'll expect me to do  
this everyday, delivering  
water to her apartment.  
Whenever  
she wants.  
I can't do this everyday.

“Jesus man. The hospital sent me  
home. I'm stuck in my bed. I can't get  
to the sink.”

My manager is going to think I have  
no boundaries.

I'm not doing this.

“Counselling staff don't provide  
personal care. The home visiting nurse  
will be arriving soon.”

My voice, hardened and cold, calm as  
a threat.

“If I die of thirst it's your fault.”

- - - - -

Doesn't it feel good

to lay your head down on your pillow at  
night knowing you helped people?

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- - - - -----

You don't realize how much of an  
obstacle course every cross walk in  
the city is, riddled with streetcar tracks,  
until you have to push a wheelchair  
with a person across it.

"The curb cut's on that side,"

You say, nonchalantly.

"Oh my gosh, sorry, let me turn  
around---"

"That's ok,"

You shrug.

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You realize scars can build their own  
skin over time, an exoskeleton, layer  
upon layer upon layer

As if walling up

As if a declaration of me against the  
world

Prove yourself worthy to join the  
party.<sup>45</sup>

45. A party in a tabletop role-playing game, such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, is a group of characters adventuring together through various challenges; the characters usually complement each other in skills and interests in order to collectively problem-solve and achieve shared goals (Wizards of the Coasts, 2022).

"I swallowed a paperclip,"

Your voice, soft and shaken, across  
the line.

"Open or closed?"

Routine, bottom line, routine.

"Open."

"Do you want to call EMS yourself,"

Routine, bottom line,  
boundaries, remember what we  
decided in the team meeting



the service goal of  
independence-----

Jesus man. Why does anyone need to  
do this alone?

“Or I can call with you. Or I will need to  
call for you.”

“You can call for me.”

“Ok. The ambulance should be coming  
in a few minutes.”

“Can your student come with me?”

Routine,  
boundaries, the service goal of  
independence-----

“Yes she says she’s free. But she can’t  
stay the whole time, she’s off at 5.”

“I know. Thanks.”

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I didn’t know until your mother came  
one day and pinned the  
announcement of your memorial  
service on our bulletin board, after we  
evicted you.

In the picture you were much younger  
and smiling, someone's arm around  
you, perhaps believing  
Tomorrow will be a good day too

In my mind I picture the rabbit in the  
cage on the table in our office  
In my mind I hope you know this  
The door to the cage is open now

"You need to ask the lawyer what her  
charges were,"  
The housing manager implored.

Don't get pushed around into  
proving  
your loyalty.

"We have no permission from the  
applicant to do that. That's not the  
consent she signed."

I know how to wall  
up when you try to confuse me about  
who's against whom.

"Remember 1701, we had to gut the  
apartment, it cost us thousands. She  
was a liability. Your job is to figure out  
exactly who is moving in so we can  
prevent this.

If I could  
I would dial your number  
into the receiver, across the line  
a thousand times over  
I would tell you-----

[illegible]

One day, the cage might be open for me too

Every day, I'm still proving myself worthy to join the party.

## Ghosts in the Bones: How Care Becomes Violent

Over the past decade I spent a lot of time working in people's living spaces, in shelters, drop-ins, subsidized housing programs for people who use substances and with psychiatric diagnoses. Through this work of unpacking the conceptualizations of trauma, and of remembering people who were often deemed at risk, I have also come to realize that these temporary, material provisions were also the conditions that put people *at risk* and *on edge*. Some people are always already positioned on the verge between deserving and disposable, and therefore constantly at risk of losing everything, including their lives. Breaking a house rule, saying the wrong thing to a worker, saying something in the wrong way that can be interpreted as threatening, can tip them over the edge into the undeserving category, in which their human needs are no longer recognized and as such their *humanness* is perhaps also no longer recognized, in the moment that they are judged as undeserving.

If the provisions of care are based on conceptualizations of trauma, and the conditions through which care is distributed can become dehumanizing, then I suggest that *forms of care that are mediated by the concepts of trauma can potentially be violent*.<sup>46</sup> Or it might be understood this way: trauma as a mechanism of systemic, social, moral judgment can turn care practices into acts of violence.

This idea can feel extremely ironic, confounding, and almost nonsensical when we happen upon it. How can a concept that was developed to address people's experiences of violence with the aim of healing from such experiences enact or turn into violence? It is again like seeing a ghost, a haunting. I think: this is not happening in our world. I think: this is not what I wake up every morning to do, I did not spend years in school and hours of unpaid labour in internships then hours of underpaid labour in social services in order to do harm to people. I feel that something is not right. We should know better by now. But we contribute to the violence of everyday with our labour. But I contribute to the violence of everyday

46. Mediation, as explained by Gordon (2008), "describes the process that links an institution and an individual, a social structure and a subject, and history and biography. In haunting, organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations" (p. 19).

with my labour. *Something must be done in the labour of the present.*<sup>47</sup>

What is *trauma-informed* care? What is the thing that informs the ways we care, whether we should care? How did it come into being, or more precisely, how does it come into being through our labour of care? What does it do when it is evoked, when we speak its name? We have been warned that trauma-informed care has come to imply universal good. We have been warned that we would be sorely amiss, and in fact doing a disservice particularly to people who have experienced a multitude of social injustices, to assume that all practices or actions or labour bearing the label of trauma-informed will result in benefits for the people we claim to support.<sup>48</sup>

Trauma is commonly understood as an ahistorical, natural category that describes certain overwhelming or life-threatening events, and by association, people who have been impacted by such events. If we take the critical stance that all concepts, all understandings of all things, all stories about who we are and what we do, are

47. If we follow Gordon's (2008) theorization that a haunting is the mediation that links the social structure and forces to the everyday felt experiences, then we may also understand major social structure and forces as "the paradigmatic and value-laden operations of the capitalist market. This is a market whose exchange relations continue to transform the living into the dead, a system of social relations that fundamentally objectifies and dominates in a putatively free society... the ghost is not just the return of the past or the dead. The ghostly matter is that always 'waiting for you,' and its motivations, desires, and interventions are remarkable only for being current" (p. 169).

48. Rachael Goodman (2015) identifies that, over the past two decades, there is a growing tendency amongst service providers to uncritically equate trauma-informed practice with social justice, and therefore urges that "we critically examine the practices that are being operationalized as trauma-informed and question how and in what ways they might actually perpetuate injustice" (p. 56).

discursively shaped and produced through social, historical, political, and cultural contexts and relations of power, then an understanding of trauma as a natural, free-standing category effectively renders invisible its role within relations of power, connected with the social structures and forces that both shape it and operate through it. I therefore resonate with Maurice Stevens' delineation of the concept of trauma.<sup>49</sup> This is not to negate people's experiences of particular events as overwhelming or life-threatening to them. This is to say that overwhelming events are framed as trauma through particular discourses or stories, which in turn produce or reinforce particular subjecthood and relations of power for all involved.

What subjecthood does trauma produce?

*What does trauma tell you about you?*

49. Speaking of critical trauma studies, Maurice Stevens (2016) describes trauma "as a cultural object whose function produces particular types of subjects" (p. 20), entailing "sets of practices that provide explanatory narratives, organize interpersonal and material relations, and establish meaningful network of understanding relatedness, temporality, and embodiment vis-à-vis 'overwhelming events'" (p. 26). Unpacking the conceptualization of trauma in any given context thus aims to reveal "the processes by which things that happen are denoted as trauma" (Wertheimer & Casper, 2016, p. 3).

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Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that Lisa Appignanesi, in her historical study of feminized psychiatric diagnoses, described the essentially powerless self-image of femininity as an inadvertent result of feminist advocacy for the recognition of gender-based violence and trauma in the 1970s and 80s. Certainly, as we have also learned from Margrit Schildrick, Silvia Federici, Dian Million, Elene Lam, and other feminist scholars about their theorizations of gendered subjecthood, the essentialization of femininity as passive, helpless, empty, child-like, and irrational has a much longer history than the 1970s. In fact, the very reason that a resistant, political movement aiming toward justice and empowerment for the feminized others could be so readily turned against itself is because the social imaginary was already steeped in a culture of devaluation and denigration of femininity.

Trauma and hysteria forged a close kinship first through Sigmund Freud's theorizations. However, long before Freud began investigating psychic trauma as a cause of hysteria, ancient Egyptians and Greeks attributed a great deal of illnesses that they could not explain otherwise to the bleeding, leaking, wandering uterus.<sup>50</sup> This medical conceptualization of hysteria that configures a causal relationship between illnesses and the

50. The earliest conceptualizations of psychic trauma are found in Freud's theorization of hysteria (Leys, 2000). In the 1890s, Freud suggested that experiences of sexual violation or assault was at the core of the "hysterical shattering of the personality consequent on a situation of extreme terror or fright" (Leys, 2000, p. 4). The historical conceptualization of hysteria reaches back to the time of ancient Egyptians and Greeks, premised on

uterus echoes the discursive constructions of the female body as inherently empty and lacking boundaries and control. It sets the stage on which the feminine is always already understood and treated as inherently disordered.

For his study of hysteria, Freud drew on the work of fellow neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot.<sup>51</sup> Charcot is infamous for the exploitation of women who were patients at the Salpêtrière hospital for his theatrical display of hysterical trance and the hypnotic cure in the 1860s. The theatrical displays were staged to confirm Charcot's own theories about hysteria and the disordered feminine physiology, no doubt to advance his own standing and career in the burgeoning biopsychiatry in competition with the medical profession. The patient who embodied a disordered femininity was positioned as utterly helpless in her own derangement and confusion, and therefore in need of control and rescue by the all-knowing masculine expertise, who could wake and cure the patient from her own primitive, preconscious state of unreason and insanity. Over time, hysteria remains specifically a signifier for a kind of undesirable femininity through this nosological history. From the still-common use of the word 'hysterical' in present day, we can see that Charcot's orchestrated public displays of

the belief that uncontrollable movements of the uterus known as the "wandering womb" (Appignanesi, 2008, p. 162), or "the pressures of unexpelled menstrual fluid flooding the brain" (Shildrick, 1997, p. 42), were the cause of a diverse range of ailments seen in women, ranging from emotional distress, erratic behaviours, to physical pain with no biological sources.

51. With the advancement of industrialization, technologies, and the medical professions, the intertwining theories of hysteria and trauma emerged in the 19th century through biological psychiatry, an approach that drew on neurosciences to explain and treat psychological conditions (Appignanesi, 2008). French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot's public theatrical displays of the hysterical trance and hypnotic cure at the Salpêtrière hospital in the 1860s played a major role in furthering theories on hysteria (Appignanesi, 2008). These theatrical displays were performed by women patients under hypnosis to demonstrate phases of hysterical trance, including convulsions, erotic gestures, chaotic and intense affect such as weeping and raging, and the retelling of sexual violence (Appignanesi, 2008). Aside from hypnosis and confinement, physicians routinely prescribed marriage as remedies for hysteria

hysteria have cemented the figure of the irrational, emotionally unstable women in the social imaginary of the euro-american world. The purpose of this figure is not only for the regulation of a particular group. This figure *appears only to be removed from the scene*, to make space for the feminine social norms that she ought to embody, and more importantly, to emphasize the centrality of her binary opposite, the masculine rescuer who brings order to eliminate chaos, who exorcizes the forces that threaten to undo the norms that uphold social orders, the norms that keep feminine sexuality, emotionality, and productivity in check.

Exorcism is perhaps not an exaggeration or analogy. The setting of the theatre, the performance of the trances, the enactment of intense emotions no doubt made the theatrical display a strongly affective, almost supernatural experience for all present. At the centre of the stage, bound to a chair, the hysterical woman is reminiscent of the witch. Her erratic, inhuman expressions and gestures evoke repulsion, fear, and curiosity. The masculine doctor performs hypnotic control and heroic arrest of these pathologized and demonized expressions. As if by magic, the hysterical woman awakes her distressing, dissociated state. I imagine her making eye contact, perhaps looking embarrassed or

(Appignanesi, 2008), likely grounded in first century medical texts that attribute uterus displacement to a lack of sexual intercourse with men, and the underlying cultural belief that women required masculine control to make them whole and stable (Shildrick, 1997).

grateful. The viewing public is relieved, amazed, assured that the ailment plaguing the hysterical woman will not threaten humanity with the doctor's cure proven effective. Moreover, the hysterical woman will now be placed under the watch and care (as discipline) of another man via the prescription of marriage. The public would now be safe, as the (white) public would be safe from Asian sex workers who were first confined at the Chinese Rescue Home and then married off to Chinese Christian men, as they would be safe from Indigenous children who were taken to residential schools and sent to white foster families.

Isolation, exorcism, conversion. By now we are probably not surprised that this played out over and over again throughout history. The stories of daughters, sisters, mothers, aunts, grandmothers, friends, cousins, neighbours. A rather predictable, formulaic strategy of colonial domination and white supremacy. So why are we so shocked when we are haunted in the present, when we are confronted with our own complicity in the tactics of isolation, exorcism, and conversion, in our very acts of helping?

I think we are shocked because when we are distracted by hysteria, we lose sight of violence. If the earliest conceptualizations of

trauma were found in Freud's theorizations of hysteria, then how did the concept of trauma figure into the theatrical display of hysteria, aside from the retelling of sexual violence? Did the viewing public understand these narratives as merely symptoms of pathology, as the hysterical women's excess sexuality, as a threat to social morality? I think when we are persuaded to focus on individual pathology, when we become mesmerized by the presentations of so-called symptoms and the appearance of all-knowingness and healing power of the mind doctor, when such mesmerization shapes our own desire to gain approximation to the centre of power as the owner of knowledge, we lose sight of social horror and violence, as Freud and other mind doctors did.

While Freud initially theorized that hysteria was a result of having experienced sexual violence, assault, or trauma, women's narratives of violence did not serve his theoretical system of the psyche, and as such his theory of trauma took a turn that reinforced stereotypes of women's excess sexuality and lack of truthfulness by attributing their distress to erotic fantasies and processes of memory.<sup>52</sup> Freud was not the first to dismiss the impacts of sexual violence in the medical field. Despite eliciting and analyzing women's accounts of their experiences of sexual encounters and

52. Tracing Freud's theorization of hysteria, Sara Murphy (2007) explains that in the late 1890s Freud shifted away from his belief in the role of sexual exploitation in trauma, and instead reoriented his work to the effects of repressed erotic wishes, due to his focus on developing a theory of psychodynamics, the intra-relations between parts of the mind. He

violence, and even putting such narratives on public display, the cause of hysteria, of debilitating distress and suffering of the body and mind, was always assigned to the presumed dysfunction of the feminized reproductive and nervous systems, the purportedly always already deficient body and mind of woman that was susceptible to degeneration.<sup>53</sup> As we recall from Ahmed's discussion of the logic of use and disuse in social reproduction, which also greatly overlaps with the logic of eugenics, bodies that are expected to be useful cannot be left vacant and useless; what is left vacant with disuse is assumed to degenerate and be a drain to resources or a threat to society through the supposed spread of degeneration.<sup>54</sup> Particularly, what is already susceptible to degeneration must be put to use through discipline, to ensure the extraction and maximization of its use value for the common good, to ensure the reproduction of the norms that sustain heteropatriarchal and capitalist social rules. A womb cannot be left empty, left to wander. Minds cannot be left vacant with irrational wishes, deviant fantasies, and undesirable emotions distracting the body from fulfilling its social duties according to patriarchal and capitalist rules. Suffering of the feminized body and mind only came to matter when it threatened to undo the boundaries of dominant norms.

therefore effectively relegated stories of childhood sexual abuse to the realm of fantasies.

53. Reviewing medical documentation of the diagnosis of hysteria, Appignanesi (2008) found that physicians such as Philippe Pinel and Charcot commonly considered sexual violence merely as environmental factors; it was the degeneration of the female reproductive and nervous systems that persistently figured as the central cause of hysteria.

54. We return here to Ahmed's (2019) theorization on the moral norms of use and disuse in ensuring a certain kind of social reproduction: "Disuse becomes degeneracy *when something that is assumed to be for is not being used for what it is for...* you must follow the right path by keeping the arm in use, by strengthening the arm. The unused arm becomes a symbol of waste but also of death: the laborers who do not make use of their arms, who do not lend their hands to the master, cannot be supported without compromising the health of the social body" (p. 98, emphasis in original). In essays written by social theorists to advocate for the poor law, vacant mind is likened to vice, poison, or weed, with the potential of spreading. Ahmed points out that in the late 19th century, those who called for the education of American women deployed not only

Fixing the spotlight on the excess feminine sexuality of the individual as the source of pathology rather than the sexual violence the individual experienced made clear that the correct path to be taken was to redirect the hysterical woman back to the institutions of marriage and family, so that she could contribute to the reproduction of the useful labouring class as her body is *supposed* to be used for the common good.

One might wonder: did men ever approach Freud or Charcot or any doctor about unexplained physical or psychological experiences of suffering, and if so what was the diagnosis? It seemed that Freud did include the study of a man in his theorization of hysteria, but only to be constructed in ways that reinforced the discourse of degenerative female neurological and reproductive systems.<sup>55</sup> As such, the person who exhibits the impact of overwhelming or violent events is feminized regardless of sex or gender through the cementation of hysteria's association with dysfunctional female physiology. However, the experiences of men who returned from the world wars seemed to defy, and therefore threatened to destabilize, the established logic of the theorization of hysteria *as well as* its underlying discursive hierarchical gender binary. The naming of men's experiences of suffering from the wars

the language of use but also of eugenics. They "argued that middle-class and white women should make use of their faculties (that these women should not be allowed to dwindle like unused arms) so they could improve the race through making better reproductive choices. The call to make use of use was also about the dangers of uselessness spreading" (p. 99).

55. While Freud's early theorization of hysteria included the study of a man who experienced overwhelming events of violence, he had attributed the symptoms of hysteria to the male reproductive organs that were understood as analogous to those of the female body, which reinforced the physiology of hysteria already established at the time (Bergo, 2007).

as 'combat hysteria' reflected their similarity to the so-called symptoms that were located in the women studied by the mind doctors.<sup>56</sup> As we recall from Shildrick's study of medical texts and illustrations, the feminized body is positioned as an inferior version of the masculine. How could men possibly 'have' hysteria if their physiology is believed to be ontologically different from, and superior to, that of women? Freud's solution was to attribute the experiences of suffering to *a logic of lack*: the ego self-protection wasn't strong enough and was therefore breached by the stimulus; the person was unable to master the amount of stimulus in the environment. Again, Shildrick reminds us that this conceptualization of trauma and hysteria is reminiscent of the passive, permeable female body in the classical discourse of medicine. The man suffering from combat hysteria is one who does not measure up to the ideal of masculinity, which positions him on the wrong side of the hierarchical binary of gender.

It was therefore not surprising that hysteria and trauma as medical entities were not considered matters of importance for nation states founded upon neoliberal and capitalist social orders. On the one hand, it can be understood that hysteria and trauma did not come to matter because they were associated with femininity and therefore devalued.

56. Following the first World War it became clear that men who experienced "combat hysteria" or "shell shock" (Leys, 2000, p. 21, 22) suffered not from organic, neural degenerative conditions but from psychic injuries. Freud then attempted to adapt his theorization of hysteria by reframing trauma "in quasi-military terms as a widespread rupture or breach in the ego's protective shield" (Leys, 2000, p. 23), a "problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in" (Freud, 1920, p. 30, cited in Leys, 2000, p.3). Men presenting with combat hysteria were treated with indifference or accused of malingering, and medical interest in the conceptualization of trauma declined thereafter, likely responses shaped by nation states' political and military priority of maintaining a strong, masculine national image (Herman, 1997; Leys, 2000).



Indeed, it was not until public protest against the Vietnam War and pressure for better professionalized care that the psychiatric diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder was recognized in the 1980s, and women's experiences of sexual violence was by association legitimized as trauma in the medical discourse.<sup>57</sup> Thus, it could be argued that the emotional distress and experiences of sexual violence of women and feminized people had been deemed normative and unremarkable, such that the concept of trauma gained medical and public attention largely through men's narratives of suffering, which were regarded as unusual plight given their ontological stability and coherence. On the other hand, as we recall from Federici's study on capitalist accumulation, and Ahmed's theorization on use, the core and ultimate aim of a neoliberal, imperialist, and capitalist system is to extract and increase the use value of bodies by producing and shaping the desire to willingly take on individual responsibilities to fulfill this aim. Even hysterical, traumatized, and sick bodies may be of use. The state's interest is therefore not in the understanding of the psychic or physiological theorization of hysteria in order to support healing, or in examining the conditions of violence from which experiences so-called trauma arise in order to prevent the dis-ease of the body, but in the various ways

57. In the 1980s, activism supporting Vietnam War veterans led to the legitimization of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a psychiatric diagnosis by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM); with the feminist advocacy for the recognition of gender-based violence at the time, women's experiences of sexual violence were also recognized and folded into medical, legitimized conceptualization of trauma (Herman, 1997; Leys, 2000).

through which individuals, especially those in the labouring class, can be brought back to the path of usefulness and fulfillment of their social duties, whether they experience healing from their suffering or not.

Under neoliberal and capitalist rules, which work in tandem with the historical and discursive construction of the hysterical woman as suffering from deviant, irrational, and erotic fantasies, the establishment of a psychiatric diagnosis that can garner the rights to services and support for women and feminized people is necessarily followed by suspicion of whether the person is worthy of the diagnosis and the resulting rights in the first place.<sup>58</sup> The clinical diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder is followed by the emergence of the psychological entity of false memory syndrome. While the two entities seem to work against one another, both are labels that can be applied to women and feminized people at the same time. Following feminist disability scholars, femaleness in and of itself is always already constructed as a flawed, lacking, disabled way of being physically and mentally in the binary opposite of idealized maleness. Debilitating suffering of the body and mind due to violence, and the label of psychiatric diagnosis, are also experiences of disability. If a woman or feminized person conforms to the

58. The concept of false memory syndrome arose in the 1990s and was understood as a backlash against feminist advocacy in the previous decades for the recognition of gender-based violence and the concept of trauma (Appignanesi, 2008). While this concept is not recognized as a psychiatric illness in the DSM, it is generally accepted as a psychological condition, and it has led to the establishment of several organizations in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1990s, dedicated to disproving the narratives of survivors, mostly women, ostensibly to ensure justice for those wrongfully accused of abuse and sexual violence (Appignanesi, 2008). This promoted a suspicion of women's recollection of experiences of violence, reinforced by a gendered discourse that presumed women's affectability and faulty mental capacity (Appignanesi, 2008; Shildrick, 1997).

understanding of her suffering as individual symptoms of irrationality and emotionality, and therefore conforms also to normative femininity by recognizing that she is in excess of what is accepted as normal, she is pathologized by the diagnosis of PTSD. If she takes on the diagnosis of PTSD, she is suspected of false memory or lying as she is presumed to be untrustworthy and irrational by nature of her femalehood, and she is again pathologized. These again are the double-binds of femininity particularly in the contexts of disability and the psycho-medical system.<sup>59</sup> As Shildrick writes, the dispensing of rights can appear as protection and help for those marked by difference, but in actuality functions to regulate and discipline those marked by difference, to bring them within the fold of the requirements of normativity by reinscribing their failures to meet these requirements and legitimizing further regulation and discipline.<sup>60</sup> The accusation of false memory syndrome logically premises on the belief that there is such a thing as true memory, and that violence is primarily a memory. This is a legacy of hysteria and its construction of trauma that centred memory processes and drives, parts of Freud's key theories.<sup>61</sup> The dominance of Freud's psychodynamic theory shaped the approaches and practices of not only proponents of false memory syndrome, but also counsellors who wished to help

59. Feminist disability scholars argue that femininity, within the gender binary and in opposition to the masculine able-bodied ideal, is constructed as a disabled way of being, a physical or mental deficiency, an ontological unruliness (Garland-Thomson, 2005; Wendell, 1996). Susan Bordo (1993) discusses the concept of the double-bind of femininity in relations to psychiatric diagnoses that have been historically disproportionately applied to women. Bordo explains that the description of these diagnoses, such as hysteria, anorexia nervosa, and agoraphobia, are exaggerated characterizations of normative femininity. This means that women and feminized others are always already susceptible to being constructed as abnormal or pathologized for embodying characterizations of femininity to varying degrees; however, if they act in opposition or defiant of these characterizations, they are constructed also as abnormal for defying normative femininity. In this sense, normative femininity can be understood as a system through which violence operates. As Bordo writes, "In hysteria, agoraphobia, and anorexia, then, the woman's body may be viewed as a surface on which conventional constructions of femininity are exposed starkly to view, through their inscription in extreme or hyperliteral form. They are written, of

survivors of violence. I have been troubled by the ways this legacy shows up in my workplaces over the years. Even though in recent years trauma-informed literature has repeatedly warned that eliciting stories about memories of violence can result in the person re-experiencing the violence in their bodies and minds, and that we don't need to know the details of people's experiences of violence in order to offer support. Even though my colleague and I teach counselling and art therapy students from this literature, we continue to encounter an unquestioned and tenacious belief in the *healing power of talking about what happened* in our conversations with students. 'But the participants wouldn't share anything,' a student came to me, troubled. Another common question from students: 'what art directives can get people to talk about their trauma?' And a common belief about art therapy that I hear from students often: 'Art-making can get people to feel comfortable to talk about their trauma.'

It seems that the healing power of talking about what happened is lodged in our social imaginary. What desires keep it there, as a reward on the horizon for our hard work? This question takes me back to the scene of the theatrical display of hysteria. The magical scene where the mind doctor draws the erotic narratives from the patient. As the audience,

course, in languages of horrible suffering. It is as though these bodies are speaking to us of the pathology and violence that lurks just around the corner, waiting at the horizon of 'normal' femininity" (p. 175).

60. Writing on the law and disability rights, Shildrick (2005) draws on Wendy Brown's work and theorizes that "rights are never deployed 'freely,' but always within a discursive, hence normative context. It is not the wider society that is constrained to change but always the individual marked by difference... she may be accorded 'special' rights that decisively *denote her failure* to achieve the privileged standards, and that position her difference as an inadequacy. Each time the law comes to the assistance of a disabled person with relief or protection, she is reinterpellated precisely within that devalued identity and thus marked for further regulation" (p. 36-37, emphasis in original).

61. Freud has consistently emphasized in his theory of trauma that it is not the event itself that is experienced by the person as traumatic, but it is the memory of such events, rendered through internal psychical processes and drives, that forms traumatic symptoms (Bergo, 2007; Leys, 2000). The legacy of Freud's theory of memory seem to remain in therapeutic approaches to support people who

along with the patient, we too are mesmerized. We want to be that doctor, the doctor who holds the key to people's private lives. We want that kind of privileged knowledge. We want that privilege. The desire to know the exotic other, to accumulate knowledge about the conquered, to ensure our dominating position on the social hierarchy, is a *colonial desire*. This, too, is lodged in our social imaginary. What do we lose sight of when we fix our gaze on trauma-as-memory?

As Stevens explains, the conceptualization of trauma as a memory of an event, or even of an accumulation of events, by definition positions these overwhelming, violent, or life-threatening events in the past.<sup>62</sup> This conceptualization of trauma-in-the-past in turn obscures the ongoing violence in social life, and the ways through which such violence is entangled with ongoing memory-making in tandem with people's ongoing ways of being and becoming in relationship with others. The conceptualization of trauma as a singular, devastating, life-altering event is premised on the discourse of the self, or the pre-trauma subject, as a coherent whole with an interiority of rational thought and emotional processes that is separate from its surrounding contexts. It is an understanding of the self that would remain whole, pure, and happy had it not been altered by the devastating event that is called

have experienced events labeled as trauma, whereby there seem to be unquestioned idealization of the effort to recuperate the memory or expression of violent or overwhelming events (Appignanesi, 2008), events that have "occurred in a place and at a time that are, by definition, distance from here, from now" (Stevens, 2016, p. 33).

62. Stevens (2016) argues that ongoing experiences of living also shape memory, which in turn shape people's ways of being and community relations. Furthermore, the relegation of trauma to memory of the past presumes a linear sequence of events through time as well as a "whole, pure, and mature" (p. 35) subject who has existed pre-trauma. In popular and clinical narratives, trauma is understood as "events unique in their ability to disrupt or confound both what we believe we know about our bodies (our own and those of others), and our ways of knowing about embodiment" (p. 30). Judith Herman (1997), whose book *Trauma and Recovery* is often cited as seminal in clinical trauma study, describes trauma as events that "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning... [and] involve threats to life or bodily integrity" (p. 33). Trauma theories such

trauma. It is an understanding that is foundational to and popularized by clinical models, developmental theories, and practice approaches relating to people who have experienced violence, in professionalized care settings and popular culture alike.

Following Shildrick, no model or discourse of trauma is sufficient to encapsulate and therefore regulate the disruptive excess inherent in all forms of disability, and in fact all forms of embodiment, ways of being, and ways of becoming.<sup>63</sup> The excess, the undefined, the ambiguous, the liminal will always haunt the boundaries of normativity, will never be fully captured or exorcized by the technologies that attempt to define disability, all the while demanding that something be done about the operations of power that maintain the boundaries themselves. The hauntings point to how the entanglement of mutually constituting experiences, memories, and shifting embodiments shaped by conditions of violence is in stark contrast with the linear sequence of events and human development that is presumed by the conceptualizations of trauma-in-the-past and the pre-trauma subject. However, following the logic of trauma-in-the-past, it makes sense that recuperating the memory of the moments of trauma is central – the existence of the pre-trauma subject is only recoverable by verifying

as that delineated by Herman exemplify attempts to make sense of events that disrupt an ideology of the self as coherent, rational, and host to a recognizable and controllable interiority (Stevens, 2016). Along the same line, therapeutic approaches to sexual assault are often grounded in theories from developmental psychology, which assumes a self-determining, non-abused feminine subject who follows a set of normative stages of growth toward mature sexuality, thereby positioning women and feminized people who have experienced violence as childlike and lacking in agency (Egan, 2016).

63. For Shildrick (2005), abnormality, whether it be “unusual forms of embodiment, mental instability, deviant sexual behaviour and criminality” (p. 34), is implanted in the social imaginary as a problematic, which judicial, medical, and psychiatric technologies strive to effectively manage. Disability therefore always remains suspect in this context and is marked for regulation according to the norm. However, drawing on Foucault, Shildrick also emphasizes that “the operation of power repeatedly generates refusals... it is a question of *the haunting undecidability that is never entirely settled or resolved by the technologies of power that shape the notion of disability*” (p. 35, emphasis mine). Law, therefore, “is

the injuries that have damaged it. Shildrick would once again remind us that the whole, self-contained, independent pre-trauma subject is a replica of the idealized white masculine liberal rational subject, whose idealization and domination require the infantilization and inferiorization of its binary opposite, the feminized subject.

never sufficient to arrest the disruptive excess inherent in all forms of disability” (p. 35).

If the feminized subject is always already interpellated as passive, childlike, emotionally unstable, irrational, and lacking in substance and boundary, and the mature, coherent, self-contained subject is valorized as the result of successful healing and recovery from the pathology that is called trauma, then the conceptualizations of trauma-in-the-past and trauma-as-pathology poses an impossible quest for the feminized subject who has experienced violence, as *one cannot recover what one is assumed to have never had*.

### **I realize this as I think of you now**

Hold

Like our grips on the grocery bags. Boxes of Halloween cupcakes, pasta sauce, tins of beans, a few carrots. Wilting leaves hanging over edges.

Substances to fill the stomach and not vitality  
or dignity

Which we nevertheless valiantly carried  
From the food bank through November gray  
slush, hauling up the steps of the streetcar  
Slipping sliding

Until your body found refuge in a seat  
I stood over you and thanked the stars that  
you didn't slip and fall  
We were going to make an appointment to  
finally take a look at the fracture in your leg  
that has been untreated  
For days and weeks and months

"There's no point, fractures heal you know.  
They won't see anything now."

Who knows  
If you fractured your leg and no doctor ever  
saw the evidential crack in the glow of the x-  
ray machine  
Did you still fracture your leg?

Is the pain held by your body ever  
acknowledged?

I stood one hand gripping the grocery bag,  
another gripping the pole over you  
Like a shield you don't need  
You said



"I can take your bag and put it on my lap."

Hold

Like the bandages around your fingers  
Like when you handed me a spoon you found  
in the community kitchen and asked me to  
spread Polysporin across your hand which  
was burnt while you made tea at home

"Can you do this or not-- I can't do this with  
one hand."

But I'm not a medical  
professional  
I can't be liable  
It is the tenant's responsibility to get  
their own medical  
supplies, support, supposedly---  
What if something  
happens am I to be  
  
blamed---

I reached for the spoon  
I held it in my hand spreading the Polysporin  
across yours like icing  
You smiled.  
Because you can't do this with one hand.

Because anyone  
can burn themselves making tea at home

can use another pair of hands

I think we aren't born with six hands because  
We are meant to be interdependent  
I realize this as I think of you now  
And if I tell you this now  
I imagine your side-eye saying

"It took you this long to get it?"

Like it took me this long to get  
That you can't remember with one mind  
That is fogged and held captive by the days  
and years and months  
Of the past and the now  
Of human cruelty  
Of structural violence  
Of state sanctioned indifference  
Of preventable losses too many for any one  
mind-body to hold  
Of anger and agony and rage  
Of pain and distress that does not dissolve  
with any social justice knowledge or analysis  
or action

Distress and rage  
that I failed to hold space for as I was in the  
grip  
Of the fear  
Of not being able to hold my own  
A trail of ghosts behind me screeching  
Imposter, imposter, imposter

Held captive also  
by another kind of violence  
Different and shapeshifting but also does not  
seem to dissolve  
with any social justice knowledge or analysis  
or action.

You asked me to knock  
Three times  
The day before, the hour before, when we're  
supposed to leave if I don't see you at my  
office door

But I'm not your personal assistant  
But I have other tenants to support  
But when I knock you get  
angry with me  
because I've woken you up  
And how are you going to learn to  
remember your own  
appointments---  
Aren't you planning to go back to school?  
--- If you're so used to me remembering  
them for you?

I realize this as I think of you now  
And it took me this long to question

How

Am I to expect people to know what it's like to  
care for themselves

by withholding care?

Hold

Like when you missed the group and asked  
how it went  
I said everyone got along.

“That’s what you expect from people? Just to  
get along?  
You don’t expect that people can get more out  
of the group?”

You held me accountable to my imagined  
moral superiority.

And you still saved me a seat on the streetcar  
when a classroom full of children piled on

“Come quick Pat!”

I never liked being called Pat but I never told  
you that because  
I imagined you extending into the space  
between us and shortened it as I sat beside  
you.

Extend

I’m having trouble ending this story of our  
encounters  
Because I ended it  
I refused to continue

Holding onto fear I could not extend

Instead I ran

Armed with justifications built from

Codes of Ethics and

Organizational Policies

Workers' Right for Safety

Vicarious Trauma

Need for Self-Care

I'm camouflaged in the Institutional Walls so

your rage can't hurt me

When I harmed you.

I picture in my mind the last time I saw you

You called

The surprise in your raised eyebrows when  
you saw that I actually showed up when you  
called

A shield you didn't need but nevertheless  
required by the Liability Policy

A shield you didn't need but nevertheless I  
hope it gave you some sense of comfort that  
someone showed up for you.

It could have been early afternoon, or later

I picture us walking into the sunset

Talking about horses

Because horses made the space between us  
less awkward

Our shadows extending behind us

I realize this as I think of you now  
My task is not to end this story of the  
moments you left behind  
but to extend them into  
the ways I move through this life

One of the greatest teachers in my life taught me how to move through this life by refusing the comfort offered by the idea of trauma-in-the-past. Accepting that the overwhelming, life-threatening events are in the past leads us to believe that the perpetrator is no longer here. There is no more harm here. The flashbacks, the nightmares, the hypervigilance, the gripping anxiety, the burning rage, are not rational responses to the present which is safe. *This is the liminal space* between trauma-in-the-past and healing-in-the-future. The danger is in the past, the present is safe, the future holds the recovery of the coherent, whole, and pure self always on the horizon. Our location in this liminal space marks our bodies and minds as pathological, disabled, sick, unruly, *out of order*. The comfort offered by the idea of trauma-in-the-past is comfort for the agents of the state in the construction of a safe present, in the belief that we as agents of the state contribute to the construction of this safe present through our care work. Trauma-in-the-

past offers no real comfort for feminized, colonized, racialized, and otherwise subjugated peoples who have experienced, and continue to experience, violence of the streets and violence of the institutions and the state. There is no real comfort for disabled, poor, and socially marginalized peoples whose state-sponsored helpers contribute to their experiences of violent conditions and unfolding precarity. One of the greatest teachers in my life taught me how to move through this life by refusing the idea of trauma-in-the-past and instead noticing the entanglements of our different ways of becoming in our shared social world of unfolding precarity, in our liminal positions within networks of domination, in our ongoing, sometimes congruent and sometimes contradicting, experiences and embodiments of violent conditions. Refusing the rhetoric of trauma-in-the-past may even allow us to see how it is deployed to continue sustaining the mechanisms of annihilation, within the project of nation-making, that are rooted in the founding violence of the Canadian state. Violent conditions are sustained, reinforced, and perpetuated by never acknowledging the violence at all, or, when acknowledgement is unavoidable, devising ways to deploy further regulation *through* the acknowledgement of guilt and shame.

Violence against and exploitation of Indigenous peoples through centuries of European colonialism has been a topic of concern on the world political stage that is the United Nations since early 1980s. Yet, recalling Stevenson's documentation of the Canadian State projecting an image of itself as benevolent and ethically responsible for the welfare of the Inuit community of the Arctic and Indigenous peoples across the land, it is astonishing that the Canadian state did not sign on to the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples until 2016.<sup>64</sup> The prolonged non-recognition of the rights to land, resources, and sovereignty of the people whose land, resources, cultures, lifeworlds, and sovereignty the state has stolen or devastated is to continually deny that such theft and violence ever happened. The state would not have to take responsibility and accountability for the violation of rights if those rights do not exist in the eye of the state in the first place. However, there comes a point when violence can no longer be denied, as it lives not only in the memory of the past but also the unjust social conditions of the present, inscribed on racialized bodies who persistently haunt the national image of peace and benevolence, demanding that something must be done.

It is now common knowledge that the last

64. While a working group was formed in 1982 to study the discrimination and human rights violation of Indigenous peoples around the world as part of a sub-commission in the UN Commission on Human Rights, it took a quarter of a century for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to be adopted in 2007 (UN, n. d.). The majority of the member states voted in favour of the declaration. However, as countries that were built upon and ongoingly benefiting from long histories and continuities of colonization and violence against Indigenous peoples, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada voted against the Declaration at the time of its adoption, citing concerns that the prioritization of rights and self-determination of Indigenous peoples would threaten state sovereignty and control over resources (Hanson, 2009). Even though the Canadian Human Rights Act came into effect in 1977, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was added to the Constitution Act in 1982 (Canadian Human Rights Commission, n. d.), which delineated "*race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability*" (Government of Canada, 2020, art. 15, emphasis mine) as prohibited grounds of harmful discrimination from which all



Canadian Indian Residential School closed in 1996, but it was not until 12 years later, in 2008, that an apology was offered to Indigenous peoples about the genocidal policies and strategies that were operationalized through the IRS.<sup>65</sup> When the acknowledgement of violence is unavoidable, the widely accepted conceptualization of trauma-in-the-past enables the non-recognition of violence's continuities in the present and the evasion of accountability and responsibility for enacting meaningful change. Former prime minister Stephen Harper's apology statement framing the IRS as a 'sad chapter' in Canadian history is such a deployment of trauma-in-the-past, through which the admission of guilt and shame of those who in the past who governed Canada during the so-called sad chapter served as a means of evasion from responsibility to remedy the damages it has caused. The fact that the state issued a public apology in 2008 but did not also sign on to the 2007 UNDRIP may be understood as evidence of this evasive maneuver.

The admission of shame does not only enable evasion of responsibility but can also shift both shame and responsibility to those who have been violated. Following Million's analysis, we can see how, through the dominant, widespread, psychomedical understanding of

citizens are protected against, it was not until 2016 that Canada agreed to fully support the UNDRIP, which requires state implementation of policy measures to recognize and protect the rights of Indigenous peoples (Government of Canada, 2021). However, it was not until December 2020 that the Canadian government introduced the legislation Bill C-15, an *Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which sets out the framework for the implementation of the declaration, and received Royal Assent in 2021, 14 years after UNDRIP was established (Government of Canada, 2021).

65. Issued in June 2008, former prime minister of the Canadian state Stephen Harper's statement of apology for the Indian Residential School system opened with these words: "The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history" (Government of Canada, 2010, para. 1). This is followed by his 2009 statement at the G20 Summit about the Canadian state's economic well-being, stating that "'We also have no history of colonialism" (Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, 2009, para. 1).

trauma-in-the-past and trauma-as-pathology, the admittance of profound violence against Indigenous peoples, to the extent of national shame, effectively produced a corresponding profoundly traumatized subject in dire need of help and healing at the moment of this admittance.<sup>66</sup> Trauma-as-pathology is fundamentally a psychological and neoliberal concept, which stresses individual dysfunctions and personal responsibilities in overcoming said dysfunctions for the purpose of becoming a productive liberal citizen. The admittance of shame also signals that the perpetrator is no longer violent, is now regretful, benevolent, and eager to help. Accepting the help, accepting the apology, and accepting that trauma is in the past and the present is safe are understood as signs of healing. Poverty, houselessness, poor living conditions, disproportionate rate of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, disproportionate rate of Indigenous peoples in the carceral system, substance use, suicide, chronic illness, mental distress, gender-based violence, are all framed through this rhetoric of trauma as individual problems and responsibilities of unhealed people rather than effects of state structural violence and indifference. Colonized and subjugated peoples are far from safe in the Canadian state but within the logic of trauma-in-the-past and trauma-as-pathology, lack of safety is an

66. Since the establishment of the UNDRIP, Million (2013) observes that shame is again evoked in the framing of colonial violence through a human rights discourse. Such framing in front of the international political stage has positioned Canada as perpetrator of abuse whose actions should be named and shamed; however, it simultaneously constructs the colonized subject as a trauma victim in need of healing. Healing in these political settings is defined through the dominant, psychomedical discourse of trauma as a psychological pathology that references feeling of shame as a result of violence, but effectively bypasses issues of sovereignty and self-determination at the root of this violence by focusing on “state-determined biopolitical programs for emotional and psychological self-care informed by trauma” (p. 6). As such, challenges faced by Indigenous communities such as poverty, substance use, gender-based violence, and social dissolution are medicalized and posed by the state as threats to its economic development. This positions healing as “the resolution of illness, a promised safety and revitalization from past colonial violence” (p. 8), thus implying that violence is no longer present and that the state is benevolent. Replicating racist ideology that justifies colonization in the first place, “[h]ealing

individual problem. And even if help in the form of biopolitical, psychological programs is accepted, they are designed to be time-limited and resource-inadequate, so the healing that is promised at the end of the programs are forever a dangling carrot in front of people positioned in the liminal space between trauma-in-the-past and healing-in-the-future.

*You are in this liminal space because you shouldn't feel unsafe, because your trauma is in the past, because the present is safe, because help is available. If you still feel unsafe, if you suffer from chronic mental distress, if you need to cope with drugs, if you try to kill yourself, if you can't get yourself together and keep down a job, then you're not healed. If you're not healed, then you're unruly, you're dysfunctional, you're not participating in society and fulfilling your moral duties as a productive citizen, and you can't 'do human.' So then, how can we let you govern your people and resources, if you can't even take care of yourself?*

Here, shame ricochets. Following Ahmed's theorization of emotion, in conjunction with Million's analysis of the state's deployment of shame, it can be understood that through the language of trauma the state is able to express shame in apologizing and repositioning itself as an ideal, while

from trauma begins to be narrated as a prerequisite to self-determination. If the Indigenous don't heal, they may not be able to self-govern" (p. 105). Thus, "any actual political power for Canadian Indigenous Peoples is *continuously deferred to a future self-healing*" (p. 12, emphasis added). At the same time, health programs developed under state mandate of reconciliation remain severely underfunded, therefore blocking efforts towards healing at the same time that it is perpetually posed as the ultimate resolution to trauma.

simultaneously framing Indigenous peoples as responsible for their affective management of shame and trauma from colonial violence.<sup>67</sup> Ahmed also points out that shame is specifically intertwined with the reproduction of sexual norms. We may recall from the work of Federici and Million that the sexualization of Indigenous and racialized women and the demonization of this racialized feminine sexuality are tactics to justify violence against women, which enables the devastation, control, and colonial conquest of communities. Shame was already operationalized to subjugate and control communities through colonial relations of violence. Over time, when such violence becomes more widely known and less acceptable largely due to social activism, the state unavoidably acknowledges this violence. However, the state's admittance of shame for its perpetration of *violence in the past* simultaneously reinscribes the colonized supposed failure in progressing toward a productive liberal subjecthood through the discourses of trauma, helping, and healing. The self-perception of failure in approximating an ideal perpetuates shameful feelings. Shame as an emotion thus mobilizes the discourse of trauma between colonizer and the colonized, with the tendency to stick to bodies, or to fix characteristics and feelings of shame to bodies that are always already marked as inadequate and therefore shameful

67. Ahmed (2004) defines emotions not as psychological states that reside within bodies, but as social and cultural practices that are shaped through relationships between bodies, which in turn produce and reinscribe relations of power and subjectivities that animate such relations. Regarding shame specifically, Ahmed writes that "*we feel shame because we have failed to approximate 'an ideal'*" (p. 106, emphasis in original), often a kind of moral ideal that is "bound up with the reproduction of social norms, in particular, with norms of sexual conduct" (p. 106). On the other hand, showing shame when it becomes unavoidable to acknowledge the perpetration of violence can be a way for a nation and its subjects to realign with the ideal, as a performance of shame that "makes possible a return to pride" (p. 109).

within a colonial and neoliberal social order.

I have taken much space to explain how I understand the foundational violence of the state. I do this not to retell or assume ownership of the knowledge or experiences of colonial violence and genocide in the Canadian state, as I have not been subjected to such violence and annihilation. I do, however, believe that writing about the founding violence of the state by drawing on Indigenous scholarship and narratives is crucial for understanding how the founding violence of the state reappears and seeps through to the present, particularly and ironically through the discourse of trauma, a discourse that emerged from and continued to be touted as a manifest desire to care for those who have experienced violence. By now I have established that the dominant, psychomedical discourse of trauma is grounded in individualism. Individualism can be understood as a mechanism that enables institutionalized forgetting, or even collective forgetting, that shapes the being and becoming of settler whiteness.<sup>68</sup> As Shotwell explains, whiteness is a way of being that believes other people are the problem. Faulting the person for their innate dysfunction or even hereditary inferiority due to race, gender and class effectively obscures, or disconnects the person's challenges from,

68. Alexis Shotwell (2016) theorizes that forgetting is central to colonial practice. Epistemologically, "what we do not know is actively shaped and carries politics... Ignorance is not just an absence of knowledge; it is a way to (not) know things. In our being, ontologically, we become who we are in part through what we know and what we are made (or made able) to forget... A central feature of white settler colonial subjectivity is forgetting; we live whiteness in part as active ignorance and forgetting" (p. 37). Forgetting is therefore socially organized and state-sanctioned, presented as "a kind of benign ignorance—people just haven't been taught the facts of the situation, and so they can't be held responsible for not understanding how race, poverty,

violent social conditions that make living impossible for some groups but not others. That which is made to continually disappear in the social imaginary is not only a violent historical moment in time but also the ways that the ruling class in the present is sustained by that violent historical moment across time and space. It becomes very difficult to hold someone responsible for their complicity in violence if they claim that they genuinely do not know or do not remember their involvement. *Canada has no history of colonialism. Or, I wasn't taught about residential schools when I was a kid. Or, in my (white middle-class) family I was taught that everyone is equal. Or, life wasn't easy for us either, we worked hard to get what we have.* It may feel like talking to a wall. It can feel infuriating, as the wall stands benignly unresponsive. Those demanding responsibility may even be accused of being unreasonable, irrational, emotionally unstable, or even violent. *What is the problem with people looking for problems that aren't there?* Following Cotton Seiler's recounting of the fiction of race based on evolutionist ideology since the 17th century, the thinking that other (Indigenous, Black, racialized, disabled, feminized) people are the problem can be understood as premised on the taken-for-granted belief that white people cannot inherently be the problem, because whiteness

indigeneity, and more, are present in their lives" (p. 38). Whiteness, as Shotwell writes, "is a problem of being shaped to think that other people are the problem" (p. 38).

has been naturalized as benign and a disposition to care, as well as innately deserving of care.<sup>69</sup> Calling in also the work of Shildrick, Ahmed, Chapman and Withers, Federici, and Lam, as described in the previous pages, to read alongside Seiler's theorization of white care, the conceptualization of sympathy, benevolence, and justice as evolutionary accomplishments of whiteness is interconnected also with gender, religion, class, disability, and sexuality.<sup>70</sup> White supremacy is therefore made possible not only through racism but is produced through complex, mutually reinforcing and constituting networks of patriarchal, religious, classist, ableist, and misogynistic ideologies, to uphold and fuel what Spivak theorizes as the ruling class' self-ascribed manifest destiny to right wrongs, and what Chapman and Withers describe as the imagined healing power of the moral superiority of whiteness.

Writing with, thinking with, theorizing with, and creating with the narratives surrounding the historical founding violence of the state can therefore be understood as a practice of unforgetting, a push-back against the enduring wall of institutionalized and socially organized forgetting. Particularly, writing about how forms of care operationalize racist and colonial violence can be understood as a specific focus

69. Perhaps parallel to Ahmed's (2019) theorization of use and disuse as a social organizing principle, Cotton Seiler (2020) traces how the "fictions of race" (p. 25) that propelled inquiry into the "causes of visible physical differences" (p. 21) and "the conception of the evolutionarily achieved moral and ethical superiority of whites" (p. 25) were circulated through literature, popular culture, politics, religion, and the sciences since the 17th century. Arising from but in opposition to Darwinian theory of evolution contingent on the ecological, and therefore unpredictable and random, at the turn of the century other evolutionists drew on Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's transmutation theory of species and put forth the argument that whiteness was a god-given capacity to acquire traits necessary for survival. Such capacity was exemplified in the will as manifestation of the mind "to activate its own morphological change" (p. 20). Particularly, sympathy, benevolence, and justice were identified as white evolutionary accomplishment, the fellow-feeling, the altruistic sentiments, which people categorized as other races were said to be unable to fully develop. Such accomplishments were claimed to be evident in white heteropatriarchal family units and continuation of family lines, and popularized in anthropological and medical literature on marriage and

of unforgetting that aims to disrupt the ways white care forecloses recognition and responsibility. My argument, informed by anti-racist, feminist, decolonial scholarship and narratives, is that *the dominant discourse of trauma operationalizes an ongoing, continuous circuit of socially organized erasure and forgetting for colonized, racialized, and feminized subjects*, following the violation and annihilation of personhood in the project of nation-making: first the denial of colonial and racist violence, historical and ongoing, by individualizing, depoliticizing, and pathologizing the effects of such annihilation; then the dispensing of resources that is contingent on the interpellation of the person within a devalued identity of inadequacy and dysfunction; then the imperative to perpetually chase after, through hard work, the healing and recovery of the whole, cohesive, pre-trauma ways of being that the person is believed to never have had as a racialized and feminized subject; which brings us back to the non-recognition of subjecthood in order to uphold the boundaries of normativity and the domination of white masculine neoliberalism.

Clearly, not all workers in the fields of professionalized care are white cisgender men. Far from it. Simply from observation, the vast majority of social workers, counselors, support workers, and therapists in the

sexuality as well as popular media. The embodiment of whiteness was therefore naturalized as both a disposition to care and inherently deserving of care. People embodying these qualities “authorized, in the eyes of their fellow citizens, their claim on the resources of the state” (Seiler, 2020, p. 31).

70. We may recall from Shildrick’s (1997) analysis of classical medical texts and illustrations that the mind and reason were believed to be inherent to masculinity, and that feminized people fundamentally lack the capacity for will or moral agency. Chapman and Withers (2019) further explain that in Kantian ethics, only those whose wills aligned with the supposed will of God, which meant that they had access to religious education that would have been reserved for clergymen, were perceived as capable of reason. Ahmed (2019) drew on similar social theory texts as those analyzed in Seiler’s writing, and identified that those who were poor and of the labouring class were marked for extraction of use from the labour of the body, as opposed to those who were marked for creativity and leadership through the work of the mind due to their higher rank in the social hierarchy. Particularly, those who were disabled or seen as failing to fulfill their social duties were referred to as vacant-minded. Federici (2004) as well



workplaces where I have been employed, collaborated with, or visited are cisgender women. From the very beginning, the social work profession arose in North America as a way for women to enter the workforce.<sup>71</sup> However, if whiteness poses in the social imaginary as disposition to care, then it makes sense for racialized and feminized workers to desire the approximation of whiteness: the rugged individualism and compulsory sound-mindedness of idealized masculinity,<sup>72</sup> the Protestant work ethics, the middle-class norms and respectability, the ableist demand for capitalist productivity.

It's been centuries since the early days of social working. Centuries later, a collaborator in this study, Kathryn Mettler, and I laid out questions and stories and made collages around a kitchen table. We were thinking with our combined decades of working in shelters, group homes, and residential services, in response to the question, *how can we practice care without replicating violence*. We were unsurprised to realize that, through our storytelling and image-making, care labour carried out primarily by feminized bodies is still co-opted into the surveillance, conversion, and social control of people who were deemed morally defective, difficult, threatening, centuries after the early days of social working.

as Lam and Ki (2022) wrote about the demonization and dehumanization of racialized and feminized sexuality in the processes of colonial conquest and domination, which would make racialized women and feminized people ineligible for evolutionary progress within neo-Lamarckian theories. Altogether, "neo-Lamarckian tales of bootstrapping and divinely elected species functioned as powerful props to white supremacy, ranking races based on their evident record of evolutionary labor and their viability for further ascent" (Seiler, 2020, p. 21). Solidifying ideas about whiteness, the development of the American School of Evolution in the 1860s "offered its audience an institutionally sanctioned scientific discourse" (Seiler, 2020, p. 20) and shaped much of the social imaginary that continues today that upholds the legitimacy of white supremacy in "what we expect, our ways of being, bodily-ness, and how we understand ourselves as 'placed' in time" (Shotwell, 2016, p. 38).

71. The professionalization of social work is commonly understood as an important feminist gain for enabling a large number of women to enter the workforce and the public sphere (Chapman & Withers, 2019). However, it can be argued that, through this new profession dominated by ruling class white women, and with their work mostly organized by Christian mission

Mettler and I met when we worked together in supportive housing. When we worked together we often commiserated about insomnia. Many of the people we worked with were labeled morally defective, difficult, and threatening. There were case notes, some of which we wrote, to highlight the fact. All of the people we worked with had experienced violence in their lives. All of the people we worked with would also be labeled as traumatized. Our storytelling grew from our wondering of what were the things that kept us awake. What was the burnout? What were the worries? What was the anxiety? Conditioned to be highly meticulous with our social work and management training, we followed all the safety protocols, codes of ethics, standards of practice, crisis intervention procedures. We documented carefully, objectively, truthfully. We consulted with our superiors and supervisors not only when necessary but always just-in-case. We did everything right, even the highly recommended self-care routines, the deep breathing, the lunch-time walks. So how can we be worried, anxious, sleepless? We had no reason to experience these unhappy emotions. This must be what Chapman calls *unreason*.

The stories that keep us awake were moments like the time when a young person labeled with developmental disability was restrained

groups and institutions, the traditional feminine role of caring is co-opted into the surveillance, religious conversion, and social control of people who were deemed morally defective, such as people who are poor, disabled, engaging in sex work, or divergent from heteronormativity in sexual and gender identities (Chapman & Withers, 2019). This history of social working and professionalized care is also reflected in the writing of Lam and Ki (2022) on the Chinese Rescue Home in Victoria, BC as well as Stevenson's (2014) study on the Arctic Inuit community.

72. Chris Chapman (2013) uses the term "compulsory sound-mindedness" (p. 184) to describe a colonial and capitalist tactic of subject formation that denigrates unreason and disability to maximize labour, based on the deeply rooted European thought that "equated class-privileged, white, and heteropatriarchal norms of self-governance as key to achieving 'true happiness'" (p. 184). Compulsory sound-mindedness then involves a "conflation of unreason with idleness" (p. 184). Or in Ahmed's (2019) words, being vacant-minded and therefore useless. In the context of social work and professionalized care, Chapman suggests that unreason for workers often includes "unhappy emotional experiences including anxiety and guilt; not-knowing or uncertainty; an

and made to sit on the ground in a public parking lot for demanding a chocolate bar that he was promised during an outing but never received. Or the time when a young woman was kicked out and denied services from a violence-against-women shelter for expressing outrage and panic from a 3am flash-light bed-check. Or the times we participated in staff meetings discussing which tenant is a threat to the community, which tenant will receive an eviction notice, which tenant will then be cut off from access to support workers in our program. Or the times when we did not know how to respond to social service and counselling students in classes we taught who listed all the ways that they would protect themselves from vicarious trauma before they even began working in the field.

Mettler brings her intriguing scholarship and critical analysis about the conceptualization of trauma to the table, which are elaborated in a series of co-created visual essays, a zine titled *Stories from the Shadows*, for this dissertation study.<sup>73</sup> However, the main concepts I would like to summarize and focus on here are ones that may demonstrate how care work and care workers enact violence through the rhetoric of trauma. Firstly, Mettler's research on the idea of vicarious trauma indicates that there is a widespread belief, which has suffused both professionalized care settings and popular

unmoored sense of self, particularly when questioning one's morality; and a sense of self that incorporates others' presence" (Chapman, 2013, p. 185).

73. *Stories from the Shadows* is an online, open access zine with seven visual essays co-created by Kathryn Mettler and Patricia Ki (2022): [https://mappingcare.art/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/stories-from-the-shadows\\_v3.pdf](https://mappingcare.art/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/stories-from-the-shadows_v3.pdf)

understanding, that people who have experienced violence will become violent as a symptom of trauma.<sup>74</sup> This follows the conceptualization of trauma as a destructive event that alters the pre-trauma, rational, pure self as discussed by Stevens. Vanessa Pupavac's research and theorization of therapeutic governance further suggests how the potential to enact violence is associated with symptoms of trauma as a psychopathology; as such, resistance to intervention or regulation is readily framed as violence within this discourse of trauma.

Secondly, if it is believed that people who are labeled as traumatized will become violent due to the very nature of trauma as a psychopathology, it then follows that interacting with, supporting, or even simply listening to, people who are deemed traumatized can expose care workers to risk or harm. Hence the notion of vicarious trauma. Trauma becomes understood as a contagion that evokes fear as well as a sense of duty to contain it. It evokes anxiety and a desire to master the skills to control the cause of the anxiety in order to eliminate the anxiety and all the distracting, uncomfortable, unhappy emotions within, because *unreason* must be eliminated to ward off idleness and uselessness. As Stevens writes, trauma as a concept therefore *affectively* moves workers

74. This understanding comes not only from observation from our experiences or the experiences we witnessed. Researcher Vanessa Pupavac (2001) has found that western discourses of psychiatry and trauma define experiences of violence and distress as causes for psychological symptoms, behavioural dysfunctions, and further violence. She uses the term "therapeutic governance" (p. 358) to describe a broader colonial and transnational disciplinary network that is operationalized via myriad psycho-social interventions such as trauma counselling and life skills classes. Through processes of therapeutic governance, political authority is reframed in seemingly non-punitive, benign, individualist psychological terms, which inform not only healthcare and social services, but are also "codified in international instruments as human rights" (Pupavac, 2001, p. 366). Underpinned by "the archetype of the robust risk-taking, self-made man" (Pupavac, 2001, p. 360) as the norm, citizenship and the rights to care defined by therapeutic governance are understood in terms of psychological functionalism. Specifically in relations to Black, Indigenous, and racialized groups, discourse of trauma and dominant policy structures work in tandem to evoke the European colonialist imaginary of the "non-Westerner as 'half-savage, half-child'"

into enacting and enforcing particular ideologies and norms.<sup>75</sup>

It makes a lot of sense that many of the narratives in *Stories from the Shadow* are about anger. Or more precisely, they are stories in which workers, including ourselves, have enacted violence against people who had experienced violence because we were reacting to their expressions of anger, which were almost immediately interpreted as threats of violence. The affective circuit of biopolitics that moves workers into action, which Stevens has discussed, shows us that power does not seek to eliminate emotions altogether, but to control them and render them productive. Following Ahmed, we can see how emotions may be ranked in terms of their productiveness based on their approximation to rationality.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps more precisely, it is not emotion itself that is being ranked, but the expressions of it. Emotional expressions that align with the rules of regulation, whether it be shelter policies or unspoken expectations of middle-class respectability, may signal a higher ranking on the social hierarchy. For example, higher ranking emotional expressions of anger may look like the ability to articulate such anger calmly with 'feeling words' that are intelligible to those around them. Bonus points if they use 'I-statements' and take ownership of any

(Pupavac, 2001, p. 366), whereby both signs of distress as well as resistance to interventions are labeled as psychological dysfunction requiring risk management, trapping people within "a double bind that does not allow escape from pathological categories" (Pupavac, 2001, p. 364).

75. Following the threads from conceptualizations of trauma and dominant discourse of the self, we can understand that they are mutually constituting in producing and propagating the belief that the "self that is subject to trauma can be 'held responsible,' can be expected to respond to intervention with self-restraint or behavior modifications" (Stevens, 2016, p. 25). Stevens (2016) argues that this rubric of trauma that weaves together a universal set of devastating effects on the self as well as a recoverable, whole, innocent selfhood works to cohere the affect of those who are moved to 'help' and those who are 'traumatized,' all towards "our own admission to the global community of the healed, the cured, and the normative" (p. 29). He further suggests that medical terms produced by such notion of trauma, namely, PTSD and more recently traumatic brain injury, function "as a kind of state servant and ideological apparatus" (p. 32) in categorizing and channeling affect into state supporting practices of population control in the

unhappy emotion as an internal phenomenon of dysregulation or a result of misperception, rather than an embodied experience produced through relations of power, thus relieving the workers and systems around them as contributors to any unhappiness or destabilization in the shared environment. Pain, however, defies language. Elaine Scarry, in her study of suffering and violence, concludes that pain may in fact destroy one's ability to speak about it. Emotions that flow from overwhelming violence and harm may therefore be perceived as inarticulable and unruly. Expressions of emotions by people who have experienced violence may therefore more likely be seen as requiring regulation, containment, and control. Perception of emotional expressions is certainly mediated by gender. Anger may be viewed as reasonable, expected, or even righteous when expressed by some bodies, but abnormal or a threat when detected in others. Drawing from Ahmed as well as Federici, feminine anger can be understood as an unmooring or wandering away from the husband's will and the general social will, which assigns cheerful nurturance to women as their intrinsic duty to fulfill their reproductive labour according to familial, capitalist, and patriarchal norms.<sup>77</sup> This brings us back to again hysteria, the construction of which, according to Foucault, was to realign the feminine bodies with their assigned

service of capitalist gains.

Practitioners' own longings and pleasurable emotions in helping, achieving justice, and uncovering traumatic stories are shunted into the labour of managing the affect of those who are traumatized and improving their emotional states. It is through this circuit of "bio-affective-political economies" (p. 35) that instruments of management operate in the forms of case histories, outcome measurements, and best practices, with the objectives being "the scrutinizing, the bringing under control, the calming down, the pacification of the subject of the state... through the provision of 'safety,' 'hope,' 'somatically grounded resiliency treatments'" (p. 36).

76. Ahmed (2004) theorizes that the hierarchy of reason and emotion lends itself to "a hierarchy between emotions: some emotions are 'elevated' as signs of cultivation, whilst others remain 'lower' as signs of weakness" (p. 3). The grand narrative of progress is therefore not only about the triumph of reason, but also the ability "to experience the 'appropriate' emotions at different times and place" (p. 3). Cultivated and productive emotions are therefore defined against unruly emotions or madness, often signaled by their inarticulability into reified 'feeling words' (Gorman, 2017). At the same time, Elaine Scarry (1985)

biological and moral responsibilities.

While hysteria is no longer in use as a psychiatric diagnosis, it is often viewed as a predecessor to the contemporary diagnosis of borderline personality disorder (BPD). Hysteria and BPD share many genealogical or kinship connections, relating in terms of the discourse of trauma, the feminization of the diagnoses, and the expressions of emotions that were seen as outside of the bounds of normative femininity.<sup>78</sup> The individualistic conceptualization of the diagnosis and the presentation of mere statistics comparing diagnostic rates between men and women imply that women are more prone to BPD. This is not surprising, and serves to reinforce the already dominant discursive construction of the feminine as passive, empty, and chaotic. It is also not surprising that women would be overrepresented in a diagnosis associated with experience of violence, when western societies are ongoingly sustained by a patriarchal social order that naturalizes the exploitation and subjugation of femininity. If anger and rage are constructed as inappropriate or even alien to the embodiment of femininity and a threat to social orders, then it is logical that pathologizing judgment about anger is made far more frequently against women and feminized people than they are against cisgender men.<sup>79</sup> As such, violence

theorizes that pain is unsharable because of “its resistance to language” (p. 4) or “its ability to destroy language” (p. 54).

77. Exploring anger as an emotion, Ahmed (2014) references the figure of the angry wife, whereby this feminine anger is “understood as antisocial, as destroying ties of affection” (p. 115). As demonstrated by Charcot’s theatrical displays of hysterical trance, anger and rage expressed by women were seen as common symptoms of hysteria. Foucault (1990) writes that the “hysterization of women’s bodies” (p. 104) is a strategy of power deployed through the discourse of sexuality to produce compliance with women’s “biologico-moral responsibility” (p. 104).

78. Both hysteria and BPD are disproportionately applied to women, both theorize childhood sexual trauma as a precipitating factor, the diagnostic criteria of both emphasize excess feminized emotions as well as emotions that contradict normative femininity (Becker, 1997; Wirth-Cauchon, 2001; Ussher, 2011), and as such women labeled with either disorder are frequently viewed as “inevitably disordered” (Ussher, 2011, p. 128) and “untreatable” (Sulzer, 2015, p. 85). In the current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-5) the

enacted by the masculinized body is construed as normal, while anger expressed by the feminized body is unimaginable except as signs of mental illness. Gendered constructions of pathology therefore obscure misogyny, with feminine unreason serving to maintain the ideal of masculine rationality. Gendered constructions of pathology further intersect with discourses of race, class, and disability, such that some bodies may express anger without much consequences for their access to social support and safety, while for (racialized, disabled, poor, trans) others their expressions of anger can be interpreted as threatening and dangerous to the social good, and the consequences of such expressions can be fatal. The purpose of these judgments about anger and other seemingly unruly emotions, as many theorists have argued time and again, is to regulate affect and its expressions such that use values can be ongoingly extracted from bodies to uphold structures of dominance. Aristotle's maxim, an ailment originating from the female nervous system, a psychiatric disorder affecting mostly women, and the psychological phenomenon of inappropriate anger can all be understood as stories on which the psycho-bio-medical system and the professionalized care industrial complex establish their dominance, the bricks and the tools with which the master builds and maintains his house. However,

symptoms of BPD that refer specifically to emotionality includes: "Affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood," "Chronic feelings of emptiness," and "Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger" (APA, 2013, 301.83).

79. Drawing on Aristotle's maxim that "anyone who does not get angry when there is reason to be angry, or does not get angry in the right way at the right time and with the right people, is a dolt" (Spelman, 1989, p. 263, cited in Boler, 1999, p. 12), Megan Boler (1999) argues that according to western moral traditions women are not permitted to express anger even in the face of transgression, which serves to maintain women in their subordinate position. It is therefore not coincidental that both hysteria and BPD emerged during historical periods in which existing boundaries of gender roles were challenged by increased education and employment opportunities for women (Wirth-Cauchon, 2001). Further, Dana Becker (1997) remarks that the introduction of BPD in the DSM-III in 1980, in conjunction with a new diagnostic model that centres personality traits, has served as a way for psychiatry to maintain its supremacy against emerging and competing professions such as psychology and social work. BPD quickly became the most diagnosed personality disorder in 1984



Audre Lorde reminds us not only to recognize the master's tools but also the possibility of new tools that can be forged to take down the master's house through this recognition.

As such, following both Ahmed's model of the sociality of emotion as well as Stevens' discussion of bio-affective-politics, it can be recognized that Hysteria, BPD, and PTSD are but different iterations of a biopolitical apparatus that saturates the rhetoric of trauma as well as the traumatized subject with the emotion of anger as such rhetoric circulates through healthcare encounters, practices, and knowledge, in order to enable the ever-multiplying means of systematic demarcation and regulation of normative femininity. In this way, anger as an emotion is *fixed* to the traumatized subject as an inevitable outcome of trauma as well as a threat to social good that necessitates *fixing* through biomedical measures. Through these ahistorical and ostensibly neutral diagnostic categories, anger is understood as a debilitating impairment part and parcel to the rhetoric of trauma. Dominant discourse of trauma produced through biopolitics therefore does not aim to describe experiences of harms in order to prevent violence, but to delineate conditions of dysfunctions that require the development of particular regulating or rehabilitating technologies.<sup>80</sup> After all, sustainment of the

(Wirth-Cauchon, 2001). In recent decades advancements in neuroscience, proliferation of trauma studies, and recognition of the stigma attached to BPD have led to a shift toward the use of PTSD in diagnosing women who have experienced violence (Appignanesi, 2008). In DSM-V, PTSD is also marked by a "Persistent negative emotional state (e.g., fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame)" (APA, 2013, 309.81), of which only anger is further explained as "quick tempered and may even engage in aggressive verbal and/or physical behavior with little or no provocation" (APA, 2013, 309.81). For Audre Lorde (1984/2007), women's anger, particularly those of racialized women, is brought into being by personal and institutional oppressions. Anger is therefore "loaded with information and energy" (p. 127) that can create progress and change — not a "simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good... [but] a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlining our lives" (p. 127).

80. Psychoanalytic theories of trauma, developed within the historical contexts of industrial technology advancement and the domination of the medical profession, have propagated "perceptions of the body as a systemic organization of capacities and energy that, like a steam engine, can be

norm requires the construction of the impaired, deficient, or defective. In trauma's discourse, the impaired subject is angry, rageful, and dangerous. The discourse of a pre-trauma subject is imbued with hope for complete healing and restoration of the normative, juxtaposed against ghost stories, science fictions of horror that aim to warn us about the dangers and the rage harboured within the person labeled traumatized. Feminist writers Susan Wendell and Margrit Shildrick remind us that stories produced through the intersecting, mutually constituting discourses of psychomedicine, gender, and disability that have long been propagating the fear of the feminine and the disabled, as the seeming lack of control and containment of the body in feminized and disabled corporeality and emotionality disrupt and destabilize the dominant concept of the self as cohesive and self-contained, and represent the threat of the dissolution of the self.<sup>81</sup> These stories tell us to be on guard, to be afraid of *them*, to bring them back to normal or else control and contain them. Our methods of regulation and control, if proven to be successful, assure us that we will not become them, our selves will not be dissolved, if we are ever struck with the misfortune of trauma. *The ailment plaguing the hysterical woman will not threaten humanity with the doctor's cure proven effective.* There are thus emotional investments in holding the

regulated" (Goldberg & Willse, 2007, p. 270). Foucault (1995) likens subjects of modernity to "meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine" (p. 169), bound to "indefinitely progressive forms of training" (p. 169) to achieve "automatic docility" (p. 169), efficiency, and increasing productivity. Biopolitics therefore requires a conceptualization of trauma not so much as a description of harm, but "as a condition of possibility for technological development" (Goldberg & Willse, 2007, p. 281), by which the impaired, traumatized subject is made productive for "the development of new rehabilitative technologies... which offer the possibility to modify and extend governmental management and the administration of mutation of life" (Goldberg & Willse, 2007, p. 281).

81. Susan Wendell (1996) theorizes that disabled women are doubly rejected as signifiers of human conditions that are deemed undesirable and fearsome, such as irrationality, failure to control the body, pain, and death. Shildrick (1997) further suggests that feminized embodiment exemplifies "the threat of corporeal engulfment" (p. 16), which destabilizes the practice of disciplinary power that is premised on the binary logic of mind/body, self/other, interior/exterior, boundaries that are thought to be clear and distinct are "threatened by loss of definition, or by

person who has experienced violence responsible for learning and manifesting self-restraint and behavioural modifications to curb the symptoms of trauma. There are pervasive networks of policies and practices spanning multiple levels of governments, across various systems that adjudicate on every aspect of life from material provisions to familial relationships, that have been developed *in the name of trauma*, but are commonly rerouted and channeled back to focusing on and increasing social, legal, and medical scrutiny and regulation on women and feminized people who have experienced violence, rather than holding the perpetrators of violence accountable.<sup>82</sup> There are countless models of therapeutic interventions dedicated to the self-control and rerouting of anger and rage, rather than holding space and valuing the expressions of unhappy emotions as inevitable responses to marginalization and violence for feminized, racialized, disabled peoples. These stories become the things that we tell ourselves about trauma, the things that we tell other people about trauma, and the things we tell ourselves about other people who had trauma.

*We are responsible for the safety of the community. The community is in our hands. We must make sure that people's trauma symptoms are under control. We must check*

dissolution" (p. 17). The dissolution of the self, represented by the feminized body's "putative leakiness, the outflow of the body which breaches the boundaries of the proper... in the male cultural imaginary the metaphor characteristically provokes unease, even horror" (p. 16-17).

82. In the Canadian state and Ontario particularly, since the 1980s, there have been system reforms that emphasized gender-based and intimate partner violence, such as the creation of specialized domestic violence courts, improved coordination of legal and social service systems to support survivors of violence, court-mandated programs for men who perpetrated abuse, criminal injuries compensation program, and special priority subsidized housing application for survivors of violence (Burnett et al., 2015; Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, 2020; Koshan, 2018; Sinha, 2015). However, critical and anti-racist feminist scholars critique that the proliferation of therapeutic interventions and prevention strategies has quickly become depoliticized and co-opted back into the psychomedical discourse that produces the concept of trauma as a psychopathological entity. Such re-alignment with the dominant ways of understanding distress intensified the legal and medical scrutiny on women and feminized peoples rather than on the people who

*in constantly so we can prevent people from going out of control. We must separate children from traumatized parents or monitor the family closely to prevent the trauma from getting passed on. We must provide psycho-education to people about their trauma so that they can learn emotional self-regulation. We must follow established procedures and document every minute of our interactions to verify that we have done our jobs, that we have earned our admission into the community of the healed, the normative, the deserving.*

In other words, trauma as a concept, when evoked, moves us affectively towards the approximation of whiteness.

And yet, following trauma's discourse and doing all the right things it laid out on the table, we are still haunted at three in the morning. And the things that were keeping us awake, worried, anxious were not the stories of violence that we heard from people labeled as traumatized. What haunted us were the things we wished we said, the care we wished we gave, the change we wished we made, the harms we wished to undo, the structural violence we could not unsee, the ineffectiveness we felt, our complicity that went against our values. These were the things that reverberated in our minds and our

perpetrated violence, whereby the feminized were positioned as responsible for protecting themselves, which paradoxically naturalized male violence (Fahs, 2016; Million, 2013; Murphy, 2007). Bonnie Burstow (2003) particularly challenges the work of Judith Herman (1997) in privileging psychiatric diagnosis and lobbying for an expansion of post-traumatic stress disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Along with Burstow, feminist scholars writing on decolonization have argued that diagnostic criteria are individualistic and deficit-oriented, thus reducing complex personal and social damages to a list of biological symptoms (Goodman, 2015; Linklater, 2014; Tseris, 2013).

beings, keeping us worried, anxious, regretful, and deep in grief.

Because trauma as a discourse, when evoked, moves us affectively towards the approximation of whiteness, and when we approximate whiteness, we produce further social horrors by reproducing the violence of misogyny, racism, ableist discrimination, colonial domination. As Mettler emphatically asks, *who is in the position to cause harm to whom? Who is in the position to make who sick?* This reversal of positioning, through the discourse of trauma, from the person who has experienced violence to the person who will become violent, from the survivor of harm to the perpetrator of harm, is again a double-erasure: first the indifference to the violence inflicted upon the person historically and ongoingly by focusing on the containment of the individualized symptoms of trauma, and then making invisible the violence of surveillance and control within multiple systems by imposing upon the person violence as a symptom of trauma to legitimize the systemic and structural violence.

In one of the visual essays we also asked:<sup>83</sup> *If the saying goes, people abuse because they have been abused, if we assume this to be true, and now we believe that we've been abused by the person we're working with, then*

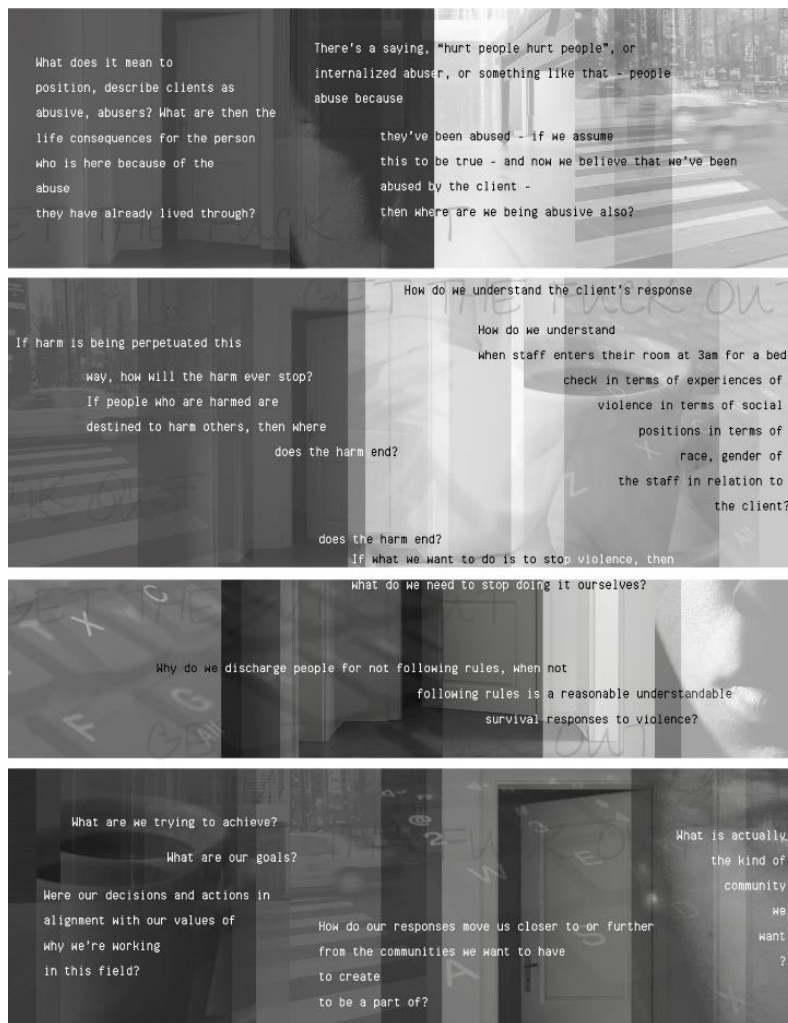
83. This series of questions appears in a visual essay titled "Things we ask ourselves at 3 am" by Mettler and Ki (2022). The full essay can be viewed at this link: <https://mappingcare.art/stories-from-the-shadows/>

*where are we being abusive also? If harm is being perpetuated in this way, how will harm ever stop? If people who are harmed are destined to harm others, then where does the harm end? Does the harm end? If what we want to do is to stop violence, then what do we need to stop doing it ourselves?*

These questions are why the ghosts are not leaving, at 3 o'clock in the morning or otherwise.

## Figure 8

### *Things we ask ourselves at 3 am*



Note. Kathryn Mettler & Patricia Ki, *Things we ask ourselves at 3 am*, 2022.

Digital collage / visual essay, page from a zine titled *Stories from the Shadows*, accessible at <https://mappingcare.art/stories-from-the-shadows/>

#### 4. Constellation: An Unfolding of Care and Unruliness

We must encourage love—love that is radical, love that digs deep. Love that asks the hard questions, that is ready to listen to the whole story and keep loving anyway. Love for the survivors, love for the perpetrators, love for the survivors who have perpetrated and the perpetrators who have survived. Love for the community that has failed us all. We live in poison. The planet is dying. We can choose to consume each other, or we can choose love. Even in the midst of despair, there is always a choice. I hope we choose love.

— Kai Cheng Thom (2019, p. 44)

The world we want is one where many worlds fit.

— Zapatistas (cited in brown, 2017, p. 155)

If, as Avery Gordon writes, hauntings  
take place in our everyday life to  
demand that something be done in the  
labour of the present, then these  
ghostly appearances also require us to  
believe that another world is possible.  
A world that is different from the one in  
which people are rendered ghostly,  
made invisible and unworthy of care,  
may be crafted by exerting our labour,  
particularly our caring labour,  
differently, to create a different world  
for the future.



To figure out how to do something differently may in turn necessitate that we identify and understand what it is that we are doing that requires change. What, after all, is care?

I have learned from collaborators of this project, from feminist scholars dedicating their labour to care ethics, from my own experiences in professionalized care work, that *care is an entangled web*. It emerges in response to multiple, contradicting, impermanent truths, shaped by unpredictable, uncertain circumstances. It may feel easier to hang our theories on binary identity categories of the caregiver and the care receiver, the oppressor and the oppressed. However, a person's subject positions in their lived realities are always multiple and intersecting, and never limited only to one social role at any given time. Theories that are out of touch with people's lived realities will undoubtedly be limited in its usefulness in mitigating violence, let alone creating a different world for a different future. When we ask *who is in the position to cause harm to whom* in a professionalized care setting, the answers are always context-

dependent, and possibly multiple and contradicting.

## Perpetrators Who Survived

Caretaking is a normative feminine role. Thinking with Ahmed, we can see why its labour is devalued: caring is relegated to the hands by the head, to the body by the mind, to women by men, to racialized workers by white owners of the means of production.<sup>1</sup> In the global capitalist, imperialist market, the labour of certain bodies makes life possible for all, thereby freeing other bodies from a life that is shaped and defined by their labour. Feminist, anti-racist, and disability scholars particularly point out that, in the interlocking operations of race, gender, and class, some people are deliberately scripted as disposable populations that are available for exploitation and exhaustion in the extraction of their use. The undervalued and unrecognized *care labour* of those deemed exploitable and disposable is in turn what sustains life for the vast majority of people around the globe.<sup>2</sup> We can think about the hands that touched and held our lives since the day we were born.

1. As Ahmed (2019) writes, “The investment in the distinction between mental and manual labour as a social distinction is evidenced by these contrasting figures—arm and head, body and mind, laborer and gentleman” (p. 143). Shaped by the mind/body split of western philosophical traditions, this social distinction imbues the head with the authority to command the body to function according to their designated use. Those who are lower on this social hierarchical arrangement become defined by the functions and usefulness of their bodies. The higher up a person is in this social hierarchical arrangement, the more freedom the person enjoys away from the requirements to be useful. While largely rendered invisible and therefore commonly unrecognized, the supply and demand of low wage, unpaid, racialized, and feminized labour within the global capitalist market are what make life possible for most of the world’s population (Kelly, 2013; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). The labour of some is therefore used to free others from having to be useful.

2. Jasbir Puar (2017) theorizes that disability itself is the intentional product of the interlocking transnational operations of

There is a reason why birthing is called labour. Childbearing, birthing, nursing, childrearing, and care work in general are ubiquitously understood as normative feminine roles and expectations. It then follows that personal support workers, social workers, nursing home attendants, counsellors, therapists, or any other occupation that has to do with day-to-day physical or emotional caring are largely taken up by women or feminized people. As such, this care labour may not be a result of coercion but may be extended out of the labourers' own free will, affectively motivated by moral, economic, and longstanding religious ideals that shape the social imaginary of what it means to be human. As femininity is associated with emotionality and childrearing, it may be theorized that the ability to love is a feminine gender role expectation. The ability to love may be outwardly evident by the ability to care. If love and care are expected to be innate ways of being for feminized humans, then feminized humans who cannot demonstrate love and care may be perceived as unable to 'do human.' As we learned from the work of Federici, Million, Lorde, and

capitalism and imperialism, which require the "biopolitical scripting of populations available for injury" (p. 64). Historically and ongoingly, racialization is deployed in the biopolitical classification of certain bodies as defective for the justification of slavery and exploitative labour. Workers in the disability and care service industry are therefore positioned in the global capitalist economy as "objects of disposability" (Puar, 2017, p. 80). Racialization and gender norms that define caring as women's moral duty drive this economy of care, such that much of paid or unpaid care work particularly for disabled people fall on women of colour from the global south, who are expected to endure displacement from their homelands, unlivable wages, race- and gender-based abuse, and poor working conditions (Erevelles, 2011; Robinson, 2006). Micki McGee (2020) further describes this economy of care as "the informal global supply chains that move impoverished women from developing areas of the globe (or from poor populations in the United States) to provide care labor in the homes of affluent families" (p. 43). McGee points out that such migrant care labour "mirrors the chattel slave trade that built US economic preeminence in the nineteenth century" (p. 43). In today's world, "Without the unwaged or discounted wages of women, the care economy would be (and in many cases has been) crashing" (p. 43).

Ahmed, the feminized humans who demonstrate emotions that are opposite from love and care, such as anger and rage, are demonized, pathologized, isolated, and punished, with fatal consequences. The stakes are certainly high for feminized humans to extend their labour of care, even if this labour is often done without adequate resources and conditions of care to sustain it, and is therefore detrimental to their own lives in a path toward slow death.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the pursuit of what Lauren Berlant calls a *good life*, or what Ahmed describes as the *happy end*, for women-identifying people, includes the unrecognized, unpaid labour of motherhood and care work. But perhaps most of the time this is not even about an idealistic American-dream, white-picket-fence, property-owning kind of good life. Perhaps under capitalism, any form of *livable life* with the means to meet basic needs such as food and shelter for oneself and one's family, and the ability to keep on living, for many women-identifying people, means unwaged or discounted care labour.

It can therefore be argued that care work is therefore often done, in Kai

3. Legitimized subjugation in turn shapes, delimits, and maintains individuals' "sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world" (Berlant, 2011, p. 24). This can be pondered alongside Ahmed's (2014) theorization of the general will, whereby individuals are moved to align their own particular wills or desires with it out of a sense of moral duty, and because the general will promises a happy end for those who fulfill their moral duties. Lauren Berlant (2011) describes this subjugating relationship in the system of capitalist industry as "cruel optimism" (p. 1), whereby individuals' desire, pursuit, and attachment to certain moral-economic ideals of a 'good life' paradoxically become detrimental to their own well-being and survival. The conditions of "slow death" (p. 95) thus result from the biopolitical tactics that sustain the optimistic pursuit of a good life, which enable populations to endure long periods of wearing-out through global capitalist regimes of precarious labour and uneven distribution of resources.

Cheng Thom's words, by perpetrators who survived. Surviving racism, sexism, misogyny, exploitation, and subjugation does not make us innocent. Our subjugation is interlocked and mutually constituting with the objectification of and extraction of profit from people whose lives are dependent on care work.<sup>4</sup> I would like to point out, at the same time, that not all racialized and feminized care workers are subjugated, exploited, or bound to their labour in the same way, because utility is unevenly distributed across a social body according to class hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> For example, with my access to training and education as a social worker and therapist, I am privileged to perform primarily mental and emotional labour, in the city where I reside, without having to migrate away from my loved ones and support network. With my support network, I am also not the sole earner of my family and therefore not bound to my waged labour for my survival and that of my loved ones, at least not always. While recognizing that I am still dependent on the wage one way or another, the manual labour of personal support workers, homemakers, and visiting nurses, free me from working in

4. Nirmala Erevelles (2011) theorizes that medicalization and the welfare regime operate through discourses of inclusion and accessibility through which disabled people are made productive as "objects of care" (p. 77). The economic value of this production is threefold: propelling the care service industry and maximizing its profits through low wage caring labour; making disabled bodies available for surplus labour through neoliberal strategies of intervention and rehabilitation; and exploiting those deemed unworthy of care as sites of profit via their "exclusion from adequate healthcare, and their ideological production as lazy, criminal, and burdensome" (Puar, 2017, p. 78), such that whose devalued conditions further uphold idealized narratives of capitalist progress (Erevelles, 2011). Specifically related to people who have survived violence, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) defines "the web of institution, practices, and beliefs that works to manage, contain, and/or offer resolution to survivors of sexual violence" (p. 229) as the "survivor-industrial complex" (p. 229), which profits through the care work of social workers and mental health service providers in regulating normative, socially acceptable, and productive participation in society by eradicating distressing memories and responses to violence, such as pain and rage.

5. Speaking of class hierarchy and labour, Ahmed (2019) writes that "for those who are not laborers, use can become more creative, more detached from the requirements of a system. Loosening and tightening thus become mechanisms for distributing utility unevenly

physically exhausting, potentially hazardous, largely unsupported, underwaged and precarious working conditions. Each worker in the care industrial complex, though performing different jobs, has varying access to resources, and are also subjugated in differing degrees. In this care industrial complex, each worker has a role to play in the larger capitalist system that is driven to accumulate surplus value from those who labour as well as those who do not. This accumulation and extraction of surplus value is often operated through the workers' enactment of violence and subjugation in the name of care. However, some of us have more freedom for creativity and mobility to make choices about how to perform this care work than others, according to our place in the class hierarchy.

Women, femme-presenting, feminized, and trans people working in academia could be understood as people who have experienced subjugation while being afforded certain levels of class-based freedom to shift political and economic conditions that devalue and exploit feminized care labour. In the 1980s, during the same period that

across a social body... Fatalism becomes functionalism: the lower you are in a class hierarchy, the more you are supposed to be determined by function—function as fate” (p. 133). In other words, one's usefulness and function in the system come to define one's understanding and embodied sense of what it means to be in the world, to keep on living, to look forward to, and to hope for (Berlant, 2011).

feminist activism demanded public awareness of sexual violence and the concept of trauma, the discourse of feminist care ethics was also introduced in a popular text by Carol Gilligan to assert feminine relationality and emotionality as viable overarching frameworks to mitigate structural and interpersonal violence.<sup>6</sup> Gilligan's argument was that because women have been subservient in patriarchal relationships, they have developed ways of caring and being in relations with others that can eliminate inequality and oppression, and as such women's ways of caring should be included in human moral development models. Note that Gilligan's argument was not to dismantle the hierarchy of moral development altogether, but to move women's position up the ladder on the social hierarchy. Adding women's experiences and voice to an existing dominant account, however, does not necessarily disrupt the underlying violence of classifying human superiority and inferiority in that account. Besides, while Gilligan critiques that Kohlberg's model of moral development was built on research conducted with white men only, which women or feminized

6. Carol Gilligan (1993) introduced the term "ethic of care" (p. 73) in 1982 to describe women's "construction of the moral problem as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than as one of rights and rules" (p. 73). The book, *In a Different Voice*, is premised on Gilligan's contest of Lawrence Kohlberg's influential model of moral development, which theorizes that women tend to remain in lower stages of moral development due to their attachment to relationships, while men are able to transcend personal relations and emotionality to reach higher or abstract level of universal moral decision-making capacity. Kohlberg's hierarchical model is clearly a reiteration of hierarchical binaries of mind/body, masculine/feminine. Gilligan instead argues that women's "embeddedness in lives of relationship, [and] their orientation to interdependence" (p. 171) are effects of gender inequality rather than deficient moral development. She understands that the "reality of connection is experienced by women as given rather than as freely contracted" (p. 172), and that women are also "subservient in relationships of permanently unequal social status and power" (p. 168). Thus, she asserts that women's experience should be included in accounts of human development, as they "are ideally situated to observe the potential in human connection both for care and for oppression" (p. 168), such that their "development delineates the path not only to a less violent life but also to a maturity realized through interdependence and taking care" (p. 172).

subjects was Gilligan speaking of when referring to women's experiences? There are always those in liminal spaces who get left out of the delineated path, which is so deeply ingrained in our desire toward the good life, toward access to the centre of power.

A decade later, Joan Tronto critiques Gilligan's theory by pointing out that it effectively positions women who are closest to power based on race, class, religion, and sexuality as the most moral.<sup>7</sup> Producing a new class of moral elites reinforces existing structures of power relations, while continuing to exclude those lower on the social hierarchy and with less access to the realms of power and privilege from moral and political decision-making. Along with Tronto, disability scholars have also found that disabled people are excluded from feminist theorizations of care ethics, even though disabled people are very often recipients of care services.<sup>8</sup> As autonomy is idealized as a prerequisite for moral agency, and disabled people are commonly assumed to be dependent and therefore not afforded the choices or dignity in making

7. Joan Tronto (1993) critiques Gilligan and other feminist advocates who argue that women are by nature more moral than men as a way of accessing "partial admission to the realms of power and privilege" (p. 91). She points out that, consistent with feminist theorization historically, the development of feminist ethics of care "has used the experience and ideas of upper middle-class, White, professional, heterosexual women as the standard for 'women'" (p. 16). Privileging the idea of a universal feminine morality rather than unpacking how morality is defined merely reinscribes the process of producing a "morally adept elite" (p. 63), which requires and justifies the exclusion of a subjugated other from moral and political decision-making. Within this rhetoric of gendered morality, "women's participation in political and moral life remains contingent on their making contributions along clearly delineated paths" (p. 86), which uphold patriarchal and capitalist rules. Tronto therefore advocates not for "women's morality" (p. 3) but for "a care ethic that includes the values traditionally associated with women" (p. 3), which she argues can connect "our broadest political and social aspirations with the consequences and effects of our actual practices" (p. 124), and re-orient feminist theory to meaningfully address intersecting relations of power and production of otherness within feminism.

8. At the same time, Susan Wendell (1996) and Jenny Morris (1993) argue that disabled women are frequently excluded from feminist research and theorizing, which are almost always based upon the universalization of the nondisabled



decisions for their lives, it can be understood that disabled people are prone to be excluded from ethical and political decision-making about their own lives and their communities. Indeed, Eva Kittay points out that disabled people often find themselves in unequal care relations, in which they do not have a choice in regard to whether they receive care and who they receive care from. Jenny Morris comments that feminist theorizing has applied the principle of 'the personal is political' primarily to the carer but not to those being cared for. If we understand that *the personal is always political*, and if disabled people's concerns are understood as personal tragedies and biological impairments and not politically and socially shaped, then the individualist understanding of disability effectively erases disabled people's agency and subjecthood, at least in discussions and knowledge production about the sociopolitical implications of care ethics, if not in the everyday practices that flow from such discussions and knowledge diffusion throughout the social body. We may therefore understand this exclusion of disabled people from feminist theorizations of ethics as yet another

woman, thus foreclosing space for the perspectives of disabled women to be known and validated. Specifically, Wendell reflects that while feminism has challenged patriarchal control and devaluation of the feminized body, it has failed to dislodge the myth of the body as controllable by celebrating the strengths of feminine embodiments but leaving little space to examine "the bodily frustrations and suffering that social justice cannot prevent or relieve" (pp. 92-93), thereby framing the experience of continual suffering as failure in overcoming what is unruly and reinscribing the idealization of independence. In an ableist society, autonomy is understood as a prerequisite for human dignity; as such, the dignity of disabled people may appear diminished when they must depend on others' caretaking for their well-being, economic security, safety, or survival (Kittay, 2011). Morris (1993) critiques how feminist research has largely focused on the systemic exploitation of women's caregiving labour while overlooking the violence that disabled women experience in receiving care, thus positioning disabled women as passive recipients rather than active agents in addressing gender-based violence, such that the "principle of 'the personal is political' is applied to carers but not to the cared for" (p. 61). Moreover, this one-sided focus on caregivers lends itself to support for coerced institutional care (Morris, 1993; Wendell, 1996). There is indeed extensive work in disability studies exposing "care as a layered form of oppression that includes abuse, coercion, a history of physical and metaphorical institutionalization, and a denial of agency" (Kelly, 2013, p. 786). Eva Kittay (2011) asserts

operation of dominating forces, in this instance ableism and classism, in rendering ghostly those who deviate from the norm and challenge its boundary and stability. In response, Kittay suggests a care ethic that includes dependency and the ability to both give and receive care as a source of human dignity. Similar to earlier feminist writing about including women's perspectives in existing models of moral development, making an existing framework more inclusive can be helpful, but it does not disrupt the framework itself. Shift in attitude about dependence may result in better awareness about ableist discrimination, but it may not be adequate in addressing the dominating structures that organize and constrain both the access to and provision of care as apparatus of social control and capitalist exploitation.

While Tronto is clear about not advocating for the idealization of the values and practices of a particular group of women with relative privilege, and is instead emphasizing an ethics of care that centres feminized ways of being such as interdependence, relationality, and emotionality, in her

that an adequate ethics of care must understand moral relations as taking place "not only between equals (who have voluntarily entered that relationship), but also among those not equally situated or empowered, individuals who find themselves in relationships that they themselves may not have chosen" (Kittay, 2011, p. 53). Kittay advocates a care ethic that centres dependency as an inevitable feature of human life, therefore recognizing that "the ability of a being to give and receive care is a source of dignity for humans no less than the capacity for reason" (Kittay, 2011, p. 52).

writing there still appears to be a tendency, a desire, or a need to draw lines in the sand to evaluate *the right kind of care* that is indispensable to human survival and can guide all care practices for all humans to live as well as possible and to advance social justice. This is echoed by later writing by Virginia Held.<sup>9</sup> Within these theorizations, what can be considered care is understood to be conditional upon the caretaker's ability to feel the right kind of emotions, such as empathy; to facilitate mutual respect, trust, and sensitivity; and, above all, to fulfill one's self-care needs. Following these definitions, how can we then understand the care labour of those whose needs and lives often do not come to matter in the imperialist and capitalist industrial system? For example, how can we understand the experiences of migrant workers from the global south, whose livelihood and survival through their caretaking labour are exploited by capitalist structures of the global north, and therefore do not have much choice whether to work or not? How can we understand the lack of care that racialized caretakers receive?<sup>10</sup> How can we understand the care labour of a racialized worker who

9. Along with other feminist writers such as Margrit Shildrick (1997), and later Virginia Held (2006), Tronto defines care as a practice enacted in relationships beyond a mere interest in another. Specifically, a feminist ethics of care emphasizes mutuality and interdependence as indispensable in human survival (Held, 2006; Shildrick, 1997), and in maintaining and repairing "the world so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Tronto, 1993, p. 145), with the broader aims of social justice (Held, 2006; Shildrick, 1997; Tronto, 1993). For some theorists, firm parameters are crucial in an ethics of care to evaluate underlying motives and effectiveness in meeting needs. For example, while Held's (2006) writing suggests that care should not be reduced to fixed virtue or dispositions and should centre emotions rather than idealize reason, an ethics of care is nevertheless characterized as involving the 'right' kind of moral emotions such as empathy, and a mutually trusting relationship with a carer who "will not only respect himself but will foster mutual respect and mutual sensitivity" (p. 56). Similarly, Tronto (1993) conceptualizes ethics of care with four essential elements: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness, with the understanding that sufficient fulfillment of one's own needs for care is prerequisite to the suspension of one's goals in effectively attending to the needs of another.

10. Examining collaborative forms of care, Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) examines the structural inequity that "stops us from being able to ask for care when we come from Black and brown communities, for example, who have always been the ones forced to care for others"

routinely experiences racist acts of disrespect and violence by the people they care for? Is the racialized worker required to carry out the impossible task of garnering respect from a racist person, on top of their caretaking tasks, for the sake of mutual respect, in order for them to be perceived as practicing ethically? What about the precariously employed, underpaid care workers who are not compensated with a living wage, and therefore cannot fulfill their own basic human needs of paying rent and putting food on the table, but continue to care for the service recipients every day? Does their subjugation mean that their labour cannot be considered ethical or caring, or be categorized as care at all? Are their various forms of care labour not indispensable for the survival of those they care for, and cumulatively on the larger scale, the survival of communities? Again, who is the caretaker positioned as the standard in these theorizations of care ethics? Whose face does she wear? Might these definitive characterizations of ethics of care be efforts to redraw the line of innocence while inadvertently reinscribing the binary of the morally adept elite/morally deficient, and

(p.35). They cite the concerns of racialized people about their reliance “on being liked or loved by the community” (p. 47) in order to receive care, as well as the reality that caring labour “becomes the only way femmes are rewarded in community” (p. 139).

intensifying the subjugation of those who are perceived as unable to fulfill their designated utility and moral duties for the social body in their expected gender roles?

Of course, many of the questions I ask above are obviously rhetorical, and intend to convey the untenability of the neoliberal, capitalist imperative to assign individual solutions to systemic problems. The standards for evaluating care, such as attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, self-care, and empathy point to the rhetoric of individual self-governance and self-improvement. A mandate for self-governance and self-improvement does not consider the system and conditions that shape care labour. The capitalist system is one that unevenly distributes the resources required for people to be attentive or responsive, enact responsibility, develop work skills, and care for themselves. When the time and effort that are required for care work is simply too costly when applied to the logic of commoditized labour—in other words, when care labour simply cannot be mass produced with less labour for more

profit—the capitalist system is one that tenaciously operates through neoliberal standards to extract ever greater amounts of labour and profit with as little cost as possible by positioning capitalist productivity as moral duties and means to a good life in the common sense.<sup>11</sup> Care workers, particularly women and feminized peoples, will put in more hours, more effort, more labour to make themselves better humans, without adequate compensation, support, or even acknowledgement for their contributions.

One may critique that the texts on feminist ethics of care from which these evaluative standards were described are dated, and they are a limited sample of theories on ethics of care, which perhaps renders the analysis based on such theories questionable, irrelevant, or at least limited. There is no doubt that countless theorizations of care have been produced since Tronto and Held's texts, whether in academic, organizational, or grassroots publications, including some writings that I have already mentioned and will be thinking and writing with in this

11. McGee (2020) describes an escalation of "care crisis" (p. 43) at a global scale. The logic of capitalism, which focuses on maximizing profit and reducing costs through mass production, simply does not adequately apply to care work, "which often requires individual attention, often in one-to-one, or one-to-few, ratios" (p. 42). From infant care to eldercare, from urgent medical care to long-term disability care, care labour is a social need "not readily resolved in a system that relies on commoditized labor" (p. 43). The relative cost of care labour and corporate capitalism's demand for profit renders many forms of care unaffordable. Capitalism thus relies on promotion of the fantasies of "boundless supplies of care (traditionally in the form of women's unpaid labor in the home, though more recently in the movement of low-wage care workers from one part of the globe to another) and limitless natural resources on what is now clearly a finite and destabilized planet" (p. 43) in order to maintain widespread human participation in the system. As capitalist operations that are disconnected from lived realities continually fail, McGee writes that "a standard quick fix is to hold up individual solutions and strategies for problems that are economic and structural" (p. 44). American bootstrapping ideology, entrepreneurialism, motivational psychology, and extreme self-care are understood as such individualist solutions to maintain the illusion of boundless supplies of care for those who perform and receive care work.

chapter. There is, however, also no doubt that individualist solutions continue to dominate systems and practices of professionalized care, such that we find ourselves in an escalating global care crisis as described by McGee in 2020, as recurring violence experienced and witnessed by myself and the collaborators of this project in the labour of our present. The problem is therefore not so much Tronto's and Held's writing specifically, but the ideologies that shaped their writing in ways that I understand as contradictory to their expressed commitment to dismantling the regulation and subjugation of feminized and racialized otherness, *the ghosts unseen* and yet carried forward through time and space and labour, and continuing to animate desires and relations of power in theorizations of the past and practices of today, *despite* the updated and radical writings about caring otherwise.

If we believe that improving care is a result of care workers' individual self-governance, self-development, and self-improvement, then we might also believe that people we care for can also improve their well-being with the

same self-regulation strategies. If we are conditioned to desire quick fixes because they bring us outcomes that we are conditioned to desire, and if we see quick fixes as the most, or the only, viable fix, then quick fixes we will impart onto others who seek our support. Thinking with Ahmed's analysis of the monitorial system of education, we may understand that this hierarchical relay of knowledge about how to be good, productive humans is also a tactic of domination.<sup>12</sup> In some ways we might understand the social workers, counsellors, case managers, and therapists as monitors of those who are deemed others. The figure of the monitor appears most prominently in my memory of the supportive housing program where I have worked for several years. Part of the work procedure for workers was to enter into a centralized system our activities in 10-minute intervals every workday, accompanied by corresponding case notes. We were told that this data we report is submitted directly to the provincial ministry of health every three months. The implication was that the majority of our activities should involve the residents living in the housing program. If there were too many 10-

12. Examining the education theories developed by Joseph Lancaster, who established and propagated an economical monitorial system for primary education that has been implemented since the 19th century in the western world and colonized states, Ahmed (2019) writes that the creation of a hierarchy with the monitor at the higher rank is a crucial technique of social control. Moving up the rank is rewarded with positive regards and affirmation from authority figures and therefore imbued with positive affect. The monitor as a figure becomes associated with positive affect as an example of achieving the happy end. Ahmed writes that "liveliness can be directed toward useful ends not only or simply by the students monitoring themselves... but by some of the students becoming monitors of the others" (p. 122). The monitor directs themselves to useful ends while directing others at the same time by being singled out, "by acting as a surveyor of other members of your own class. To be rewarded is to identify or align oneself with the master in accomplishing his task of inspecting the performance of others. The monitor becomes a method: *it is by policing others that you police yourself*" (p. 122-123, emphasis in original).



minute intervals that were coded as 'professional development' or 'client-indirect,' or the amount of time coded as 'direct client face-to-face' did not meet the monthly quota of our program, we would be subject to performance review, and we could be deemed ineffective workers. Logically, ineffective workers are replaced with more effective workers. As such, results of this reporting procedure relate directly to our job security and livelihoods. It is also important to note that while there was a code for 'personal time,' no one used it: if 'professional development' can lead to questions, then one can only imagine 'personal time.' In other words, every minute of our workday must be spent exerting productive labour outwardly. Of course we were not told not to eat or use the washrooms; no, that would be a blatant human right violation. However, without these activities having legitimate codes in the system, every minute spent chatting with my desk neighbour about the weather or pets or eating at my desk felt like stolen time, time that is unmentionable, saturated with guilt and, over time, even shame.<sup>13</sup> I *was* a lazy worker for running to the washroom twice during a

13. Kai Cheng Thom (2020) theorizes that "Guilt is feeling bad about something you've done; shame is feeling bad about who you are" (p. 76). This distinction may be helpful when thinking with Ahmed's (2019) discussion of the singling out of the monitor being an affective tactic associated with moral norms.

9-hour workday—a thought that was fleeting and quickly recognized as ridiculous, but contributes to an enduring sinking feeling that results from being surveilled and always judged as not measuring up. To be clear, no worker I knew documented their activities into the system every 10 minutes. There was simply no time for this. What often happened was every two to three weeks workers would allocate a full work day to catch up on statistical reporting. What code do we use for that labour? Administrative tasks. No client attached. Another red flag in the system. And on the ground, we were acutely cognizant of how that time could have been spent with the people we claim to support, to do the work that we aspire to do in the first place, that aligns with our values and hopes. The misalignment of our values that also produces a feeling of shame.

| Time                                   | Input                  | Capacity | Output                                      | Client                  |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 08:00                                  | Coffee 250 ml.         | 60%      | Travel-public transit - 64 minutes          | N/A                     |
| 09:04                                  | --                     | 50%      | Counselling Session w/11452 - 58 minutes    | Direct face to face     |
| 10:02                                  | --                     | 22%      | Accompaniment w/09874 - 121 minutes         | Direct face to face     |
| 12:03                                  | Coffee 125 ml.         |          |                                             |                         |
|                                        | Gluten free cookie x 2 | 28%      | Team meeting - 64 minutes                   | Indirect                |
| 13:07                                  | --                     | 19%      | Supervision - 50 minutes                    | Indirect                |
| 13:57                                  | Sandwich at desk       | 35%      | Activity log - 42 minutes                   | N/A                     |
|                                        |                        |          | [mandatory self-care implemented]           |                         |
| 14:39                                  | --                     | 29%      | Crisis intervention w/08226 - 22 minutes    | Direct face to face     |
| 15:01                                  | --                     | 12%      | Mindfulness group facilitation - 94 minutes | Direct face to face     |
| 16:35                                  | Coffee 350 ml.         | 43%      | Home visit w/10587 - 46 minutes             | Direct face to face     |
| 17:21                                  | --                     | 15%      | Phone session w/08766 - 24 minutes          | Direct non face to face |
| 17:45                                  | Grapes from Margaret   | 36%      | Case consultation - 56 minutes              | Indirect                |
| 18:41                                  | --                     | 30%      | Travel-public transit - 72 minutes          | N/A                     |
| 19:53                                  | Bath, with bubbles     | 45%      | Session notes - 92 minutes                  | Indirect                |
|                                        |                        |          | [mandatory self-care implemented]           |                         |
| 21:29                                  | Dinner, Door Dash      | 54%      | CE-PTSD training video - 60 minutes         | N/A                     |
| 22:29                                  | Wine                   | 32%      | --                                          | N/A                     |
| 01:39                                  | Sleep                  | 4%       | --                                          | N/A                     |
| 02:04                                  | Warm milk              | 2%       | Session notes - 12 minutes                  | Indirect                |
| 2:16                                   | Sleep                  | 1%       | --                                          | N/A                     |
| -----End of Record for 09/07/2018----- |                        |          |                                             |                         |

**Figure 9**

*a day in the life of a good robot in the care industrial complex*

*Note.* Kathryn Mettler & Patricia Ki, 2022, *a day in the life of a good robot in the care industrial complex*, digital image, in a zine titled *Stories from the Shadows*, accessible at <https://mappingcare.art/stories-from-the-shadows/>

This is a picture of *attentiveness*, *competence*, *responsiveness*, and *self-care*, in the care industrial complex.

This is an example of the monitors who have made it to the good life through the right and moral ways to belong in a community. We make ourselves useful by supplying our labour beyond capacity. To prove our usefulness we require those we monitor to police themselves in the same way: check-in regularly to let us know you are implementing a normative daily routine, participate in group programming to self-regulate your rage, process your trauma in individual counselling, work on getting off ODSP by going to employment retraining appointments. I needed to be in contact with residents in order to prove myself useful and worthy of my place in the world. The demonstration of my usefulness requires the demonstration of the residents' usefulness. We are all, at the end of the day, directed to useful ends in the capitalist industrial system. If we think about this as a tactic of domination, then there is no wonder that following large scale feminist activism for the acknowledgement of gender-based violence and increased support

for trauma in the 70s and 80s we ended up with intensified medical, legal, and social surveillance of people who have experienced violence, particularly racialized and Indigenous women and gender diverse people who are deemed traumatized, who are therefore always already positioned as unruly, prone to violence, lacking self-containment, and in need of regulation, as described in the last chapter.<sup>14</sup> Thinking alongside McGee and Ahmed, we can see how the neoliberal capitalist system is exceptionally agile in co-opting resistance by shaping desires and habits of embodiment.<sup>15</sup> Particular directions become easier to follow because of repeated use from the past; we can follow the path without even making a conscious choice, it is simply the way our mind-body move toward, or is moved toward. We know there is something wrong in this world. We know there are discriminations and gender-based violence and racism. We know things need to change, so we *attend* to the problem, we *respond*, we build *competence*, and we *improve care* by coming up with endless variations of individualist solutions aimed toward self-regulation and self-improvement, translated to various therapeutic

14. In the previous chapter, it was discussed that critical and anti-racist feminist scholars have long been critiquing that the therapeutic interventions and prevention strategies following feminist activism in the 70s and 80s have quickly become depoliticized and co-opted back into the psychomedical discourse. The re-alignment with the dominant ways of understanding distress position people who have experienced violence as emotionally unstable and prone to violence (Pupavac, 2001), thus intensifying the legal and medical scrutiny on women and feminized peoples, particularly those who are also positioned as innately incapable of self-control based on racial stereotypes, such as Indigenous, Black, and other racialized peoples (Fahs, 2016; Lam & Ki, 2022; Million, 2013; Murphy, 2007).

15. McGee writes that capitalism is “a cunning system that responds with considerable agility to its own internal contradictions” (p. 44). Reading alongside Ahmed (2019), we may understand such cunningness as a way of redirecting any resistance effort to that which is familiar, that which is easier to follow, that which has been useful before: “There is more to more; more creates more. However much usedness is shaped by the past usedness points toward the future: used as being directed toward that which has become easier to follow” (p. 41). Specifically, the monitorial system is premised on the law of exercise: “an association between a stimulus and a response is strengthened from repeated use” (p. 120), particularly if the response is rewarded by positive affect.

modalities integrating Eastern philosophy or neuroscience or any new ways of enlightenment we have not previously come across. We make changes along the well delineated path, perhaps because it is easy, perhaps we see no other path. But if we think about the care industrial complex as an iteration of the monitorial system and our place in it, then we might see that no amount of personal improvement or individualist solution is going to ameliorate suffering, we will in fact continue to contribute to collective suffering, if we do not dismantle the care industrial complex and its connected capitalist system that produce suffering, precarity, and violence in the first place.

This is not to say that we suffer too, we too are oppressed and therefore off the hook. This is trying to say the opposite. This is to say that our sufferings across different rungs of the social hierarchy are all bound together and interdependent, *and more importantly*, our subjugation is constitutive of exponential subjugating and deleterious effects on those to whom we extend our care work because they have less freedom to disengage from the

requirements of the system.

This is also not to say that if the system does not change as a whole, then individual actions are useless. Thinking with the writing of adrienne maree brown on the notion of fractals, we may understand that systemic transformation in fact requires and consists of *individual intentional actions that are interdependent*.<sup>16</sup> As my teacher Suzanne Thomson would say, *one by one by one*, we build a force stronger than dominating forces. Along this line of thinking-feeling-being, individual learning and actions are necessary, but not with the conditioned desire of upward mobilization in the existing social hierarchy through personal merit or enlightenment, or the mitigation of shame by improving our job performance and compliance, avoiding raising red flags, and staying invisible under the radar. Personal development and changes are necessary for widespread transformation with the intention of shifting conditions that produce injustices and building on conditions for collective liberation, one relationship at a time. For example, how might we engage and build relationships with people with less freedom from the

16. adrienne maree brown (2017) describes fractals as never-ending, infinitely complex patterns that are “self-similar across different scales... by repeating a simple process over and over in an ongoing feedback loop” (p. 51). Grounding an understanding of transformation and creation in nature, brown further theorizes that large-scale structural changes with the emergence of different, more livable, ways of being are created through non-linear, iterative, interdependent, and intentional adaptations and responses to the changes and needs of the community. Transformation processes are therefore necessarily long-term and ongoing, and meaningful relationships are central, with those who are directly impacted by injustices, those who have been labouring to resist injustices, and those with access to resources to move the changes forward, so that cycles of collective transformation of beliefs and practices can occur through the exchanges and gathering of new information and experiences, and over time, we can understand and hold positions we previously believed to be erroneous or impossible. As brown quotes a co-organizer, “Shifting our way of being *is* our tangible outcome. Systems change comes from big groups making big shifts in being” (p. 216, emphasis in original). In the day-to-day work environment, this may look like acknowledging the power relations of race, class, gender, and ability we are engaged in, being “in the complexity of living inside these constructs while evolving beyond them through relationship” (p. 143).

requirements of the system, such that they can exercise decision-making for their own well-being and that of their loved ones, such that there may be ways for them to disengage from the system?

The collaboration between myself and Virginia Jahyu, a fellow practitioner in the creative arts therapies, may be understood as this process of reflection and recognition discussed by brown: we acknowledge the power relations of living and working within the constructs of race, class, gender, and ability, and at the same time finding ways to evolve beyond them by remembering what we have been through as racialized bodies-minds.<sup>17</sup> Our conversations about *how we can practice care without replicating violence* began with remembering our experiences of accessing mental health services, in the past when we were labeled ‘at-risk’ or ‘troubled’ youth, and in more recent years as part of our obligatory personal development as therapists. Our conversations were summarized through a process of collaborative poetry writing that unfolded as we spoke: we took turns telling stories and sharing experiences, we began taking notes of what the other

17. In the introduction of the zine series, we described our experiences of accessing mental health services as racialized women as follows:

“The felt-sense of harm in these relationships. Experiences of feeling dismissed, silenced, feeling small, not given space to explore how racism impacted our feelings/thinking/being, but instead being told that we were thinking and doing wrong. “No but’s!” “I told you so.” “You are not answering my questions.” Seeking service didn’t feel safe. Therapists posing as experts pushing their worldviews as universally beneficial and powering over. Leaving no space for our own cultural wisdoms and the in-betweens. Taking away space for people to exercise power is a form of violence. But our exposure to violence, overt racism, criticism and judgement perhaps made us more sensitive to those who are seen as others. People who have been through a lot perhaps can understand what a lot can look like, and notice violence when it shows up. We have assumptions, biases, and lived experiences. They inform us about the other, and inform the ways we interact with one another” (Jahyu & Ki, 2022). The zines can be accessed at <https://mappingcare.art/pocket-full-of-questions/>



person said, we exchanged our notes and images we found or created that resonated with our words, and created poems from our words and images. Through this process the poem unfolded as a list of questions. The series of zines called *Pocket Full of Questions* therefore emerged. Questions were important in this collaboration, because some of the memories that stood out to both of us were about being asked questions by mental health professionals that made us feel small and inferior.<sup>18</sup> Instead of wanting to learn about us, the questions were asked to backhandedly educate us on Eurocentric psychological definitions of mental and behavioural dysfunctions, to implicitly tell us what we were thinking and doing wrong, to impart techniques that aim for personal fixes. In these encounters we felt an individualist disregard that is ignorant of or indifferent to cultural wisdoms, ancestral knowledge, experiences of racism, and complex connections to the collective. These memories led us to desire creating different spaces for people to share what is important to them, to experience a sense of belonging that we did not feel in our encounters with the mental health

18. Some examples of the questions include (Jahyu & Ki, 2022):

What is culture?

How do I directly invite stories of cultural wisdoms, cultural considerations?

How do I imagine the person would answer?

Do I already hold expectations for what the right answer is?

Does every part of the person's story need to be communicated or expressed in ways I can understand?

Who decides when the story starts and where it ends?

How do I prioritize my commitment to the person rather than my curiosity about the person?

What is the direction of my curiosity? Does it align with a commitment and responsibility to care?

How do we define skilfulness?

What assumptions do we have about what our work is?

What do they say about what our needs are?

What nourishes your skills to ride the waves of uncertainties?

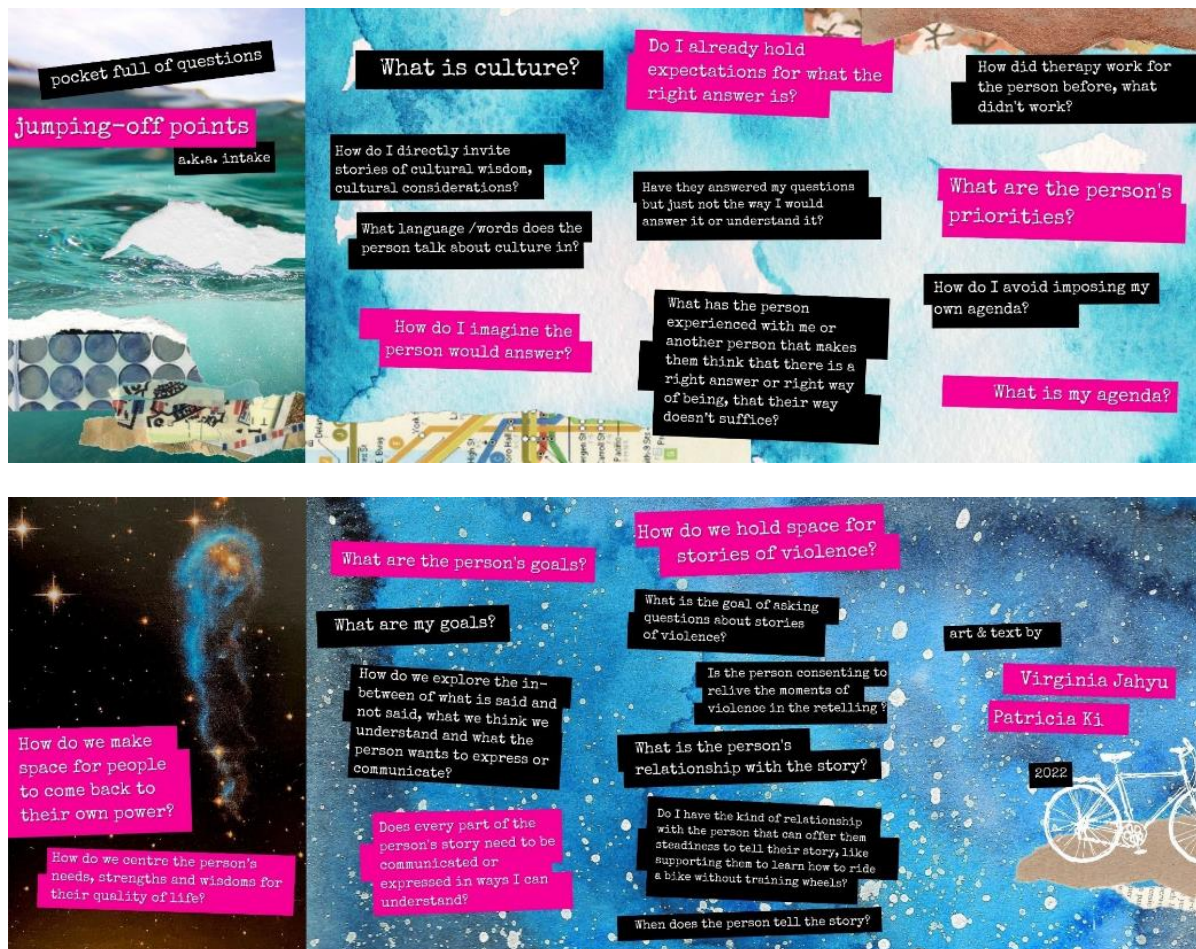
system. They led us to imagine that maybe we can engage with people and build relationships differently by asking different questions. We wonder what would happen if *instead of a toolbox full of therapeutic modalities created by assumed experts, we also carry a pocket full of questions* when we meet people who are looking for support. We wonder what would happen if we *value and use the questions themselves as tools* to name our assumptions, biases, implicit standards from which we measure people based on our own experiences, to name the patterns of harm and violence we are potentially replicating. We wonder if questions will help us form *new tools to dismantle the master's house* of subjugation and unbelonging, so we used the zines to invite other practitioners to ask questions, because if many of us ask questions that de-centre the dominant, then quite possibly we can collectively create these spaces of belonging that we wish to see.

To make the zines as accessible as possible and to give back to the professional and local communities on whom we rely to produce knowledge, digital versions are available for

download with no costs, and full-colour print copies can be requested with a donation to Toronto Indigenous Harm Reduction, an Indigenous- and queer-led grassroots organization that supports Indigenous peoples who are houseless. Understanding that we work in the construct of psychotherapy, for relevance and ease of use, the zines were organized based on the themes of 'intake,' 'sessions,' and 'self-reflections,' which are terms commonly used in psychotherapy training and practices. The questions within the zine, however, invite the reader to evolve beyond, to subvert the often taken-for-granted therapist-client power relation, to make space for the knowledge of the service user to take the lead, to question the skills we think we have and the knowledges and experiences with which they are shaped, to put ourselves in the positions of being wrong. As brown encourages us to ask, *what can grow from this place of being wrong?*<sup>19</sup> What different ways of relating can grow from this, ways that may shift the conditions that produced my wrongful assumptions in the first place?

19. To activists and organizers working alongside others toward change, brown (2017) suggests that "the place where you are wrong might be the most fertile ground for connecting with and receiving others" (p. 94).

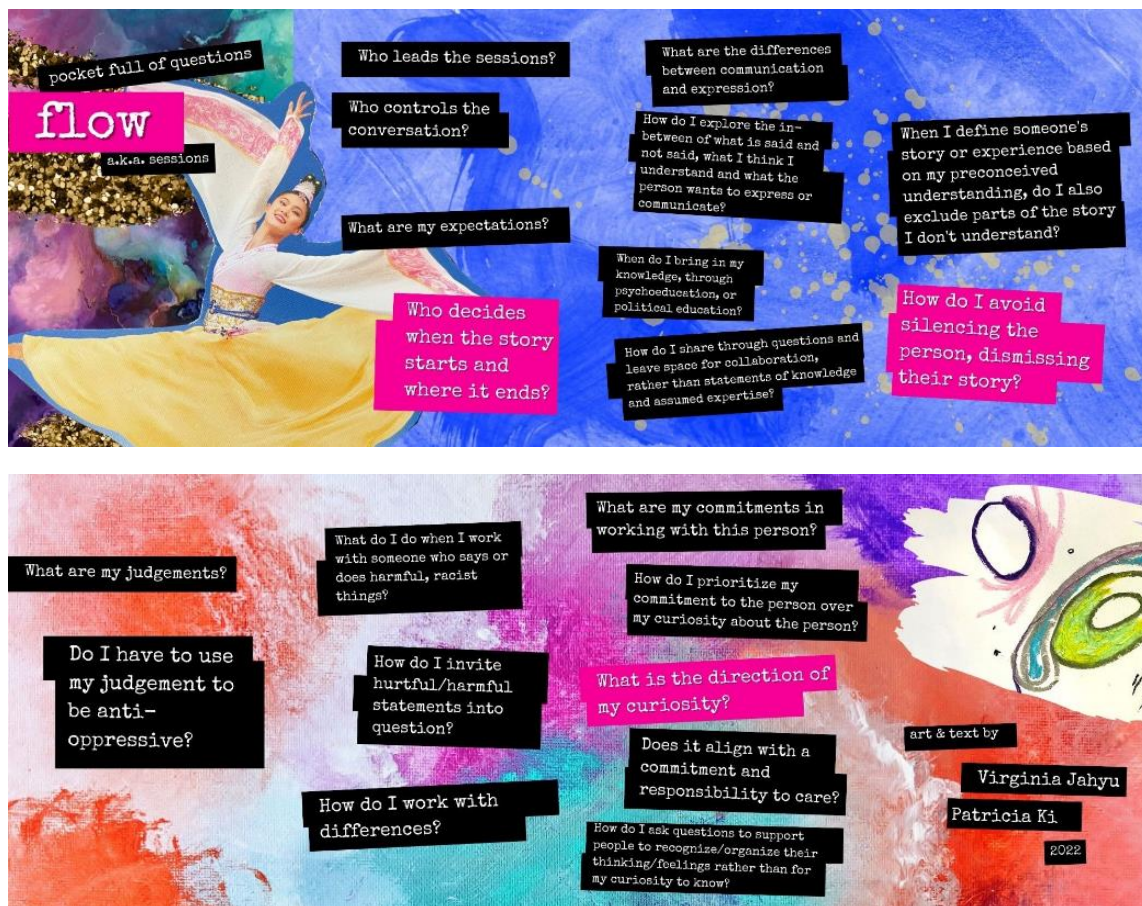
**Figure 10**  
*Jumping Off Points*



Note. Virginia Jahyu & Patricia Ki, *Jumping Off Points*, 2022, part of a series of zines titled *Pocket Full of Questions*, accessible at <https://mappingcare.art/pocket-full-of-questions/>

Figure 11

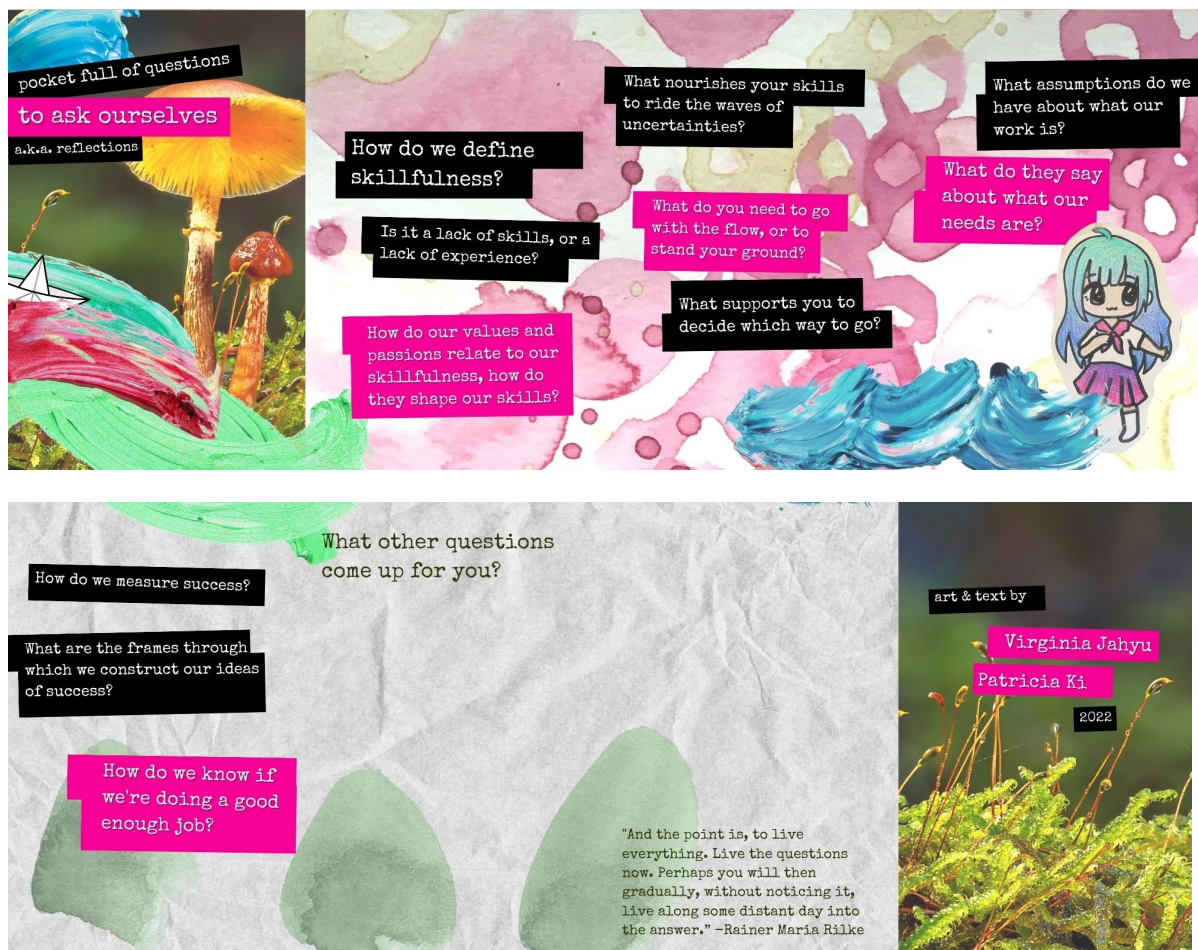
*Flow*



Note. Virginia Jahyu & Patricia Ki, *Flow*, 2022, part of a series of zines titled *Pocket Full of Questions*, accessible at <https://mappingcare.art/pocket-full-of-questions/>



**Figure 12**  
*Ask Ourselves*



*Note.* Virginia Jahyu & Patricia Ki, *Ask Ourselves*, 2022, part of a series of zines titled *Pocket Full of Questions*, accessible at <https://mappingcare.art/pocket-full-of-questions/>

## Ethics of Infinity

The place where our preconceived assumptions are wrong, the place where we do not know, the place where we are uncertain, may be the most fertile ground for connecting with others. Thinking with Amy Rossiter's writing on the theorization of ethics by Emmanuel Levinas, knowing, or knowledge, can even be understood as a kind of violence.<sup>20</sup> The ghost stories told in the previous chapter illustrate how Indigenous, racialized and feminized people have been dehumanized, demonized, and rendered invisible through the imposition of dominating conceptual schemas of what it means to be human. The ghost stories show that this violence in no way remains symbolic but in turn, as it is intended to, legitimizes and enables literal violence, actual murders, and the extinguishing of lives and lifeworlds, for the purpose of domination and conquest.

As we contemplate care in the contexts of these ghost stories, the poetic inquiries created in collaboration with Jahyu can be understood as an

20. The foundation of ethical relations, for Levinas (1979), lies in unknowability, whereby a being can only be in relation "with what it cannot absorb" (p. 80). Levinas uses the term "Infinity of the Other" (p.80) to describe the irreducible singularity of the other, which Amy Rossiter (2011) further describes as the moment of sociality that transcends one's understanding of the other, and therefore commands recognition of the other as an equally unique being rather than an extension of one's knowing. Rossiter helpfully explains that, the concept of totality in Levinas' text on ethics, *Totality and Infinity*, refers to knowledge, or all that can be thought and can be said, "the concepts we deploy that allow us to feel that we know or understand another person. Totality is our knowledge of others" (p. 983). Totality is knowing others as an instance of the same as our knowledge, assumptions, beliefs, and representations of an other. It is a form of violence against what Levinas calls Infinity, described by Rossiter as "the inexhaustible, irreducible singularity of people: it is what is outside the Same" (p. 983). Levinas therefore insists on ethics before knowledge, a deliberate way of responding to the face of the other first with the recognition and acknowledgement that their singularity or uniqueness exceeds and eludes our understanding and knowledge. Rossiter summarizes an encounter that enacts ethics before knowledge as: "I must refrain from treating the other person as an extension of *my* categories, *my* theories, *my* habitual or learned

attempt and invitation to resist against totality, that of professionalized care and our own. In resistance we unpack fundamental conceptual schemas that are often taken for granted: What *is* culture? What are my expectations? What is my agenda? What are the priorities of the person sitting in front of me? What are their goals? *What is our work?* Particularly, the inquiries and the way they came into being challenge the conceptualization and application of ethics in professionalized care, with the professional or the social worker or the therapist or the counsellor positioned as the arbitrator of ethics by applying a standardized set of rules and steps.<sup>21</sup> If we have been told as therapists that we have to get it right, then what if we start from a place of getting it wrong? What is the knowledge that shapes the way I see this person in front of me? The process of collaborative poetry-writing itself, the practice of flowing with and responding to the unfolding of each other's words, without preconceived notions or expectations of what the outcome will look like, defies the professional structure of working: following a plan, an agenda, or a goal from the top down.

ways of perceiving others. Indeed, I must refrain from seeing the person through *any* system of human thought" (p. 985). Drawing on Levinas, Rossiter argues that ethics must precede knowledge, because when we perceive and absorb an other as an extension of our knowing, we enact violence or even "symbolic murder" (p. 985). She gave the example of conducting an assessment of a family and looking for "schizophrenic tendencies" in the family dynamics (p. 982). Disappointed in herself for not being able to identify any such tendencies, she referred the family to a more senior therapist. Later in life and thinking with Levinas ethics, she remarked, "I still feel horrified when I imagine the experience of the family as I tried to turn them into an exemplar of my knowledge" (p. 982). She explains that, for Levinas, "the face of the Other looks at us and implicitly says 'Do not kill me', meaning do not kill my singularity by making me an example of a pre-existing conceptual schema. If you do this, you murder my uniqueness" (p. 985). Importantly, she asked, "what could have been different if I had believed that my knowledge of the family with the schizophrenic son could not possible represent the totality of that family? What if there had been room for noticing that which overflowed the theory of schizophrenogenic families? If I had more belief in the inadequacy of knowledge itself, could I have done less violent social work?" (p. 987)

21. Rossiter (2011) writes that Levinas' insistence of ethics before knowledge, or an ethics that begins with the other's irreducible singularity, "is a radical departure from any



The experiences that underlie the collaboration with Jahyu come from mental health services, but a top-down, defer-to-authority model of ethical decision-making is ubiquitous in most if not all professionalized care settings, from childcare, disability care, healthcare, to eldercare.<sup>22</sup> Such a model and practices of ethics promise our safe return to the side of innocence, the assurance that we are doing the right thing in complex relational and ethical situations, if we *become knowledgeable* of and follow a set of authoritative, universal rules, which we then apply through an autonomous, rational cognitive schema *to understand and know* the other and what is good for them. The ghost stories of colonization, racialization, and feminization teach us that the figure of authority is the white cisheterosexual masculine ideal. Our ability to be ethical thus rests on our individual self-governance and self-improvement in cognitive and emotion-regulation skills that approximate the white, masculinized ideal of unaffected rationality and independence. It is a process of becoming, in Tronto's words, a *morally adapt elite* who is able to deliver the *right* kind of care. The

description of professional ethics, where ethics originates in the internal cogitation of the worker and is delivered up to the client" (p. 985). Susan Sherwin (1992) defines western philosophical study of ethics, or moral theory, as "value questions about human conduct" (p. 35), an everyday search for a systematic approach to evaluate "what should be done or what should have been done during difficult moments" (p. 35). In professionalized care, according to Rossiter (2006), this quest is translated to professional codes of ethics that point "the way to a horizon of innocence and 'getting it right'" (p. 139). The reliance on a systematic approach that promises to minimize harm and maximize benefits, as well as minimize cost and maximize profit, in the care industrial complex stems from the need of human service professions to vye for legitimacy within the biomedical discourse by aligning with objectivity and rationality in the practices of helping and intervening in human lives (Chapman & Withers, 2019; Rossiter et al., 2000). In an earlier study, Rossiter and colleagues (2000) further assert that the social imaginary of what ethics means is primarily shaped by the discourse of individualism, such that ethical decision-making and actions are guaranteed through the rational, cognitively correct thought processes of free-willed individuals in carrying out a neutral set of rules. Echoing feminist critiques of western philosophical traditions, Rossiter et al. posit that individuals positioned to be best suited in ethical decision-making in the discourse of professional ethics are those who embody the "autonomous, independent, masculine ideal of the Enlightenment" (p. 90). The dominance of

delineation of feminist ethics of care that involves cultivating the right kind of emotions and other prerequisite skills likely reflects the diffusion of this top-down, authoritative model of ethics beyond professionalized care and into academic research and theorizing, political thoughts, and everyday social encounters, even in spaces that aim to defy patriarchal and other oppressive rules. The ghost stories of colonization, racialization, and feminization also teach us that the lives and lifeworlds that defy and destabilize the authority of whiteness and masculinity do not come to matter in many of our social spheres. The dominant systematic way of knowing what is the right thing to do can therefore be understood as one of the social processes through which some people do not come to matter by leaving out, in fact effectively erasing, the concerns of those deemed other, the sufferings and injustices not defined as matters of ethics, the lifeworlds deemed undeserving of ethical attention.

The process of collaborative poetry writing, for me, also opens up the question of whether it is possible to regard the other with utter unknowing.

the discourse of professional ethics not only shapes the application of codes and standards, but it effectively delineates what is or is not a matter of ethics, while obscuring the operations of dominance that construct the norms and boundaries enacted through the codes by presenting them as universally applicable truths (Chapman, 2012; Rossiter et al., 2000). Indeed, seemingly innate characteristics that practitioners are expected to possess in order to enact correct ethical processes, such as independence, locus of control, and ego strength, are mediated by gender, race, and class, and are in fact descriptors of white male privilege (Rossiter et al., 2000).

22. Chapman (2012) points out that in this discursive tradition of professional ethics, we as practitioners believe ourselves to be acting ethically “inasmuch as we defer to authority” (p. 151). Accountability is therefore conflated with “top-down accountability” (p. 156), and ethics is conflated with professional codes. As such, we understand our obligations as being accountable to a written document, rather than the people we are in relationship with. The conflation of obedience to professional codes and acting ethically depoliticizes ethical practices and relations, erases other practices and traditions that are important to the ways different communities live into their responsibilities to human and non-human beings, and discounts concerns that are not addressed in the codes as not requiring ethical responsibilities (Chapman, 2012; Million, 2013; Rossiter et al., 2000; Shotwell, 2016). In fact, such conflation may even enable unethical practices through particular applications or the

The invitation that I extended to the collaborators was to contemplate together how we can practice care without replicating violence. I made a conscious effort to tell myself that the collaborators' experiences of being service users and service providers are necessarily very different from my own, that what I assumed to be their experiences would likely be inaccurate. Nevertheless, in the collaborative writing process, when I took notes of what Jahyu said, while I could not predict what she would say, I likely heard and wrote down words that resonated with my experiences and understanding. I likely held onto words and ideas that fit into my pre-existing conceptual schema of the world. If her stories challenged or did not fit with my understanding, I would have also written them down in ways that made sense to me. To take a further step back, the focus of the collaboration itself was not unknown from the beginning. The central question, which is a frame that I impose on the conversation, likely shaped how the collaborators represented their experiences in their stories.

As such, can we meet the face of the

mere existence of a document that claims ethicality to justify inadequate responses to social injustice, such as institutional racism and structural violence (Chapman, 2012). Recall the work of Million (2013), Chrisjohn and McKay (2017), and Stevenson (2014), which illustrate multiple historical and current incidences in which state-declared commitment to the health and well-being of colonized peoples are operationalized by individualist, neoliberal, and biopolitical programs for physical and psychological self-care, which place the onus of well-being and self-improvement on the colonized, thereby perpetuating colonial control and sidestepping Indigenous sovereignty.

other without knowing? As soon as the other comes into our awareness, whether as the view of a face or the sound of a voice or the embodied sense of a presence, it becomes a *construct* that is only intelligible and recognizable by our knowledge of what it means to be human, a knowledge that is always discursively produced and shaped. It seems impossible to meet an other with utter unknowing, if we follow Butler's theorization that no agency of the self or reality of the others is outside of cultural intelligibility.<sup>23</sup> The terms with which we understand ourselves and others as humans are always already inside the relationship between self and other, always already there delineating the parameters of the encounter before it happens. At the same time, we do not have a choice not to respond to the other; to turn away, to be indifferent, or to not respond in itself is a response.<sup>24</sup> In this way, do subjugating relationships simply repeat themselves over and over without any hope for anything to be different? Also following Butler, while not repeating the relational encounters is not an option, our task can be to repeat differently.<sup>25</sup> What does it mean to repeat differently,

23. Butler (1990) writes that "To enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice, for the 'I' that might enter is already inside: there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have" (p. 202).

24. Drawing on Levinas' theorization of ethics, Rossiter (2011) writes that the presence of the face of the other "initiates ethics because we are not free to not respond, even if this response is turning away. Indeed, our own subjectivity is contingent on interaction and communication with others. We are not able to not respond by virtue of the structure of communication itself" (p. 984).

25. Regarding the social relations that produce the constructs and performances of gender, Butler (1990) writes that "The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (pp. 202-203, emphasis in original).

such that we can eventually displace the norms that shape our conceptual schemes that enable the repetition of subjugating relations? Further, what does it mean, and what can be done, to repeat differently, when our own subjectivity is contingent on interactions with others, when our own being and becoming are interconnected with those of the others?

What I know of me, which I use to know you, is generated from my interactions with you and others before you. My privileges and subjugation are bound, interlocked, and mutually constituted with the exaltation and oppression of others. There are things that I do know, such as the operations of racist violence and misogyny in this world and in lives of particular groups, such as the belief that every person deserves care, even perpetrators of violence.<sup>26</sup> This knowing about violence and about care emerged through my relationships with others. Levinas theorizes that one can only be in an ethical relationship with an other whom one cannot absorb into oneself, whom one cannot subsume as an extension of one's knowledge. This

26. This knowing about the operations of violence was pointed out to me in a conversation with Dr. Fyre Jean Graveline, Indigenous educator in the healing arts, in which I shared the approach of entering a counselling session with a person, particularly an Indigenous or racialized person, without preconceived notions of that person's experience. Dr. Graveline responded by stating, "but you do know." She reminded me that we do know colonial violence happens, racist oppressions happen, capitalist exploitations happen, systemic injustices happen, environmental destructions happen, with people who are racialized, feminized, disabled, and poor bearing the worst effects of these operations of violence. She reminded me that we do know and we have a responsibility to bring this into conversations with people, so that they would not be led to continue feeling that it is their own individual faults that they are suffering, to continue believing what the neoliberal, capitalist system would want us to believe. Such a system would also want us to believe that incidents of violence can be solely

theory of ethics may appear to position self and other as separate, self-contained beings, which may seem at odds with the theorization that our own subjectivity is dependent on and formed through interactions with others. If our own sense of self is dependent on our interconnections with others, connections beyond communications of words, are entanglements of affect and labour and values and norms and privileges and oppressions that are interlocked, then we shape each other into being, and through these processes of mutual shaping and becoming we share something we both know. I know something about you, and you know something about me, in ways that are not limited to language and cognitive understanding, but a tacit and embodied knowing and being.<sup>27</sup> If, following Butler, the ontological basis of my being is bound to that of others, then it is not possible not to know others. At the same time, if we can never fully know others, and if we are always in the interconnected process of becoming with others, then we also cannot fully know what we will become, we also cannot fully know ourselves. Perhaps we can also recognize

blamed on the people who perpetrated them, rather than pay attention to the social conditions that give rise to violence in the first place. Kai Cheng Thom (2019) therefore reminds me that to shift the violent conditions in our shared world, we must recognize that we all have the capacity to perpetrate violence, and we all have perpetrated or otherwise been complicit in violence, not just certain people doing particular jobs or from a particular community or class. And as such, to shift the violent conditions in our shared world toward caring conditions, we must believe that every person, including those who have perpetrated violence, is deserving of care and love.

27. Butler (2021) further explains that while singularity and distinctness between people exist and cannot be entirely knowable, such differentiating characteristics of beings are also “defined and sustained by virtue of their interrelationality” (p. 16). She insists on an understanding of individual based on an overarching sense of the interrelational, such that the bodily boundary is understood not to be the end of the person but rather the threshold of the person, “the site of passage and porosity, the evidence of an openness to alterity that is definitional of the body itself” (p. 16). Violence, as described by Dr. Graveline and Thom above, in Butler’s terms, is therefore not only an attack on the interdependent relationships and the person, “but perhaps most fundamentally, it is an attack on ‘bonds’” (p. 16), the bonds between beings at the level of social ontology or “a metaphysics of the social” (p. 16) that makes life possible at all.

ourselves as infinite beyond the totality of what we currently know. I believe that here lies the possibility of *repeating differently*: recognizing that our acts of responding to others differently is necessarily shaped by the unfolding relationship between ourselves and others, and will take shape beyond our existing knowledge and imagination.

Repeating or responding differently requires that we recognize, that we *know*, how power relations and norms have been repeated and how people have been responded to within these relations and norms that are violent, so that we can *act differently* to avoid repeating the same acts that perpetuate such relations and norms. In this way, as mentioned before, repeating differently also requires that we know something about what needs to be different: the oppressive or violent conditions that others have been subjected to, and the effects that these conditions have on certain others. In other words, repeating differently requires that we know something about the others, preferably without requiring the others having to exert the labour to tell us and help us

understand. As such, what would it look like to *both hold limited knowledge and recognize the infinite unknowability of others and of ourselves?*

Recognizing that we hold limited knowledge means that not-knowing is always aspirational, it is crucially important, yet impossible. We will always enter any interaction with anyone holding our own knowing. Nevertheless, can we repeat the ways we engage with others differently toward an ethical relationship while aspiring not to know? What might holding both limited knowledge and infinite unknowability look like in practice, in everyday living?

The previous pages have explicated in many ways how care is an operation of biopolitical discipline. Care is extended to those who are deemed *deserving*, whose particular bodies-minds and ways of being can be reframed within the boundaries of the norms as dysfunctional and in need of regulation, to enable the extraction of usability from their bodies for the sustainment of the existing social order and the profit from the care industrial complex, through the provision of care that promises healing in the future. Those



who are deemed undeserving, whose minds-bodies and ways of life continue to haunt the boundaries of the norms and threaten to destabilize the social order, are left out of benefits, left without resources for their lifeworlds to continue into the future. According to this norm, then, we extend care when we judge that people deserve it, when we know that the law determines that they have the right to a particular set of benefits, when we can fit people into our image of a subjugated identity of abnormality, failure, or inadequacy, be it a traumatized person or a disabled person or a houseless person.<sup>28</sup> This spells out exactly the process of subsuming the infinity of an other into an extension of our knowledge derived from a top-down system of authority and effectively annihilating the other.

To shift this pattern of caring and distribution of resources based on knowledge, to repeat differently through our unfolding interconnections with unknowable others, it may be helpful to think with Shildrick's theorization of ethics before rights, which she delineates by drawing on Derrida's concept of *unconditional or absolute hospitality*.<sup>29</sup> It is an ethics of

28. Recall here Shildrick's (2005) theorization that the subject "no longer stands before the law awaiting judgement, but is constituted by the subject effects of its capillary circulation, and sustained by a system of *reiterative* norms, including those that bestow rights" (p. 32, emphasis in original). As such, various forms of ambiguous embodiments and ways of being are "'toned down and muffled' to become implanted in the whole problematic of the abnormal around which judicial, medical, and later psychiatric technologies resolve" (p. 34). In order to attain civil rights and benefits, a person who is marked by difference must then "remake herself as a legal subject who is consistent with the requirements of normativity. Where that is not possible, she may be accorded 'special' rights that decisively *denote her failure* to achieve the privileged standards, and that position her difference as an inadequacy" (p. 36, emphasis in original).

29. For Derrida, the demand of the "incommensurable other" (Shildrick, 2005, p. 41), or infinity of the other, in Levinas' term, "is for a response and responsibility that does not defer, but engages with alterity now. The project, then, is actively committed to the ethical, not as another set of normative standards, but as a projective exercise that is open to the risk of undecidability" (p. 41-42). Derrida's notion of undecidability emphasizes that the "shape of justice to come is unpredictable, but that is not to say that present *injustice* is unrecognizable" (p. 42, emphasis in original). In other words, we cannot fully know the other, and yet we extend

valuing people as inherently deserving of care before we know whether they are deserving or not, according to the law or our own judgment. Our responses are based on our experiences and knowledge of systemic oppressions and material deprivation of certain groups, our repeated witnessing of stories in which some people are always left out of the category of deserving human and cast out of belonging, our recognition that rights-based frames are often part of this system of injustice, constructed to uphold the boundaries between normativity and abnormality, to sustain cisheteropatriarchal relations of domination and subjugation, to maximize capitalist productivity and profit.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, we cannot know exactly the experiences, needs, values, hopes, and wishes of the other, including their experiences of knowledges of oppression and violence that we think we share some knowledge of in our political awareness. The infinity of the person's uniqueness exceeds the totality of the knowledge we have of ourselves and of people and of the world, and despite that we extend care, we offer what we think can meet the needs of their

care, not as a promise of a future healing or justice, but to address the material injustices now, even if we cannot fully know whether our responses can result in justice for the other. As such, unconditional or absolute hospitality is "hospitality that owes nothing to the comfort of homogeneity or stability, and that is prepared to expose both individual self and collective standards to the risk of the unknown and unforeseeable. It comes into play precisely where the conventional juridical and moral discourse reaches its limit... absolute hospitality is given *before* the other is identified" (p. 42-43, emphasis in original).

30. For example, Nancy Christie (2000) traced the historical development of the Canadian welfare state between 1900 and the end of the Second World War from a gender perspective, and found that while special provisions were established to provide income support to women, such as the provincial mothers' allowance legislations and the federal Family Allowance Act in 1944, benefits entitlement were based not on women's inherent rights as citizens but on their reproductive labour and participation in heteropatriarchal marriage and motherhood, all of which contributed to the sustainability of the national workforce and economy as well as the reinforcement of dominant moral and gender norms. As such, women and gender diverse people in alternative family forms, such as unmarried mothers, were excluded from benefits. Moreover, in an ableist society where body-mind differences were commonly deemed undesirable, disabled and mad women were less likely to be married or mothering and

bodies-minds, we try to come up with ways beyond what the conventional programmatic or moral frameworks offer, knowing we will not get it entirely right. Unconditional or absolute hospitality may look like putting energy into creating conditions through which people known or unknown to us, people we have or have not met, can access resources to meet their different needs, conditions of care in our shared world that also impact our interconnected and interdependent lives in ways we may or may not know.<sup>31</sup>

One might critique that the ideas of undecidability and absolute hospitality seem abstract, theoretical, and removed from everyday practice, but I see absolute hospitality in the stories of organizing and advocacy efforts that many groups, activists, and ordinary people have long been putting forth. The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty persistently lobbying for universal basic income. Toronto Indigenous Harm Reduction providing food, COVID-testing kits, medicine, ceremony, and art supplies to houseless people's encampments in public parks and resisting eviction by the City. People

would therefore be excluded from the most basic levels of social safety net. Christie thus concludes that Canada's welfare state is primarily an ongoing extension of a patriarchal and neoliberal agenda: the discipline of the male breadwinner ideal, masculine self-reliance, and feminine dependence. Sunera Thobani (2000) further theorizes that access to benefits are further restricted through racist immigration policies, from the Continuous Journey Regulation and the Chinese Immigration Act as previously discussed, to the point systems implemented in the 1960s to limit immigration to those who were proven to be economically productive, with "the construction of immigrant in general, and immigrant women in particular, as one of the most potent threads to the nation's prosperity and well-being" (p. 35).

31. The Derridean notions of absolute hospitality and undecidability of justice therefore foreground not only uncertainty and fluidity of ethical relations, but also their interconnectedness. They recognize "the impossibility of a fully autonomous individuality, and indeed the inescapable connective vulnerability, of any one of us" (Shildrick, 2005, p. 39). Justice is always imperfect in the present and is always yet to come, through the unpredictable unfolding of relationships between incommensurable others, recognizing that "the incommensurability of the other is not peculiar to those at the margins, but epitomises each and every encounter" (Shildrick, 2005, p. 41). As such, to transgress the law with the ethics of absolute hospitality toward any incommensurable other can shift collective

living at the encampment, who may have been strangers to one another, watching out for each other to safeguard against COVID-related medical emergencies and overdose. Community health centres establishing harm reduction and safe injection sites in brick-and-mortar settings and, when those are not possible, in tents in Moss Park. My coworker spending full workdays helping a resident pack up their entire apartment in preparation for bedbug treatment, even when she was explicitly told by management that this was against workplace health and safety policy and therapeutic boundaries. Art and video projects by people who are houseless, disabled and poor that resist the social norms and arrangements that render them invisible and nonhuman, that insist on the mattering of their lives and lifeworlds. Continuing to make space for someone in the community and not barring them from accessing shared spaces, support, and resources after they have done harm to others. After all, to practice absolute hospitality includes extending hospitality to people who have perpetrated violence, grounded in the recognition that we can all perpetrate violence, that every

access for other others, even though in ways we cannot fully know.

person is dignified in their infinite unknowability, that every person exists as a unique coalescence of stardust from this infinitely expanding universe, that every person is valuable beyond measures and therefore deserves care or even love, even if we judge them to be unworthy within our limited knowledge.

The infinity of others and of ourselves therefore weaves together an ever-shifting web of care, perhaps parallel to what María Puig de la Bellacasa calls impure entanglements, or what Deleuze and Guattari call a rhizome.<sup>32</sup> Unknowability means that the right way of caring cannot be predicted by any kind of moral theory calculations, or the caregiver's intention or ability to be empathic, build relationship, or self-care in the right way. It means that, whether people intend to care or not, whether they realize they are practicing care or not, our ways of being and surviving are always already entangled in care relations that emerge through mutually constituted feedback loops of interactions, of giving and taking, of gains and losses, of comfort and suffering, of feeling right in one context but wrong in another. This entangled

32. María Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) posits that the circulation of care is always already “fully permeated with ethicality even when agencies are not intentionally ethical” (p. 215). As such, it is not utilitarian calculations that oblige care, but rather the ongoing re-entering into “impure entanglements” (p. 184) with one another that all beings co-produce an unpredictable web of interdependent care through assemblages of ordinary practices, labour, affects, relationships, and bodily contacts, which are constantly reconfigured as they multiply and expand in unevenly responding to demands emerging from relationships. Assemblages of care may also be understood as rhizomic, a process defined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) as “*a map and not a tracing*” (p. 12, emphasis in original), in which connected paths may explode into new directions, and replications of existing structures are parts of the rhizome but may be broken open and grafted with different connections for “strange new use” (p. 15), in a perpetual becoming through “the production of the unconscious” (p. 18), with “new statements, different desires” (p. 18), and alternative ethics. It is a system of happenstance: proceeding without assuming that life has a definite shape or direction, being redirected by what is encountered, re-creating a sense of purpose with what is found (Ahmed, 2010; 2017).

web of care is a map of what we know of the world but it is not a tracing or replica of the assumed, definitive shape or direction of life that is propagated by capitalism and other ruling discourses. Recognizing the unknowability of others is therefore also to recognize the unknowability in how our own lives will proceed as they are entangled with the lives of others in relations of care. Following Ahmed's notion of happenstance, it is to proceed in life expecting to be redirected into new ways of thinking, feeling, knowing, being, caring, hoping, constituted through an entangled web of interactions that shifts and expands like the universe itself.

### **Dispersing Care**

If practicing care based on ethics before knowledge requires that we think and act beyond the norm of deferring to the authority of knowledge as a set of top-down, ostensibly universally applicable rules, then a counter strategy of care, or repeating our care practices differently, may be a bottom-up strategy.<sup>33</sup> Following Spade and Chapman, bottom-up strategies of care centre the needs of those who are

33. Writing about mutual aid, Dean Spade (2020) advocates bottom-up, anti-authoritarian strategies for change that work to dismantle or curb the expansion of oppressive systems while building more survivable social relations and alternative infrastructures that are specifically designed to meet the needs of people who are particularly marginalized. In human services, Chapman (2012) suggests that a bottom-up strategy may involve measuring the effects of our work not by standardized outcomes, codes of ethics, or compliance of the service users to our service plans, but by the service users' narratives and perceptions of us as oppressive or racist or

particularly marginalized and who often bear the brunt of the impacts of social injustices. If we keep in mind also Levinasian and Derridian ethics of the unknowability of the other and the undecidability of justice, then we can imagine that a bottom-up strategy may be a plan that is not going to look like any single person's preconceived notion of how things should be. It may be a process that unfolds and is shaped through relationships between people who cannot fully know each others' needs, through the ongoing becoming of every person and every part of the plan. Needs change over time and according to different contexts. Meeting the needs of one person may compromise access for another. For example, scheduling an event at a certain time to accommodate someone's childcare or work obligations makes the event inaccessible to someone else whose medication regimen conflicts with the event schedule. Meeting the needs of a person who has experienced harm from another person may mean that the person who has done harm will be asked not to access certain spaces for resources that they need. There is indeed no perfect justice.

helpful or kind. This bottom-up model of ethics and accountability requires developing practices that enable us to accept others' perception of our actions as oppressive and racist (Chapman, 2013). It therefore rejects an expert-based service system that assumes a knowledgeable and morally adapt service provider by asking people what they need instead of making paternalistic assumptions about their best interests (Chapman, 2013; Hobart & Kneese, 2020), thereby collaborating with people "in ways that we were told not to imagine" (Spade, 2020, p. 138).

Nevertheless, what might attempts of bottom-up strategies look like In the everyday practices of social services and mental health settings? Some may identify processes of gathering opinions and experiences about access needs from service users, such as community consultation, initial intake, or ongoing service review, as forms of bottom-up strategy. People from marginalized groups may even be invited to participate in decision-making and service provision from their knowledge of lived experiences of marginalization. The existence of policy and documentation of processes identified as community-based or person-centred then serve as proof that the service system has addressed the diverse concerns of the community and fulfilled its responsibility to provide the care that the community needed.<sup>34</sup> The worker has logged their direct-client-contact hours; the manager has facilitated the community consultation meeting; the worker submitted the case notes detailing the client's response to the intake questions; the manager has taken minutes of the community meeting; the client-signed copy of the service plan has been filed; the new

34. Commenting on the key role of paper trail in organizational diversity work, Ahmed (2017) writes that the "very orientation toward writing good documents can block action, insofar as the document then gets taken up as evidence that we have 'done it'... The idea that the document is doing something is what could allow the institution to block recognition of the work that there is to do" (p. 104-105). The co-option of grassroots peer support work is an example of how documentation can block meaningful change. Activists observe that grassroots peer support that was initially developed in response to the violence within the mental health system had been gradually co-opted by the very system that they were resisting against over the past 20 years (Penney & Prescott, 2016). From the provision of funding and oversight to independent peer



peer worker positions are filled and they too are required to complete all client reporting procedures. All of these documentations are incorporated into statistical reports for the appropriate governmental department. All of this paper trail constructs an image of care while perpetuating *discipline as care*, by way of gathering knowledge about the others, so that the ethically adapted elites can document that they have 'done the right things' and sustain their social positions.

If we believe that each person is infinitely unknowable, then the process of asking people to provide definitive answers for what their care needs, then devising and holding people to service or program plans that are fixed to those answers of the moment, can also be understood as a way of negating the people's irreducible singularity, which is a way of violence. I then wonder to what extent the question of '*how we can practice care without replicating violence*' is answerable. How do we know how to practice care in response to the others if we cannot know what the others' care needs are, if we cannot know what justice will look like for the

support organizations, to the hiring of peer workers to deliver mental health services with the same functions of social control and surveillance, the efforts to shift organizational structures, funding priorities, and policies through the centring of psychiatric survivors' experiential knowledge are shunted into neoliberal projects, "leaving intact the coercive structure of systems that rely on the deprivation of liberty" (Penney & Prescott, 2016, p. 856), or even used to "coerce subjects into new forms of surveillance and unpaid labor, to make up for institutional neglect, and even to position some groups against others, determining who is worthy of care and who is not" (Hobart & Kneese, 2020, p. 2). This resonates with Ahmed's (2019) theorization of the monitor as a figure within a hierarchical system of social control, the creation of a particular class of people who are conditioned to police themselves in order to police others.

unknowable others? This is not to say that we simply give up on asking others what support or care they would like to have, or not take people's responses seriously. Whatever response we receive, however, the concept of care as an entangled, ever-shifting web between unknowable others reminds us that care needs and their required responses can never be fixed or pinned down to a definitive plan or course of actions. At the end of the day, what we do know is what injustices and uncaring look like as we have experienced them. This may be why the collaborators of this project have answered the question about practicing care by remembering experiences of injustices. This may also be why Chapman suggests that a bottom-up strategy may require making space for people to tell us how we have been oppressive or racist, how we have been complicit in injustices, how we have perpetrated violence, as well as how we may have been helpful, in the name of care. Knowing what we have done, part of the work then becomes finding ways to practice care differently such that we can curb the harmful effects of our complicity in violence or stop our acts of harm in our

relationships with people. Perhaps this is one way of simultaneously navigating limited knowledge and the infinite unknowability of the others.

In mainstream professionalized care settings, provision of care is often structured upon a kind of power relation in which the worker or service providing system has control over the person accessing services. The former decides whether the latter's needs are valid and deserving of fulfilment. The former *dispenses* resources that the latter needs. This power relation brings to mind the question, *why do we believe that there needs to be a special class of people who do the caring?* We would not be surprised to know that the discourses of race, class, gender, and colonial domination mediate the legitimization of a specific class as caregivers who are endowed with the authority to intervene in people's lives, and further relegate other groups as caregivers who are designated for devalued manual labour.<sup>35</sup> My own care labour as a racialized, cisgender woman doing primarily intellectual work is shaped by these intersecting discourses and ruling systems. Learning from Butler, resistance

35. The classification of who is fit to provide care is also mediated by Western psychiatric and colonial control. Chapman and Withers (2019) find that while accounts of the British and North American charity organizations and settlement houses are naturalized as a shared history of social work, racialized people's practices of collective caring, protection from violence, and feminist resistance against interlocking oppression are "frequently dismissed as particular to specific populations" (p. 79). This unilateral erasure can be understood as the classification of appropriate caregivers based on "the moral economy of white supremacy" (p. 78).

against these systems does not result from not caring. If we also take seriously the theorization that ethicality and care relations always already exist between all beings in our shared world, then it is not possible not to care. The task is therefore not a matter of not repeating the subject positions of a raced, classed, and gendered caregiver, but how to repeat differently, to subvert the normative hierarchical care relations. If within these normative relations care and resources are being *dispensed* from one who is higher on the social hierarchy to one who is lower on the social hierarchy, then perhaps one way of subverting or disrupting it would be to *disperse* care across the social body. We might begin by recognizing places where care is *already dispersed*, already reciprocal, but not acknowledged or supported.<sup>36</sup> We may begin by recognizing that some, but not all, caregivers, such as myself, are exalted through access to resources and processes of registration and licensing in the professionalized system of care work and with the authority to intervene in people's lives. Such caregivers, such as myself, benefit in many ways from the people to whom we provide care

36. For example, feminist writers complicate care relationships by pointing out that, while disabled people are often judged as lacking in autonomy, agency, and mental capacity, they often contribute to, negotiate, influence, and dictate the care they receive, as well as extend care for their caregivers by ways of emotional support and companionship (Kelly, 2013; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Wendell, 1996).

services. In fact, I would not be able to sustain my livelihood without people accessing services. My livelihood and social position is built on and sustained by people who are constructed as in need, deviant, incapable, requiring regulation, and even undeserving of care. We may begin by recognizing that we do not acknowledge the benefits that we gain from the construction of people as inferior, the annihilation of their irreducible uniqueness as humans, to uphold our knowledge of others that is shaped by hierarchical binary of superiority and inferiority.

Spade's descriptions of mutual aid as a form of political organizing through radical care may be understood as a bottom-up strategy that holds space for the irreducible unknowability of others and of ourselves, whereby planning, organizing, and decision-making unfold through horizontal consensus decision-making in which different experiences, perspectives, and needs converge and generate results that each person may not be able to imagine on their own.<sup>37</sup> Mutual aid therefore actively resists the ruling idea that there needs to be a special class of people with advanced

37. For Spade (2020), mutual aid is a bottom-up strategy that can proliferate the practices of radical care and dismantle the capitalist charity model of care that is built on the binary of deserving/undeserving. Mutual aid requires solidarity and coalition-building across different groups, and as such are projects that not only

degrees to do the caring by decentralizing access from hierarchical systems of authority and dispersing practices of and access to care. Indeed, it resists authority and the co-optation of care into discipline by organizing alternative emergency responses to police and insisting that everyone can access resources, participate, and contribute without having to meet particular eligibility criteria. In this way, people do bring their own knowledges such as skills for collaborations and addressing conflicts to the table with unknowable others in ways that can be helpful to everyone.

It is one thing to learn about how the mutual aid model aligns with theorizations about the interdependent circulation of care. From my standpoint, I think it is another matter to ask what can the bottom-up strategy of mutual aid illuminate about repeating the task of caring differently, for people belonging to organized mutual aid programs or not. An obvious action may be to contribute financial and other resources to existing mutual aid programs as a way to redistribute wealth. But if we were to think beyond passively donating and meaningfully

provide material resources, but also support the people involved to “learn the details of how the system does its harm and how to fight it” (p. 137), including skills for collaboration, participation, and decision-making, such as “meeting facilitation, working across difference, training volunteers, addressing conflict, giving and receiving feedback, following through, and coordinating schedules and transportation” (pp. 137-138). Creating spaces for people to access resources for their basic needs as well as support to analyze the conditions of violence that produced their crises can push back against the neoliberal narrative that people’s sufferings are results of their moral failing. Further, mutual aid organization is anti-authoritarian and resists the “expert-based service systems that connect helping one another to getting advanced degrees” (p. 138) by “demonstrating how to do things together in ways that we were told not to imagine and how to organize human activity without coercion” (p. 138). Subverting also the “circulation of dominant hierarchies of valuation” even within activist and social movement spaces, it centres relationships of caring for one another with labour that is often devalued, uncompensated, unnoticed and “does not produce careers of notoriety for most participants” (p. 136), such as “cooking; cleaning; caring for sick people, old people, and children; maintaining one-on-one relationships; visiting prisoners and people in hospitals; providing emotional support to people in crisis; making sure people have rides; making sure people are included and noticed” (p. 135). Importantly, mutual aid also aims to decrease and oppose the criminalization of marginalized groups by

follow the goals of mutual aid in disrupting ruling systems and norms and mobilizing the masses to participate, then might it be helpful to think about mutual aid not only as programs or groups, but more broadly as ways of being and relating, within the everyday, interdependent, and entangled web of care in which we are already embedded? As such, particularly for people who are positioned higher on the social hierarchy such as myself, perhaps mutual aid might look like taking on the manual or other labour in our workplaces that we have the freedom not to do, so that those whose labour and time are usually tied to the requirements of the system can be freed to meet their other needs. It might look like visiting or staying with friends or people in our lives through moments of distress rather than deferring to hospitals, cooking for them or taking care of their children when they need rest. It might look like using a sick day or vacation day to accompany someone to a medical or legal appointment, because such employment benefits are also resources that can be redistributed. It might look like doing less and stepping

organizing alternatives to police for intervening in crisis situations, such as training for medical emergencies and mental distress. As pointed out by an earlier discussion of grassroots peer support programs, mutual aid programs face the similar challenge of co-option, or “becoming complementary to abandonment and privatization” (p. 142) of public welfare, often by the leaders of the group accepting funding that dictates its activities and eligibility criteria for participation, thus becoming “nondisruptive adjuncts and/or expansions of carceral control” (p. 142).

aside in the realm of mental or creative labour to make room for and highlight the perspectives and decision-making of those whose perspectives have been subjugated, or those who can benefit from the resources that the opportunity offers, even if their perspectives do not align with mine, while knowing that the ability to step aside is itself a privilege rather than a selfless act of giving, while knowing that none of these actions, while caring and may shift the basis of how we relate to one another toward interdependence while challenging the myth of independence, do not necessarily disrupt the status quo of the ruling systems that distribute sick days, wages, access to resources according to social hierarchy.

Nevertheless, if mutual aid is not only a program and is also a way of being and relating, if through this way of being and relating we share both resources and labour to meet everyone's care needs as much as possible, or in Ahmed's words, if we can all be both heads and hands in creating and sustaining livable conditions for each other, *then we can all live with a certain degree of freedom away from the*



*requirements of the ruling systems.*

And if we continually decrease our need to meet the requirements of the systems in order to survive, and if the survival of the systems requires that we meet their requirements, then we can aspire to dismantle the systems altogether by compromising their survival. This aspiration points toward an impossible goal because there are always going to be those who cannot withdraw or opt out of the labour systems or the professionalized care systems without alternative options for resources that would support a livable, good life. However, this aspiration toward the impossible, learning from mutual aid as a way of being and relating, may also provide insights and propel efforts into ways that we can direct resources to those who are the most impacted by violent systems and least able to free themselves from such systems, ways that we can practice asking questions about and wanting what they want.

### **Insist on Grief**

Following Spade, at the core of mutual aid organizing is consensus decision-making, to ensure that everyone is

included but particularly those who are most marginalized, so that not only those who have the loudest voice are heard.<sup>38</sup> However, if everyone is included, then *everyone* includes people who are charismatic or desiring leadership and authority, regardless of whether their ideas will serve others, or whether the ways they push forth their ways of doing things will in fact further marginalize or do violence to others. In my experiences of working in non-profit spaces, student political organizing, or even group facilitation over the past decade, struggles or conflicts with the charismatic members with the loudest voice and persistent demands for things to go their ways happened far more frequently than I have energy to engage with. The divisive power relations and affectively charged interactions are also reasons why people will not stay and commit to intense unpaid or even paid work. The power relations and misalignment of values in fact result in divides within groups through which people are left out, pushed out, or disposed of the community they have loved and laboured for.<sup>39</sup> Participation in so-called social justice community can therefore become a competition for the space to

38. To ensure perspectives from those who are most vulnerable or marginalized are heard, mutual aid programs often establish guidelines or criteria for participation, one of which is consensus or horizontal decision-making. Spade (2020) describes consensus as a process in which participants are required to “bring forward proposals to be discussed and modified until everyone is sufficiently satisfied that no one will block the proposal” (p. 145), based on the belief that “everyone has something to offer, that we are all valuable and we can work to include us all” (p. 145). As Spade explains, “If the goal of our movement is to mobilize tens of millions of people, we need to become people who genuinely want others’ participation, even when others bring different ideas or disagree with us. Most people will not stay and commit to intense unpaid work if they get little say in shaping that work. We need ways of practicing wanting one another present and participating, not just going along with what one charismatic or authoritative person says” (p. 145).

39. adrienne maree brown (2017) describes these conflicts as a “fear-based adherence to reductive common values” (p. 145), whereby when we “find out someone or some group has done (or may have done) something out of alignment with our values... we then tear that person or group to shreds in a way that affirms our values” (p. 145). They ask, “What can this lead to in an imperfect world full of sloppy, complex humans? Is it possible we will call each other out until there’s no one left beside us?” (p. 145) Similarly, Kai Cheng Thom (2019) comments that in “social justice culture,

be seen and heard and belong. Competition can be understood as a process premised on the binary of winning and losing, with the ones who lose being abandoned, their contributions and perspectives disposed of with disgust like contaminated food or unwanted trash. Treating others as disposable is also a form of violence. Particularly, it is the violence of dehumanization, a way of treating another as something that is living but is not a life, which is met by no regard as fellow humans, which evokes no sorrow when lost.<sup>40</sup> As previous pages have attempted to explicate, the twin tactics of dehumanization and disposability sustain the colonial and capitalist project. It would not be difficult to imagine who benefits if groups with the shared hope of ending colonial and racist violence, ableist discrimination, and capitalist domination are divided through the diffusion of disposability as an accepted way of resolving conflicts and (ironically) adhering to social justice values. To paraphrase Brown, if we become so divided that there is no one left beside us, who will be left to do the work?

accountability is enforced by public shaming and shunning, which often continues to affect the person's social standing long after the act of accountability/reparation is done" (p. 43). She writes, for example, "I have seen my friends spread rumours about others in community, advocating for shunning and ostracization over allowing ideological disagreements. On rare occasions, I have seen activists encourage the physical beating of abusive people in community" (p. 43). In the context of disability organizing, Melissa Graham and Kevin Jackson (2016) point out that those from positions of privilege who have access to politicians often support the government's agenda to advance their own rights through disability organizing, thus leaving out the majority of disabled people who face multiple forms of oppression and are not deemed competent to participate in ethical and political decision-making (Kittay, 2011).

40. Recall here Butler's (2009) theorization that grievability can be understood as "life's emergence and sustenance" (p. 15). Without grievability, "there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life. Instead, there is a life that will never have been lived, sustained by no regard, no testimony, and ungrieved when lost. The apprehension of grievability precedes and makes possible the apprehension of precarious life" (p. 15). In her more recent writing, Butler (2021) further explains that to be "grievable is to be interpellated in such a way that you know your life matters; that the loss of your life would matter that your body is treated as one that should be able to live and thrive, whose

If treating others as disposable is a form of violence that effectively replicates the violence of colonialism, racism, and capitalist domination, then what would disrupt the repetition of violence? Or, more specific to the focus of this project and following Spade's theorization of radical care through mutual aid, how can care be practiced in order to disrupt the repetition of violence in our relationships with one another?

Following Butler's theorization of grievability as life's emergence and sustenance, I have come to believe that *the basis of practicing care differently is grief*. In a widespread culture of disposability, repeating differently may involve practicing care that is oriented from the recognition of every other as grievable. It may involve recognizing that, if this person were to disappear, it will be a significant loss. If this person's voice is not heard, it will be a significant loss, because that means that this person's ways of being and knowing have become subsumed by other people's louder voices, their existence has become an extension of dominating knowledge, and their irreducible uniqueness has been

precarity should be minimized, for which provisions for flourishing should be available" (p. 59).

annihilated. Grievability is therefore the basis of recognizing the precariousness of a life: flesh, blood, and soul. Grievability may therefore also motivate the preservation of that life, the desire for that life to remain a part of the shared community, the effort to create space that cherishes and nourishes the irreducible singularity of that life, even if the person's values and beliefs do not align with my own.<sup>41</sup> In many ways, coalition-building, solidarity across movements, and mutual aid can be understood as activities that are cultivated from what Spade calls 'an ethic of desiring others.' Grieving, however, may take us beyond desiring others, as there is always the risk that some are perceived and treated as more desirable than others in any social movement or group, due to their alignment with socially desirable identity markers. A desire for others on the basis of grievability is not so much a selfless giving to others but the recognition that all of our precarious lives and resulting care needs are interdependent on each other, that my ongoing becoming is sustained by that of others, that any individual solution to precarious living conditions will never

41. There is much to be learned from disability and transformative justice activists about creating space for precarious and grievable lives. Graham and Jackson (2016), founders and organizers of the Toronto Disability Pride March, insist that accessible participation for people living with all forms of disabilities and oppression is crucial to cross-issues coalition-building, through which differences should be valued as strength rather than a threat. They stated, "The presence of factions within the overall movement is not a weakness. By simultaneously recognizing and making space for these differences, while providing a space for people to come together, we can move forward with greater strength" (p. 282). Similarly, Spade (2020) emphasizes that mutual aid projects, by "creating space where people come together based on some shared need or concern but encounter and work closely with people whose lives and experiences differ from their own, cultivate solidarity" (p. 137). For Spade, participation oriented in solidarity requires "an ethic of desiring others" (p. 145). In opposition to participation and decision-making systems focused on competition, such as voting, which encourage "getting *my* idea to be the one that wins [and] cultivate disinterest in other people's participation" (p. 145, emphasis in original), an ethic of desiring others translates into discussion and decision-making processes in which "participants get to practice wanting to hear people's concerns and their creative approaches to resolving them, and not needing the group's decision to be *exactly* what any one individual wants... ways of practicing

be as creative and applicable as solutions that unfold in iterative collaborations with others and their needs. It is the realization that our lives are inevitably shaped by those of others, so we can replicate competitive neoliberal spaces in which we write-off and annihilate one another and thereby destroy ourselves, or we can *insist* on cherishing one another as precarious, grievable lives, even when conflicts and harm inevitably arise, and thereby collectively resist and transform the violent conditions that make perpetration of harm possible and make life precarious in the first place.<sup>42</sup>

We may know grief through our experiences of loss. The community that failed us. The people who left, the people we lost. The people we wished we knew how to cherish more before they were gone. The people from whom we wished to receive more care, before we left them. The times when we have been left out, pushed away, abandoned. The times when we have abandoned others. In the social imaginary, which comes through to our consciousness perhaps most strongly via popular culture, grief is commonly constructed as an undesirable emotion

wanting one another present and participating” (p. 145, emphasis in original).

42. In all spaces, with infinite different experiences and perspectives, conflicts and harm inevitably happen. As mentioned above, punishment and abandonment are often responses to conflict and harm, even in groups with social justice goals and orientations. Thom (2019) writes that these groups often do not ask the questions that are central to transformative justice in the aftermath of harm, namely, “Why has harm occurred? Who is responsible (beyond the individual perpetrator—as in, how is community implicated)? How can this harm be prevented in the future?” (p. 43) Transformative justice is defined by adrienne maree brown as processes and beliefs that aim toward “transforming the conditions that make injustice possible” (p. 126). brown expands on Thom’s question of why by explaining: “To transform the conditions of the ‘wrongdoings,’ we have to ask ourselves and each other ‘Why?’... It’s easy to decide a person or group is shady, evil, psychopathic. The hard truth (hard because there’s no quick fix) is that long-term injustice creates most evil behavior... ‘Why?’ is often the game-changing-possibility-opening question. That’s because the answers re-humanize those we feel are perpetrating against us... ‘Why?’ makes it impossible to ignore that we might be capable of a similar transgression in similar circumstances” (p. 148).

that is specifically produced by a loss. A challenging, temporal, affective phase that a person is expected to overcome. A set of feelings and thoughts that appears and dissipates, something that one would move through, or move in and out of, like fog.<sup>43</sup> A study on grief as a culturally constructed object would perhaps take the space of another dissertation. Here I would just like to point out that perhaps conceptualizing grief in the linear structure of stages provides comfort in the ways that we are conditioned to follow the path of neoliberal, capitalist productivity toward the happy end. Perhaps this is why the popular interpretation of the model as a prescriptive structure, contrary to the expressed intentions of the author of the model, continues to persist as authoritative in the social imaginary. This, too, may be an example of the wily tactics of capitalist domination. Grief in this popular discourse is pictured as the source to a host of undesirable emotions (anger, depression) and resulting actions (denial, bargaining) that stop us in our tracks, that distract us, that slow us down, that keeps us in a fog; but moving through these stages of

43. For example, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's stage model of grief, published in 1969, is commonly referred to in mental health settings, education institutions, and popular culture as the authoritative definition of grief (Avis, Stroebe & Schut, 2021). The model suggests that, in grief, a person moves through five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). In a 2021 study of a systematic narrative review on Google search for the Kübler-Ross model of grief, it is found that the majority of the websites disseminating information about grief continues to uncritically reinforce the linear progression implied by the naming of the model as a set of stages, despite the critiques of many scholars and practitioners over the past three decades, as well as clarification from Kübler-Ross herself, asserting that there is no right way to grief and that the emotional process is inevitably fluid, non-linear, messy, with indefinite outcomes (Avis, Stroebe & Schut, 2021).

obstacles with *self*-regulation and *self*-improvement offers a definitive fix to the problem. We can be back on track again toward the happy end. But what if we realize how the happy end is in reality a path toward slow death that legitimizes unlivable, precarious conditions for many, and quick fixes can never result in adequate care for ourselves and each other? What if we realize that quick fixes that promise to ward off feelings that we have come to believe as undesirable and inconvenient, such as grief, may in fact be operations that obscure, and therefore sustain, the conditions of precariousness and violence that produce loss and grief in the first place? If we wish to transform such widespread precariousness and conditions of violence, and if we were to follow Butler's theorization that the basis of ethical relations with others is grievability, then what if we cultivate a different relationship particularly with grief? What if grief can help us name and understand the conditions of precariousness and violence that produce the unequal social organization and distribution of worthiness and resources for each life to thrive? What if we expand that



relationship with and understanding of grief beyond the people and things we have lost but also to every person we are in relationship with, in order to resist a culture in which any person can be disposable, in order to cultivate a culture in which every person will be cared for in their precariousness? Perhaps instead of a fog that we move in and out of, grief is here to stay, like gravity, keeping us connected to our place in the shared world and to one another. In this way, perhaps we can think of grievability, like care, as always already here, shaping every encounter, whether we recognize it or not.<sup>44</sup> This is not to say that every person is deemed grievable in the same way, just as not every person is cared for in the same way. The extent to which one is deemed grievable and thus cared for, as well as deemed disposable and thus exploited and destroyed, is mediated by race, gender, class, and other interlocking, interdependent, systems and infrastructures that shape the livability and grievability of lives.<sup>45</sup> The task, I believe, is *to recognize and insist on grievability in order to resist disposability in the ways we practice care*. Further, I believe that care without replicating violence is not a

44. Recall here Puig de la Bellacasa's (2017) theorization that the circulation of care is always already "fully permeated with ethicality even when agencies are not intentionally ethical" (p. 215). In other words, all beings in their direct and indirect interactions are always already embedded in a web of interdependent care through ordinary practices, labour, affects, relationships, and bodily contacts. Such a web of care is constantly reconfigured as relationships multiply, shift, and expand in response to ongoingly emerging care needs from every being.

45. In Butler's (2021) more recent writing on non-violence, she revisits grievability and explains that it is produced through interdependency, "each is dependent, or formed and sustained in relations of depending upon, and being depended upon. What each depends upon, and what depends upon each one, is varied, since it is not just other human lives, but other sensate creatures, environments, and infrastructures: we depend upon them, and they depend on us, in turn, to sustain a livable world" (p. 16). As such, Butler refutes the idea of equality as "a calculus that accords each abstract person the same value" (p. 16), for "equal treatment is not possible

world in the future but is *a world in the making* by creating deliberate space for grief as we go along in our attempts in caring.

Following Butler's theorization of non-violence, care cannot be the basis of ethics, for the desire for non-violence, the desire for the other's desire to live, the recognition of the other's grievability, must precede and orient care as desires, ways of being and relating, and practices, in order for all of our interrelated, bound-together lives to persist against precarity and violence. Rethinking the theorizations of feminist proponents for ethics of care as the orienting principle of political and social arrangements, positioning care as the basis of ethics has its dangers.<sup>46</sup> Care can be understood as a response to vulnerability. Butler's comment appears to aim directly at the definitions of care involving particular emotionality and dispositions in earlier theorizations of feminist ethics of care. The application of such definitions of care as a basis of ethics therefore not only denies our own acts of violence or potentials for enacting violence, but also simultaneously creates a vulnerable

outside of a social organization of life in which material resources, food distribution, housing, work, and infrastructure seek to achieve equal conditions of livability" (p. 17), and in fact there are "pervasive forms of inequality that establish some lives as disproportionately more livable and grievable than others... forms of power that establish the unequal worth of lives by establishing their unequal grievability" (p. 17). As such, resistance to such pervasive forms of power and violence, or a desire for non-violence, is therefore founded in recognizing grievability as interdependently bound together between self and others: "nonviolence becomes the desire for the other's desire to live, a way of saying, 'You are grievable; the loss of you is intolerable; and I want you to live; I want you to want to live, so take my desire as your desire, for yours is already mine.' The 'I' is not you, yet it remains unthinkable without the 'you'—worldless, unsustainable" (p. 203).

46. Critiquing earlier feminist writing on ethics of care, Butler (2021) comments that "none of us should seek to be saints, if what that means is that we hoard all the goodness for ourselves, expelling the flawed or destructive dimension of the human psyche to actors on the outside, those living in the region of 'not me'... If, for instance, by an ethics or politics of 'care' we mean that an ongoing and unconflicted human disposition can and should give rise to a political framework for feminism, then we have entered into a bifurcated reality in which our own aggression is edited out of the picture or projected onto others" (p. 186). Care goes hand in hand with vulnerability, and an emphasis on care risks creating "a class of

class that requires caring and helping. This is not to say that people who are systematically exposed to violent and precarious conditions do not require care, but that identifying groups or individuals as vulnerable may risk individualizing the vulnerability as a personal experience or characteristic, while losing awareness of the ongoing reproduction of social structures that support some while disposing of others. The difference between vulnerability and grievability, I believe, is that vulnerability can be something that is projected onto nameless, faceless others, and grievability requires that we encounter the other as someone who matters to us, whose life is bound to ours. While care requires that there are vulnerable others on the receiving end, naming someone as vulnerable does not necessarily oblige care. We can read a news article describing a group of people as vulnerable and move on with our day without doing anything about it. Grievability, on the other hand, involves the desire to want the other to live, to preserve the life of the other, to understand and shift the very systems and social relations that produce vulnerability, to identify and support the

persons who identify primarily with vulnerability" (p. 186) and who therefore require protection and care. Butler thus asks, "if we think about those who, in a condition of vulnerability, resist that very condition, how do we understand that duality?... In portraying people and communities who are subject to violence in systematic ways, do we do them justice, do we respect the dignity of their struggle, if we summarize them as 'the vulnerable'?" (p. 186-187) Butler therefore argues that it is useful to conceptualize "vulnerability as part of embodied social relations and actions" (p. 192), which can help us understand "the situation of those deemed vulnerable is, in fact, a constellation of vulnerability, rage, persistence,, and resistance that emerges under these same historical conditions" (p. 192), and particularly "to identify those sites of resistance that are opened up by vulnerability" (p. 192).

sites of resistance that are opened up by vulnerability and are also the pathways for the others to persist into the future, because the loss of the other would be intolerable. Grievability thus motivates care for the life of the other to persist into the future by safeguarding the other from the harm that we or others can do to their life.<sup>47</sup> As such, it safeguards the infinite unknowability of the other in their ongoing and future becoming through practices of care, rather than authorizing and prioritizing our acts of care and in so doing entrapping the other in the knowable category of the vulnerable.

To care for the other as grievable, to care because they matter as I matter, and I matter because they matter, is to *repeat differently* the reproduction of hierarchical social relations and subject positions in which we are embedded, with hopes to displace the norm of precarity. To desire for the other's desire to live, to meet them wherever they are at, no matter what form their life takes or whether it makes sense to my partial and limited knowledge about life, is to repeat differently. To safeguard and hold open possibilities

47. Grievability, to Butler (2021), involves seeking to preserve another person's life, "not only because it is in my interest to do so or because I have wagered that it will bring about better consequences for me. Rather, it is because we are already tied together in a social bond that precedes and makes possible both of our lives" (p. 93). It therefore motivates acts of safeguarding the life of the other, a "future-directed modality, a kind of anticipatory care or way of looking out for another life that actively seeks to preempt the damage we might cause or that can be caused by others" (p. 93), actions that emerge "from our own need and dependency, from a sense that this life is not a life without another life" (p. 93). Safeguarding therefore also seeks to establish "conditions for the possibility of a life to become livable, perhaps even to flourish" (p. 94), for "the potentially grievable life is one that deserves a future, a future whose form cannot be predicted and prescribed in advance. To safeguard the future of a life is not to impose the form that such a life will take, the path that such a life will follow: it is a way of holding open the contingent and unpredictable forms that lives may take" (p. 146).

of the infinite unpredictable forms that the other's life may take into the future is to repeat differently. To care for the conditions through which the other's life may flourish in ways outside of our knowing and imagination of what is possible within the existing social structures, as we desire for our own freedom to flourish, knowing that the livability of our lives are bound together, is to repeat differently.

To care differently therefore requires that we deliberately, insistently make space for grief. One way of making this space may involve insistently and publically telling stories about violence, the conditions that make the lives of particular others precarious, that threaten to take away these lives.<sup>48</sup> If dehumanization and disposability are tactics of colonial and capitalist domination that seek to annihilate the flesh, blood, and souls of people whose difference threatens its regime, then it is with embodiment of insistence and the force of the soul that counter-claims can be established and passed on from person to person through our relationships and networks about the value and grievability of lives. Insisting on grief therefore also requires in our

48. Butler (2021) references Mahatma Gandhi to centre the importance of aggressive insistence in the pursuit of non-violence. Gandhi describes the politics and practice of non-violence as "soul force" (p. 21), an "insistence on truth" (p. 21). To Butler, then, non-violence is not an absence of action but "a physical assertion of the claims of life, a living assertion, a claim that is made by speech, gesture, and action, through networks, encampments, and assemblies; all of these seek to recast the living as worthy of value, as potentially grievable, precisely under conditions in which they are either erased from view or cast into irreversible forms of precarity" (p. 24). Similarly, bell hooks (1999) asserts that honesty and truth-telling are the core of justice, "seeing ourselves and the world the way it is rather than the way we want it to be" (p. 33), or the way that we have been socialized or conditioned to desire, which is built on relations of domination.

telling of violence that we situate our embodied selves, our actions, our emotions, truthfully in those stories, with the roles we play in the systematic surveillance, regulation, or neglect of lives that extinguish the possibilities of their flourishing into the future. What was the care that was demanded of us but we didn't or couldn't give? What was the care that we needed but never had? What was the world that we dreamed of but did not come to pass? Who are the ghosts that haunt our sleeping and waking lives? Who did systematic subjection to precarious conditions take away, who will it take away if nothing is done about it? Knowing the harm we can cause, the harm we have caused, obliges us not to repeat the harm to those whose grievability and livability are entangled with ours.<sup>49</sup>

Entanglement is messiness, is back-and-forth, is ruminating, is being awake at three in the morning questioning the decisions we made and the things we said and did to a subjugated other, is confusion and anxiety, is anger and rage and pain, is our minds running away in ways we were told not to imagine by neoliberal regimes of

49. I understand the entanglement of lives by thinking with Butler's (2021) discussion of social bonds, which is based in "embodied forms of interdependency [and] gives us a framework for understanding a version of social equality that does not rely on the reproduction of individualism. The individual is not displaced by the collective, but is formed and freighted by social bonds that are defined by their necessity and their ambivalence" (p. 147). Such an affirmation of life as interrelated and entangled together is categorically "different from a self-preservation won at the expense of other lives" (p. 148). It is precisely because we have witnessed and have acted upon the desire of self-preservation through the destruction of other lives and therefore know "we can destroy that we are under an

human management, is unreason pitted against omnipresent compulsory sound-mindedness. The constitution of our being, knowing, and actions through entanglement with other beings, environments, infrastructures, and systems does not displace our individual roles and responsibilities in doing harm or extending care. On the contrary, what we do as individuals based on how we embody grief or pain or unreason can have shaping effects on the entangled web precisely because we are bound together. As such, what would happen if we make visible, audible, tangible our entanglements with violence, our mourning as protest?<sup>50</sup> Mournful protest can be thought of as a way to express the embodied social bonds between those who mourn, those who are lost, and those who are responsible for the deaths. It may be thought of as a way to make the experiences of loss felt through public and insistent grieving, thus an attempt to register the deaths in people's embodied consciousness.<sup>51</sup> By making our experiences of sorrow, rage, persistence, complicity, vulnerability, and resistance *felt* as perpetrators and survivors, we can demonstrate the

obligation to know why we ought not to do it, and to summon those countervailing powers that curb our destructive capacity. Nonviolence becomes an ethical obligation by which we are bound precisely because we are bound to one another" (p. 148). A refusal to reproduce ways of being and knowing that rely on the ideology of individualism may also mean the rejection of what Chapman (2013) calls compulsory sound-mindedness, a self-contained, rational cognitive process for understanding and decision-making, and a pervasive sanist ideology to ensure obedient labour and prevent distraction from such labour due to feelings of discomfort and unreason.

50. Drawing from mournful protests of political violence, such as the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, Butler (2021) writes that the communities that mourn protest not only that the lost lives "ought not to have been lost" (p. 74), but also to contest that the life was considered ungrievable, for "the failure of accounting for violent death makes it impossible to grieve. For though the loss is known, the explanation of how the death took place is not, and so the loss cannot be fully registered. The dead remain, to that extent, ungrievable" (p. 74).

51. As Audre Lorde (1984/2007) writes, "For there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt—of examining what those ideas feel like being lived" (p. 39).

operations of violence that are entangled with our embodied selves, we can show the traces of how lives are lost through the systems of subjugation and domination, we can insist that lives are grievable and should not have been lost, and should not continue to be lost. In this way, the collaborations with Elene Lam, Kathryn Mettler, and Virginia Jahyu, the creations and public sharing of moving images, of sounds, of lyrical and visual storytelling that aim to hold our embodied contradictions and ambivalence, that hope to affectively move the viewers and readers and listeners into reflection or action, taught me that *care without replicating violence* is not an endpoint we arrive at in a world of the future but it is *a world in the making* by insisting on telling, living, and embodying stories of violence against grievable lives.

### **Bound together**

Recall Butler's theory earlier: if we believe that our lives are interdependent between humans, other-than-human beings, environments, and infrastructures, then violence and its repetition attack not



only the people involved and the relationships between people or groups, but more broadly the social bond on which all of our ways of surviving and thriving rely. Thinking with brown's suggestion of learning from the structure of fractals in understanding how social transformation can occur and expand through a simple pattern repeating itself over and over, Butler's as well as Thom's discussion of repetition of violence shows me that fractal expansion goes both ways,<sup>52</sup> that this has also been how violent structures diffuse, spread, proliferate across the social body, including and especially communities of people who have disproportionately experienced violence, who are then required to exert a disproportionate amount of labour to protect themselves from violence. The theory of the repetition of violence is different from the popular belief that 'hurt people hurt people,' or people who have experienced violence are prone to violence, which attaches violence to the person as a form of pathology originating from a damaged interiority. People who have experienced violence or are labelled with trauma can certainly perpetrate

52. Drawing on Freud's psychoanalytic theory on the effects of war, Butler (2021) describes the "repetitive character of destruction" (p. 159) as a process that "works not only against others, but against oneself. War neurosis continues the suffering of war in the form of traumatic symptoms characterized by relentless repetition; one is bombarded, attacked, under siege—all metaphors of war that continue in the post-traumatic scene" (p. 159). On a personal level, such destruction often takes the form of social isolation, which "serves to weaken the social bonds that hold societies together" (p. 159) as well as self-destruction. As such, "the social bonds without which political life proves impossible are shredded in its midst" (p. 159). More specifically, Thom (2019) speaks to the violence that she has experienced and witnessed repeatedly in queer community, one which often emphasizes safety for groups of people who have historically and ongoingly experienced blatant and fatal violence based on gender and sexual discriminations. She writes, "Beneath the mirage of Queerlandia, there are real people, real places, full of anger and pain. We carry the memories of trauma we have survived in our families of origin, in a transphobic and homophobic society, and we re-enact them on each other's flesh" (p. 31). This plays out not only in queer community but in broader social justice culture where "accountability is enforced by public shaming and shunning, which often continues to affect the person's social standing long after the act of accountability/reparation is done" (p. 43).

violence, as any person can perpetrate violence, because of the violent conditions that shape the ways we live and relate to one another. The work of Butler and Thom teach me that it is *the patterns of violent and dominating relations* that are being repeated, and such relations do not come within the vacuum of the self, but are produced and shaped by violent social conditions that mark some bodies as deviant, threatening, and requiring conversion, or are otherwise disposable. Violent relations, as attacks and disregard of the social bond that makes possible political and social life, are therefore repeated in the attempts to curb violence with further violence—to the self by self-isolation and self-deprivation of support or self-destruction; or to others by public shaming, shunning, and cutting off support; or by unquestioningly and uniformly accepting self-destruction of life as the choice of a liberal subject that cannot be interfered with and therefore withholding care. While violent relations repeat across the social body, if racialized, feminized, colonized, disabled subjects have been disproportionately exposed to

For Thom, even radical approaches in response to people's experience of intense suffering and desire to self-destruct, may be coming "from a traumatized place: it is rooted in queer and trans experiences of abusive families and intimate partnerships in which we were not allowed to refuse, we were not allowed to leave. So our reaction is to swing to the other extreme: we encourage people to leave, and we don't question the refusal of love, even when it is clearly needed" (p. 23). As such, "The predominant (white, colonial) queer/trans narrative of 'proper' consent to being cared for goes something like this: Someone expresses that they are in pain, or you happen to see that they are. You offer them help. If they refuse, you back off, no questions asked. Any further attempt to help could be considered a violation" (p. 23).

conditions of structural and interpersonal violence, then these communities are also disproportionately subject to the repetition of violent relations and its deleterious effects, due to the systematic barriers to accessing resources to mitigate such effects. Ultimately, however, attacks on the social bond have reverberating effects on all who rely on it, the fractals of violence shape each life and its survivability. Colonizers believed they could extract use from and dispose of nature without destroying themselves too, and they used the same violent methods against Black and Brown people with the same justification based on the discourse of science and human progress. People marked as racialized and deviant experienced it first and the most, but now, generation after generation, the violence of disposability reverberates in every community, every space, even ones that seek safety and peace, and the earth, the entity that makes life possible in the first place, is dying. Attacks on the social bond and the fractals of violence shape each life and its survivability.

In brown's writing, the discussion of fractals is offered as a strategy for social transformation and with it, hope. I have taken fractals on an ominous turn. In my everyday life as a racialized, feminized, immigrant academic-in-training, it is difficult not to notice the repetition of violent relations reverberating within the walls of the academy. It is in fact impossible not to notice, for it is not a choice of whether to notice or not. When it is a life that is already shaped with particular barriers and constraints as products of such violence, to go on one must engage with or respond to them one way or another. My quest of finding possible responses to the question, how can we practice care without replicating violence, extended beyond professionalized care settings and into academic spaces because education institutions, like professionalized care services, are also supposed to be supportive of people's development. Further, professionalized care workers learn how to care (and students of other disciplines learn how to engage with the world in their thinking-feeling-becoming) at least partly if not largely through training from education institutions. I have been a student for

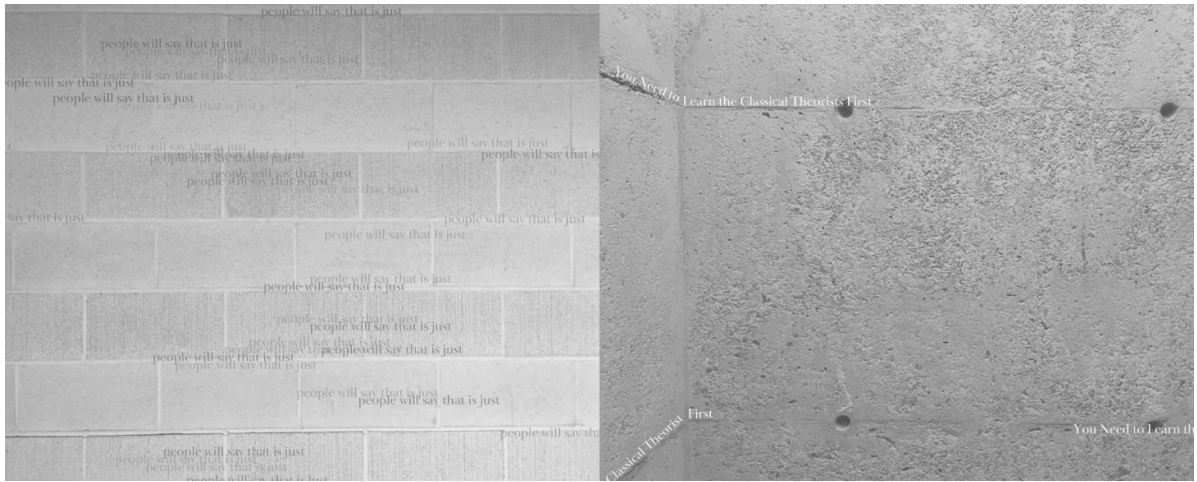
many years and have started working in recent years in education institutions. I have learned from my own experience and conversations with other students that the academy is often far from caring. My question is then, *how do we expect people to learn how to care when the environment in which they are taught to care is not caring?* Similarly, *how do we expect people to learn how to enact social transformation when the environment that is supposed to support their development and transformation is not transformative, and is in fact intrinsically cemented in racist, neoliberal, ableist conditions?*

While thinking about these questions I shared a conversation with Yvonne Simpson, Black anti-racist scholar and educator who has engaged in years of community and administrative activism within and outside of the academy. The conversation centred on a particular enduring memory in the classroom: A student offered knowledge about enslaved Black people's resistance through music and songs, which was immediately dismissed as meaningless pastime by the professor, with a derogatory word for Black people

absentmindedly tossed into the space, further undermining the significance of the resistant actions that the student had mentioned. What made this experience particularly impactful for the student was the context: the course and the program in which it belongs both explicitly promote the dismantlement of intersecting racism and ableism in their pedagogical orientation.

It was a moment of harsh realization that is not unfamiliar to many racialized students in higher education. A moment that registers suddenly. It startles the senses like a breath of frozen air. It stops you like a wall suddenly appearing in your tracks.

**Figures 13-15**  
*Institutional Walls*



*Note.* Patricia Ki, Institutional Walls, 2022. Digital photography, 8.5x11”.

In my walk around York University campus taking these photographs, I was reminded of the stories I was told about walls. *An enduring memory*: a Black student asked where Frantz Fanon’s work is in the syllabus for critical theory; the (white) professor responded that students need to read the classical theorists first. *Another enduring memory*: an Indigenous student shared their own ancestral knowledge about healing in a paper; the (white) professor docked marks, requested citation in APA style for the information. *My own enduring memory by repetition*: naming acts of domination and aggression in meetings; receiving a placating apology from (white) colleagues that doubles as judgement of my response as overly sensitive, selfish, and unreasonable. *Walls at every turn*. Inscribed with commands, of what can or cannot be said, what will and will not be heard, what lives can or cannot be preserved into the future. Upheld by restrictions for some disguised as protection for all.



When walls appear, seemingly out of nowhere, it shakes you to the core like the earth beneath your feet suddenly falling away. Suddenly groundless. Suddenly alone. In response, some, like me, might desperately grasp for meaning, closing myself off in a bathroom stall, rageful tears flowing as I muffled my sobs, plotting words in my frantic brain for talking back next time. Some have experienced this repetition of violence so many times, resignation feels like a way out—I *wanted the ground to open up and swallow me*, as I recall Simpson saying, unforgetting such a moment. It is a moment of realization that racism is so deeply ingrained, so authoritative, so diffused, so cemented, so ubiquitously repeated in everyday conversations, in knowledge production, in decision-making circles. It is a moment of despair, like the walls are caving in, for some more than others, feeling like there is no way out of this life of subjugation and inferiorization, even in spaces that we thought were supportive, caring, of people who are different—where else do you go from here, to learn and build tools to make the world more survivable, to build a

**Figure 16**

*Institutional Walls / The Master's Tools Will Never* (detail)



career and make a living, to speak and be regarded as equal to everyone else? How do we outrun the walls and the ghosts in them at every turn, there to make us feel small, to keep us small and silent and obedient? Where else could we go, is there any place that's different?

In my walk around campus taking photographs of walls I was reminded that I once found a handwritten note left in one of the many holes in a concrete wall. I could not recall what the note said, but I recall putting it back thinking it would be interesting if someone else found it too. An invisible but tacit connection between people through a hidden note in a hole in the wall.

If we resist the conditioned response to smooth over cracks, to placate, to defer to authority, to calm down, to suppress our rage and grief and confusion and unreason so we approximate rational whiteness, where might we find the openings, the gaps to repeat differently? But learning from the repetition of violent relations, maybe this growth needs to take place underground in the beginning, on the

**Figure 17**

*Institutional Walls / The Master's Tools Will Never* (detail)



other side, to be nourished, to take time in being acquainted with discomfort and unreason, to avoid being squashed in the process. What can grow out of this already ruined landscape,<sup>53</sup> these seemingly impenetrable institutional walls that block us at every turn? Can we cultivate a different space, build a different world? What would that different world look like?

Noticing the seams, I stitched into them. Mapping around the contour of how violence shapes lives and bodies. To be small, quiet, not to stand out, not to be spotted, not to take up space, lest someone notices that the body does not belong. To be given space yet feeling undeserving, like an imposter. Even this is pathologized as an inherent lack of confidence, a faulty personality trait. Walls keep the body small no matter its actual size. Small, careful knots planted in and around the holes in the wall, the gaps between bricks. Even small knots, organized in groups, can anchor the growths to come on the other side.

Stitching takes time. It is slow. It brings feelings of impatience. It is slow,

53. "This is no place to search for utopia," writes Anna Tsing (2012, p. 152). There is no blank slate to begin anew from purity (brown, 2017; Shotwell, 2016). We must grow from where we have landed on this "Blasted Landscape" (Tsing, 2012, p. 152), immersed in capital, violence, and structures of domination. Learning from multi-species interdependence that result in new growths and expansions out of the edges of domestic depletion, Tsing suggests that "*noticing the seams* is a place to begin" (p. 152, emphasis in original).

because the structure of every stitch is produced by the movements of the hand and of the body and of the breath that gives it life. Inhale—pull toward, exhale—pull away. It can only move as fast as the body can move, like care, the repetitive labour of the body. Care takes time to unfold. Care can unfold only in relationships. Relationships take time to build. Immersed in the repetition of violent relations, a different knowing that others will grieve if I were gone, a trust that others will not dispose of me when I enact a misstep or harm, and vice versa, require repeated interactions of care. While critical connections of grievability are more important than critical mass of opportunistic identifications with the latest definition of goodness, there is hope, learned from fractals and mycelium and murmurations that a repetition of critical trusting relationships and patterns of care can build toward a world that can sustain a mass of beings.<sup>54</sup> It takes time to realize, to see, to understand, how we are different and it takes time to learn particular ways to stay in relationships and in trust with each other despite the differences. Realizing also that you and

54. As brown (2017) writes, “critical connections are more important in a long-term transformation process than critical mass. Relationships are everything” (p. 28). Referencing Sierra Pickett, brown looks to starlings’ murmuration as an illustration of collective leadership and deep trust, where every “individual bird focuses attention on their seven closest neighbors and thus manage a larger flock cohesiveness and synchronicity (at times upwards of over a million birds)” (p. 65). As such, relationships are interdependent. Recall brown’s discussion of fractals in the earlier pages, in which a simple process is

I may have a different sense of time.

So resist the impulse to untangle and straighten, for the stitching is not a metaphor or an allegory but an embodied practice, a knowing in the making, a way of theorizing through the doing. What's it like for the hand to go along with the crinkled, knotted, reclaimed, salvaged thread, bearing the shapes and the dust of its past lives, while also forming it into particular new shapes with the crochet hook? Afterall, a mass of threads randomly thrown about isn't going to have the structure and cohesion and connections required to build outward. There needs to be a simple process that anticipates difference but can be repeated over and over in an endless feedback loop for expansion to happen. One stitch planted on another. Yarn over, pull through loop, yarn over, pull through loop. Interlinking, one builds upon another, one set of loops held together by another, one does not exist without the others.

*All that you touch, you change.*<sup>55</sup> Every stitch, every knot, every encounter, every conversation, every piece of writing, every person, every being,

repeated over and over in an ongoing feedback loop, creating a large, ever-growing system.

Tsing (2012) encourages the appreciation for multi-species interactions to understand interdependence. She studies the mycelium of fungi as lifelong companions to particular trees, lichens, and other plant roots, by channeling nutrients to the plants, even boring into rocks to make mineral elements available for plant growth, while the fungi gain sustenance from fallen and decaying parts of the plants.

### Figure 18

*The Master's Tools Will Never* (detail)



55. In a dedication to Octavia Butler in a science fiction collection, adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha (2015) quote Butler who stated that “all that you touch you change,” sharing the “fierce longing to have our writing change everyone and everything we touch” (front matter).

shaping one another along the way. Interdependence is iterative: a series of repeated motions, shifting shape to accommodate what it encounters, being directed by what it happens upon, always anticipating different ways of being and embodiments, always moving with the unforeseen, shaping all that we touch as we move along in our own becoming. It is a way of thinking-feeling-being with the family of things: the fractals that repeat a simple process spanning across the landscape; the mycelium running across the earth sustaining the trees and plants they touch; the murmuration moving across the sky through collective steering; the ripples echoing out across the surface of the lake from a raindrop. *All that you touch, you change*. Beware that rippling effects and iterative processes are also how violence spreads.

Salvaged threads come in various discontinuous lengths. I am constantly running out of thread. Remember that resources are always limited. Unlimited resources are a capitalist fantasy.<sup>56</sup> My labour to care for others is sustained by unseen labour of many others. Notice who is always expected to

**Figure 19**

*The Master's Tools Will Never* (detail)



56. Citing political theorist Nancy Fraser, Micki McGee (2020) writes that “capitalism relies on the twin fantasies of boundless supplies of care (traditionally in the form of women’s unpaid labor in the home, though more recently in the movement of low-wage care workers from one part of the globe to another) and limitless natural resources on what is now clearly a finite and destabilized planet” (p. 43).

contribute the most labour. Notice who contributes the most labour and no one notices. Notice when the labour to organize against racist, colonial, and ableist systems falls on Black and Brown feminized bodies. Notice who routinely gets burned out. Notice the traces left behind by efforts that were stopped in their tracks by walls or lack of resources.

There are loose threads everywhere. I circle back, I pick up the threads that come before along the way—notice who is left behind, notice who is always left behind, notice who leaves, notice who gets pushed out because they hold a different opinion about justice, care, or love. Bring people with us when we get somewhere, invite them along when we find each other again, perhaps when we have both changed, when we are ready to meet one another and work together again.<sup>57</sup> But there must also be options for people to go in a different direction. If, as Thom insists, every person is deserving of support and care, even if they hold a different opinion about justice and community, even if they have done harm, then we must find ways to hold space for people in the

57. This contemplation arises out of a conversation I shared with one of my supervisors, Rachel da Silveira Gorman. We were discussing the academic hierarchy and how racialized and disabled students can advance their careers. “Bring people with you when you get somewhere,” Gorman said. This is exemplified in their career as a leader of the university department and the field of disability justice, from collaborating in article-writing and research grants, to spearheading the creation of an entire degree program centred on the hiring of new Black and Indigenous faculty. In

community. We must find ways to hold differences in the community. We must find ways to stop ourselves from disposing of people and cutting off their access to care because they don't agree with us or they have hurt us. At the same time, Haraway reminds us that holding open space for one another is by no means a straightforward practice that benefits everyone all the time. Holding space open for one may limit access to space or resources for another. Resources are especially limited to ways of being that are not considered deserving of a future, to lives who are not registered as grievable. Some of us are positioned to have more resources and freedom to respond than others. If we dream of a world in which each has access according to what they need for a livable, flourishing life, then we must each also cultivate the skills and commitment to a way of living that responds to others' care needs, including those we do not expect to be our companions, according to our abilities and capacities. We don't have to share a deep love for one another in order to share space.<sup>58</sup> We don't have to share a deep love for one another and an identical understanding or

other conversations we talked about the people who leave a working relationship or collaboration in academia because of differences in opinions. Gorman shared that they had observed people returning to projects and collaborations years later with a different worldview and ready to engage again, having gained experiences and knowledge elsewhere. Drawing on the knowledge of bird species on the edge of extinction, Donna Haraway (2016) contemplates "what it means to hold open space for another" (p. 38). She writes that "Such holding open is far from an innocent or obvious material or ethical practice, even when successful, it exacts tolls of suffering as well as surviving as individuals and as kinds" (p. 38), largely because the space and the conditions for living have been deeply compromised. Referencing Anna Tsing's work, Haraway suggests that we need the skills for "living in ruins" (p. 37). The use of these skills is grounded not in "a longing for salvation or some other sort of optimistic politics; neither is it a cynical quietism in the face of the depth of the trouble. Rather, Tsing proposes a commitment to living and dying with responsibility in unexpected company. Such living and dying have the best chance of cultivating conditions for ongoingness" (p. 37-38).

58. In conclusion of her theorization of non-violence, Judith Butler (2021) writes, "We do not have to love one another to engage in meaningful solidarity. The emergence of a critical faculty, of critique itself, is bound up with the vexed and precious relationship of



experience of suffering in order to work in solidarity toward the conditions of ongoing care for everyone. We must however encounter each other as grievable, indisposable, interdependent. We must however think with and grieve with one another. We must commit to a way of understanding and living in which others come to matter in our lives. Maybe this way of relating to one another is also a kind of love.

This stitching work in an accordion book of photographs took place on part of my desk at work for the better half of a year in mid-2022. It started at the same time as I began a new role as a management level administrator at a graduate program in the arts. I wanted this embodied stitching practice to weave through my daily tasks, which were at times lonely and tedious, and at other times collective and invigorating, but all toward the dream and the longing that I shared with a group of educators and students about building support, belonging, and care within the school and in the community through the arts. In some ways this stitching work can be understood as a kind of fabulation, a way of storytelling

solidarity, where our 'sentiments' navigate the ambivalence by which they are constituted. We can always fall apart, which is why we struggle to stay together. Only then do we stand a chance of persisting in a critical commons" when nonviolence becomes the desire for the other's desire to live, a way of saying, 'You are grievable; the loss of you is intolerable; and I want you to live'" (p. 203). Similarly, Haraway (2016) emphasizes that grief is intrinsic to cultivating the ability to respond to one another in our interrelationships and collective survival with countless others. She writes, "Grief is a path to understanding entangled shared living and dying; human beings must grieve *with*... Without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think" (p. 39, emphasis in original). To Haraway, unthinking or thoughtlessness underlies violent ways of being in the world such as commonplace looking-away from widespread catastrophes to participating in genocide, as one "could not entangle, could not track the lines of living and dying, could not cultivate response-ability, could not make present to itself what it is doing, could not live in consequences or with consequences" (p. 36). In other words, those other than the self do not come to matter in thoughtlessness.

that embodies the relational experiences and affective truths of the storyteller, a speculative landscape of attachment and detachment and the messiness of many paths walked at once with many evolving, expected and unexpected, relations and entanglements.<sup>59</sup> An ongoingly shifting and expanding fabric that tends toward widespread flourishing made possible by responding to and becoming with one another.

It is an unruly landscape, against a backdrop of rumination. The words and stories I think with and make with. The words of resistance that are silenced. The knowledges that are pushed aside to the margins of professional fields, of scholarship, of history, of collective awareness, of what it means to be human. The ghostly presence behind the walls. The incoherent, uncited phrases I carry in my pocket like lyrics of songs that keep me company in times of trouble, from teachers, from books I found kinship with, from conversations with a like-mind, from conversations with a different mind, from conversations with my own mind, from ancestors speaking through dreams and the ways I persist through

59. Recall in an earlier chapter Halifax and colleagues' (2018) discussions of fabulation as a kind of storytelling that contains the affective realities and experiences of the storyteller. Haraway (2016) describes a public art project of fabulated coral reef ecosystems which was created "not by mimicry, but by open-ended, exploratory process" (p. 78). It is a way of exploring intimacy without proximity with the beings and relationships being explored. It is however by no means a virtual presence; "it is 'real' presence, but in loopy materialities" (p. 79). The textures, shapes, "passing patterns back and forth, giving and receiving, patterning, holding the unasked-for pattern in one's hands, response-ability" (p. 12) together become "an affective cognitive ecology stitched in fiber arts" (p. 79), a way of creating and becoming-with whereby "it matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (p. 12).

this life. This is the community, whether people are near or not. Where is the citation? Cite our friends, cite our ancestors, cite our loves. In the academy, and many other institutions, words are the master's tools that built the master's walls in the master's house. As Audre Lorde teaches us, those marked as different are not meant to survive in this house.<sup>60</sup> But that does not stop us from having words of our own. And as Audre Lorde also insists, if our silence and our fear and our smallness will not protect us, then we build new tools with our own languages, sharpened by the words of those who come before us, held together by the words that we draw on as companions, and we build our own world. We build our own world through and behind and underneath this house, and we work toward a world that is vast in its ever-expanding capacity to hold difference.

60. Thinking alongside Audre Lorde's (1984/2007) often cited words, "My silence had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences" (p. 41). Insistently, she asks, "What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?" (p. 41) Silence as a result of fear is understandable, as Lorde explains that "to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson – that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings" (p. 42), and "we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness... it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence" (p. 44). Lorde's (1978) poem, *A Litany for Survival*, ends with these words:

"but when we are silent  
we are still afraid

So it is better to speak  
remembering  
we were never meant to survive."

**Figure 20**

*The Master's Tools Will Never* (detail)



## Hold open

These words are the unruly rules of engagement. They ask first and foremost what rules are we following, what rules make themselves look like the only rules around? Rules that make following them the only way to be are also called norms. Who benefits from these norms, and again, who gets left out? A different world is not one that is forever on the horizon of the future but one that is always in the making by holding open space for grief. Grief for the care and belonging that are longed for but never received. Grief for the trust betrayed by people and communities who claim to be supportive of difference. Grief for the flourishing that could have been had there been care and support. Grief for the truths that yearned to be spoken but never said. Grief for the voices never heard. Grief, in this sense, may appear as *complaints*. Space for grief, therefore, may be structured as a shared, open, public platform for commiseration and advocacy.

*Mapping Access* was initially a project conceptualized by professor nancy viva davis halifax to assess the accessibility

of various spaces across campus at York University with students' participation. Having been a part of many conversations amongst fellow students—discussions in the classrooms, departmental check-ins, student association meetings, group texts, hangouts at the coffee shop, after-class venting—about barriers to learning and the tremendous amount of extra labour and distress they cause, a former classmate Yoonmee Han and I decided to collaborate and contribute to this ongoing project by developing a virtual space for complaints as well as dreaming.<sup>61</sup> We learned from conversations with fellow students that are full of insider knowledges, not only about things that don't work in terms of campus and knowledge accessibility, but also strategies for making things work and ideas for how things should work. We therefore developed a place to gather these stories, a place to account for the knowledges, a place for people to connect their seemingly disparate experiences and perhaps feel less alone, perhaps gather in numbers and push for change. We wanted to create space for different ways of expressing and knowing, and invited both written stories and visual

61. The virtual space for this story and art sharing project is located at <https://mappingcare.art/mapping-access/> (Han & Ki, 2022). Initially the images were only to be shared on the social media account on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/mappingcare.art/>). After the launch of the project and sharing with various student circles, we received the feedback that those who do not have Instagram accounts could not view the images due to the restrictions of the social media platform. A gallery page on the above website was therefore created to repost both the images and texts of the stories.

stories about campus inaccessibility in the form of photographs or artwork. We understood that, especially for those who have been marginalized or socialized to keep silent about their truths, giving voice to experiences or complaining could feel complicated or frightening, so we developed an anonymous questionnaire as a tool for gathering stories and images. We also understood that some may wish to use imagery to tell their stories but could not easily access campus, especially during the pandemic, and therefore offered to take photos on campus for people to help illustrate their stories.

We built a social media account and webpage to house these stories in the format of image galleries. What we hoped for was to gather evidence that students can use for their own advocacy efforts for improving accessibility on campus; to create space for us all to learn from one another the strategies to navigate and resist inaccessible spaces; to share ideas and dreams toward collective access; and, learning from Mia Mingus, to leave evidence about our experiences, survival, subjugation, resourcefulness, and mutual care.<sup>62</sup>

62. Leaving Evidence is a blog by Mia Mingus (2022). As an introduction of this space, Mingus writes, "We must leave evidence. Evidence that we were here, that we existed, that we survived and loved and ached. Evidence of the wholeness we never felt and the immense sense of fullness we gave to each other. Evidence of who we were, who we thought we were, who we never should have been. Evidence for each other that there are other ways to live--past survival; past isolation" (sidebar).

**Figure 21**

*Mapping Access: Story Sharing Forms*

**Mapping Access: Story Sharing**

ki.patricia@gmail.com [Switch accounts](#)

The name and photo associated with your Google Account will be recorded when you upload files and submit this form. Your email address is not part of your response.

**\*Required**

**Sharing your stories**

This project invites York University students and alumni who are interested in adding their stories of campus inaccessibility, as well as supports and hopes.

You are invited to share stories, photos or artwork that reflect areas of inaccessibility on campus. Please share images only of places, spaces and things, and not people's faces. Not going on campus? No worries, Patricia will take limited trips to campus periodically to take pictures of areas mentioned in people's stories.

The survey will be open and we will publish posts on the Instagram account until June 30, 2022. Thereafter, the survey raw data from the Google Form will be deleted permanently. The Instagram account will remain publicly accessible.

What area(s) of campus does your story of inaccessibility pertain to? \*

- ☐ Pathways: Indoor & outdoor - e.g. barriers with signages, evenness/steepness of the ground, width of paths, etc.
- ☐ Learning spaces: Classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, virtual spaces, class schedules - but can be any space where classroom activities, research, and studying take place for you.
- ☐ Basic needs: Washrooms, food courts, York Lanes, residences, and any space that you access to meet your basic needs while on campus.
- ☐ Administration: registration system, accessibility services, finance services, HR self-serve, wellness services, faculty/departmental administration - can be any administrative system in the university that you've had experiences with.

If there is a photo of campus inaccessibility that you'd like to share, please upload:

[Add File](#)

Please share your story of inaccessibility or barriers related to campus or academic life: \*

Your answer

How have you been able to navigate these barriers? Are there supports that you find helpful in navigating these barriers?

Your answer

How would you like things to be different to make these spaces more accessible or better in meeting your needs as a student?

Your answer

[Back](#) [Submit](#) [Clear form](#)

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

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Google Forms

**Note.** An online form for sharing stories and images for the Mapping Access project, accessible at <https://mappingcare.art/mapping-access/>

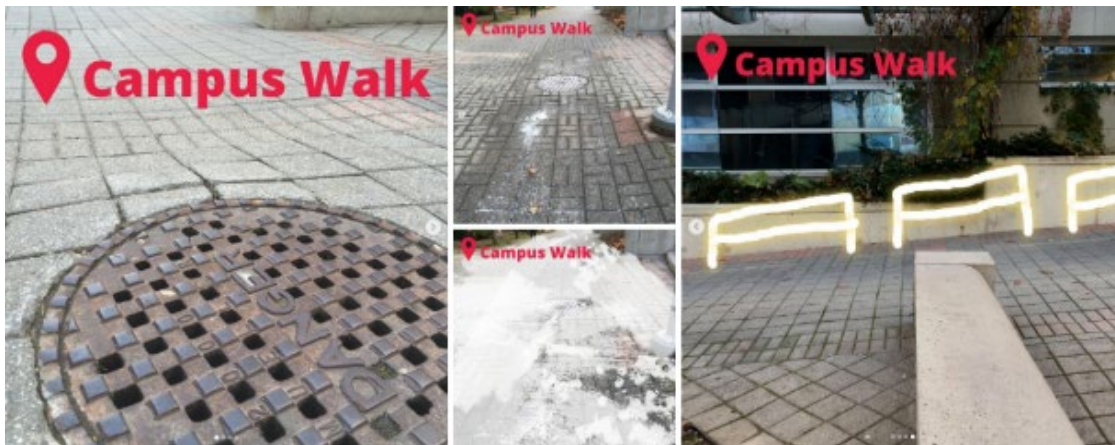
We shared the social media account and web page with groups of people we knew, at times the very students and graduates who inspired us to create this space for collective storytelling and complaints. We were however careful not to specifically ask anyone to fill out the questionnaire, so that no one felt coerced or pressured to



participate. The project launched in these public virtual spaces in late 2021. At the beginning of the project Yoonmee and I created and shared our own written and visual stories, partly because we have long been wanting to tell these stories, and partly to encourage participation.

## Figure 22

### *Mapping Access: Campus Walk*



*Note.* Patricia Ki, *Mapping Access: Campus Walk*, 2022, social media posts, in <https://mappingcare.art/2022/01/22/mapping-access-gallery/>

A series of images depicting the major pathway linking the main area of campus to where our program, Critical Disability Studies, recently moved to at Stong College. It depicts the elevation and unevenness of the ground especially when covered in snow (digitally added). It depicts the dream of rails being installed to increase the safety of the built environment for all with differing mobility.

**Figure 23**

*Mapping Access: Fatigue*



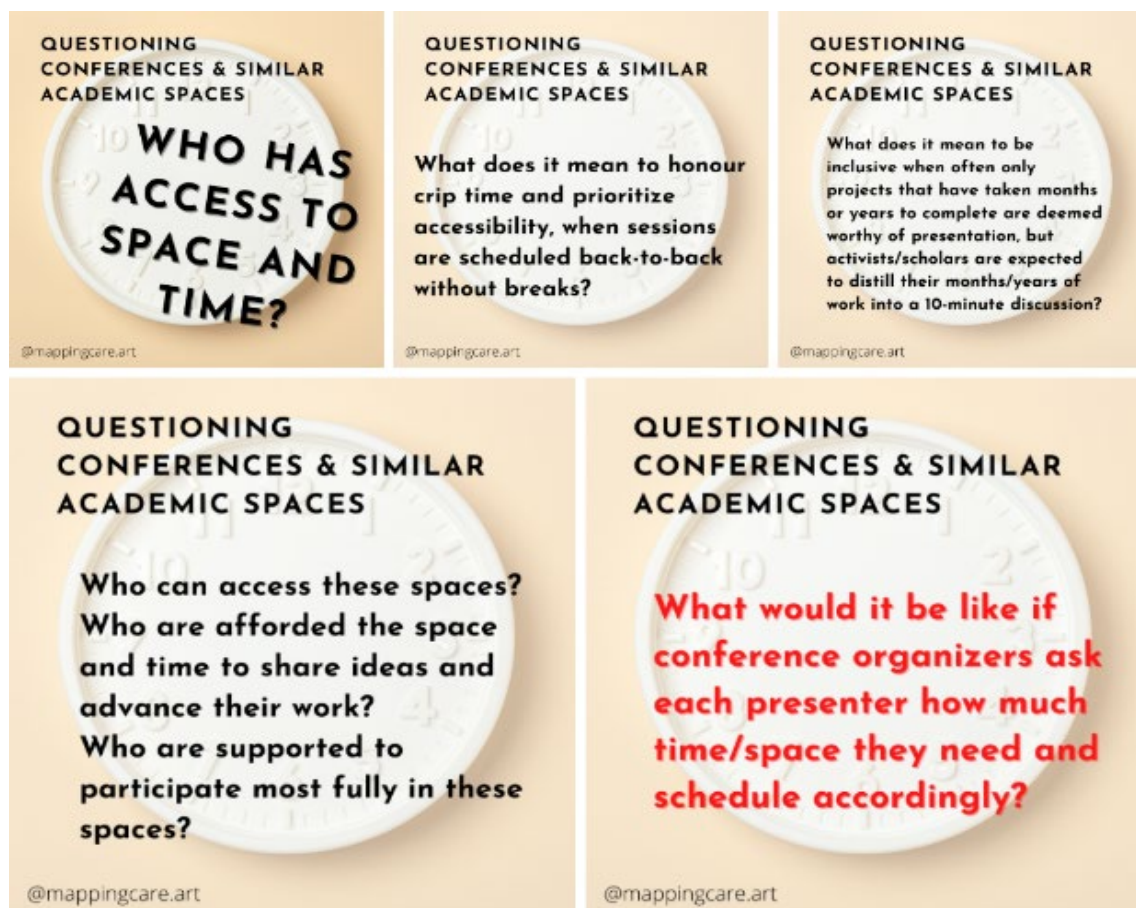
*Note.* Yoonmee Han, Mapping Access: Fatigue, 2022, social media posts, in <https://mappingcare.art/2022/01/22/mapping-access-gallery/>

This is a recurring story of additional labour just to attend classes and nevertheless missing classes, because the author couldn't find the buildings on campus with inconsistent and small signages that blended into the walls, "as if it is hidden from me which made it super confusing for a person with visual disability and colour blind," Yoonmee writes.

This is a recurring story of a space that was built for the norm of a sighted way of navigating the world. A learning environment that cements the norms for the success of some and the diminished survival of others.

**Figure 24**

*Mapping Access: Time*



*Note.* Patricia Ki, *Mapping Access: Time*, 2022, social media posts in

<https://mappingcare.art/2022/01/22/mapping-access-gallery/>

Some walls are invisible. Inaccessibility of knowledge production is certainly not limited to the built environment. This series of images depict questions that came up for me after years of going to conferences and similar academic spaces. They ask: how are these spaces reinforcing colonial measurement and management of time, and particular euro-western ways of thinking / speaking / expressing / participating as normative and desirable? They ask: What would it be like to truly centre the needs, knowledges, and expressions of different embodiments in academic spaces? What happens if we question our own common sense understanding about time and its boundaries to make space for collective access? What would it take for these academic spaces to no longer hold the authority of granting recognition for students / scholars / activists / researchers / communities?

It has been over a year since the launch of the project. A modest number of people have signed up to receive updates of new posts on the social media account (i.e. 'following' the account). However, to this day there has been no participation other than our own. It is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain why this is. Some guesses may be made around the implications or risk of public complaints, the worries that our words would not be heard (being rejected by the project for publication), our stories would not be welcomed (not receiving 'likes' on the social media account), which makes the effort of writing and creating not worth the effort. While we hoped that social media would be an accessible and familiar platform to share our truths as widely as possible, it has its own walls which replicate the norms of social desirability in popular culture and academia alike. Thinking back on adrienne maree brown's words about critical relationships being more important than critical mass in social transformation, it also makes sense that people who did not know us would not want to trust us with their stories and hopes. Why would they trust that our project will make a difference in

campus accessibility? However, one thing is certain: a lack of participation does not mean an absence of stories and experiences about inaccessibility and discriminatory structures in academic spaces. The social media and web gallery pages are still online and visible, our stories hang in the air, with no comments or replies. Perhaps this project can be understood as an opening or a way to hold open space for grief and for care, like an open hand not expecting returns. Perhaps the responses to our stories do not show up on our pages but unfold in other conversations. Perhaps our stories open up a way for someone to think about their own stories in different ways, in ways alternative to ableist norms that demand contortion to fit within its requirements, to realize how the ways things have always been need not be so. Indeed, a questionnaire does not have to return with participants, as objectivist ideology in research dictates. Participation need not be visible to the researcher. Participation may be carried out in directions not defined by the researcher and the project. The effects of the participation and of the project itself may therefore never be fully

knowable to the researcher. And yet we carve out this space in the constellation of the interrelations between various subjects of the academy, between the institution and the social structures that produces and sustains it. We hold open this space created through critical connection between two students with very different embodied experiences of ableist norms, collaborating with one another in solidarity, to talk back against norms that have become unthinkable for many others.

When the dominant rules become unthinkable, when such rules dictate following without thinking, without holding in mind and responding to those other-than-self in a thoughtless pattern of individualism and ableism and human exceptionality, we must create other patterns, other rules.<sup>63</sup> Along similar lines of thoughts with Alexis Shotwell's concept of open normativities, we might imagine rules that can bend to follow and safeguard the contour of flourishing.<sup>64</sup> The *unruly rules of engagement* that hold open possibilities for the unexpected, unruly, infinite singularity of each being. In this logic, such unruly rules stand firm

63. Haraway (2016) asks, "What happens when human exceptionalism and the utilitarian individualism of classical political economics become unthinkable in the best sciences across the disciplines and interdisciplines? Seriously unthinkable: not available to think with" (p. 57). She argues that such social and political thoughts have made the depletion of resources so rapid and the inter-relational and ecological systems so unstable, "What is required is action and thinking that do not fit within the dominant capitalist culture" (p. 47).

64. Drawing on Haraway's theorization of an ethical commitment to what is judged, without guarantees, to be good and deserving of a future, and to "earth-wide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness" (Haraway 1988, p. 187), Shotwell

against disposability, and reject those norms that secure freedom and access to resources for ourselves at the expense of others' well-being.

## Dis-ability

Earlier I drew on Butler's work to contemplate violence as an attack to social bonds, or our interdependent relationships that sustain all of us. Thinking with Haraway, we may also understand that such relational bonds are sustained by the varying degree of response-ability of every interrelated being.<sup>65</sup> By response-ability, I understand it literally as our ability to respond to others, but not just any kind of response. As Rossiter writes in reflection on Levinasian ethics, not responding is itself a response, a turning away that sponsors social and state neglect. The key, for me, in response-ability, is the cultivation of a specific *ability* to respond in alignment with the unruly rules of engagement in safeguarding the unknowable futures and flourishing of others as grievable beings. However, as Haraway also reminds us, not every being or every person is response-able in the same ways. For human beings, thinking with

(2016) uses the term open normativities to "name the contingent, without-guarantees, partially shared world that recognizes both ethical entanglement and irreducible difference. To judge that something deserves a future is to make a normative claim: this, that judgment says, deserves to continue" (p. 155, emphasis in original). This tentativeness points to an openness to the possibility of things being otherwise, a world that remains ever open to deviations. At the same time, the use of judgement makes clear that not all things deserve a future. As Shotwell writes, "working to proliferate open normativities will close down many norms" (p. 155). Importantly, "norms that flatten complexity and close down flourishing for others are rejected" (p. 156), and flourishing will continue to be a shifting, undecided, in-process norm.

65. Explaining response-ability, Haraway (2016) writes that "We are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories, and sometimes joyful histories too, but we are not all response-able in the same ways. The differences matter—in ecologies, economies, species, lives" (p. 29). With an example of a pigeon watch project in Washington, DC, in which urban children "move from seeing pigeons as 'rats with wings' to sociable birds with lives and deaths" (p. 24), Haraway shows that through remembering and commemorating the histories and histories-in-the-making of interrelationships between beings, people can become response-able as carers and advocates of beings "whom they had not known how to see or respect" (p. 25).

Ahmed, it may be understood that relative freedom from the requirements of capitalist systems, which is inextricably related to access to life sustaining resources and experiences of violence, shapes people's ability to respond to others. At the same time, Lorde writes that, for those who are living with multiple marginalizations and not meant to survive in the racist, capitalist culture of disposability, caring for the self is an act of political warfare, as the well-being of every member of a resistance movement contributes to the survival of the collective force of resistance and social transformation.<sup>66</sup> When groups of people are slated for slow death and shortened life through capitalist exploitation and state neglect, it is particularly potent that one's limited lifetime is spent on life sustaining connections and nourishment in refusal of the illusionary good life earned by giving to capital. In turn, intentional and political acts of self-care against normative, capitalist ways of being and use of time can shift the norms or the implicit or explicit rules of engagement in workplaces, academic spaces, and everyday relational encounters, thus opening up space for more marginalized people to do the same,

66. These words about self-care by Audre Lorde have been widely cited, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde, 1988/2017, p. 103, cited in Kim & Schalk, 2021, p. 326). In recent years there has been widespread proliferation of the idea of self-care, and along with it many feminist, disability, and anti-racist critiques of the problematics of self-care as a performance of social status, an individualist quick-fix to placate suffering from systemic injustices, a capitalist tactic to both encourage the consumption of care services and products and expect increased productivity as the ultimate goal of self-care (Kim & Schalk, 2021; McGee, 2020). Jina B. Kim and Sami Schalk (2021) offer a crip-of-color theorization of self-care that honours Lorde's understanding of self-care: "physical and mental, thoughtful, purposeful, necessary, political, and resistant to normative,



thereby weakening the stronghold of the requirements of the system on everyone. Response-ability to the self is therefore also interdependent with response-ability to others.

How, then, might we think about self-isolation and self-destruction as a repetition of violent relations as theorized by Butler and Thom, especially for people whose lives are constructed as disposable and whose deaths are seen as allowable within a culture of white supremacy, cisheteropatriarchy, and capitalist domination? Response-ability to others may involve extending care, sharing resources, taking time to sustain connections, holding open space for belonging, bringing people with you when you get somewhere. However, if we also hold true the idea that every person is infinitely unknowable, then when we give, we cannot assume the other will receive. When we extend, we cannot assume the other will meet us. When we share, we cannot assume the other will reciprocate, and we cannot assume that they will have the ability, in turn, to respond caringly to others. When we invite people to come with us, they may go in a separate

capitalist approaches to time that stand in opposition to wellness for marginalized people” (p. 329). Kim and Schalk reorient attention to self-care based on the recognition that “When you live in a world that seeks to do you harm or one that neglects you in such a way that your death is allowable, even necessary, both how you live and how you die are political” (p. 331). As such, rather than a depoliticized concern for the self, self-care for people who are marginalized is understood within the broader circulation of care, which “emerges as a political problematic that resonates across a number of scales, from Lorde’s own bids to determine her own course of medical care to the death-dealing denial of state care and the foreshortening of life for the nation’s most vulnerable” (p. 333).

direction. We cannot take for granted others' ability to respond to our responses. We cannot take for granted that what we can give is what people need. I am reminded of the people I have met while working in social services who are often labeled hard-to-serve, people who often do not accept resources or care, people who struggle with human interactions and are unlikely to join a care collective or mutual aid program, people who told me they would rather die on the streets than access shelter or social services because of the violence they had experienced in these spaces, people who told me that they could not stop harming themselves as a way to escape from the memory and reality of violence they were experiencing. As such, we cannot even take for granted others' ability to respond to their own needs for their lives to continue on, if life becomes truly unlivable due to its violent conditions, if self-destruction feels to be the only option in response to this unlivable life. This then leads to the question, *what does violence do to our abilities to repair what sustains us?*

Following Butler and Haraway, if violence is an attack on the social bond

that connects and sustains all of us, then a consequence of violence would be a disconnection from our abilities to respond to ourselves and others, or a diminishing of our response-abilities, both individual and collective. Might this be another way *dis-ability* can be understood? Over 50 years ago disability rights activists undercut the cultural dominance of biomedical definition of disability by arguing that it is not peoples' bodies that disable them, but the ableist culture, environment, and social arrangements that impose barriers to peoples' full participation in society.<sup>67</sup> This social model of disability was nevertheless built on the belief that biological impairments are an unfortunate fact of life that is different from the social construction of disability produced by ableist social conditions. Asking questions about who get left out by the rights-seeking movements based on the social model of disability, and what biopolitical and capitalist tactics are reinforced through this binary differentiation of biological impairments and social construction of disability within communities of disabled people, scholars developed critical disability studies as a specialized area of

67. The social model of disability emerged through disability rights movements in Britain in the 1970s and 80s (Shakespeare, 2013). While the social model also draws from critical theory in examining the interrelations between capitalist system of production and disability, analyzing systemic restrictions and subjugations of those seen as disabled, and emphasizing emancipatory goals (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009), critical disability scholars challenge the social model's binary conceptualizations of impairment as biologically determined and disability as socially constituted (Tremain, 2006). Shelley Tremain (2006) argues that there is no phenomena or social condition that can be identified outside of the specific cultural contexts in which they are produced and understood. She thus theorizes that what is perceived as impairment is an effect of biopolitics, which refers to a strategic mobilization of power and knowledge to rationalize, classify, and regulate human experiences as population problems that require management through governmental practices. Critical disability studies thus build

scholarship by drawing on critical theory to both challenge and extend this social model of disability, linking theory and practice in producing analyses of institutional measures and community activism that impact the subjectivities and material realities of disabled people. Learning from critical disability studies itself, we may continue to ask questions about who gets left behind, in what ways critique can link theory and practice, in what ways the work of scholars working within academic institutions and situated with significantly more freedom from the requirements of the capitalist system can meaningfully understand the living experiences of multiply marginalized disabled peoples, and in what ways can scholarly critiques and analyses materially benefit disabled people with little to no access to institutional power.

The disability justice movement evolves through the grassroots organizing of disabled, BIPOC, queer, and trans activists, scholars, and allies.<sup>68</sup> It prioritizes leadership of the most impacted: people who are multiply marginalized by intersecting

upon critical theory in investigating and exposing how power operates through conceptualizations of disability and impairment, particularly critiquing the seemingly benevolent institutional measures and even rights-seeking movements that in reality regulate disabled people's subjectivities and access to resources through reinforcing ableist and capitalist norms (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009).

68. Patty Berne (2015) offers a list of ten principles of disability justice: intersectionality, leadership of the most impacted, anti-capitalist politics and commitment to cross-movement organizing, recognizing wholeness, sustainability, commitment to cross-disability solidarity, interdependence, collective access, and collective liberation. Mia Mingus' (2010) lyrical narrative may be understood as ways

systems of domination, the bodies deemed deviant, invalid, and unproductive against the norms of white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism. The movement emphasizes also cross-disability and cross-movements coalitions and collaborations, for as systems of domination and violence are interlocked, the approach to dismantle such systems must also be coordinated and collective. Coordinated and collective organizing must in turn rely on interdependent connections and actions. As such, the aim of disability justice is collective access and collective liberation, as each person's well-being is interdependent with that of every other. Mia Mingus' writing brings to life how ideals of the movement can be lived out through a commitment of care for one another amongst people with different ways of being, and how this commitment to and connections with one another also sustain the ongoing becoming, healing, and flourishing of the self.

With our lives, our knowing, and our ways of being shaped by the daily living within neoliberal, capitalist social

through which these principles are lived out. She writes, "We resist ableism dividing us. I resist my disability being pitted against your disability. We will not be divided... What does crip solidarity look like? Between crips?... I know what it is like to be left behind, left out, forgotten about. I know you know as well. We vow to not do that together, to each other" (para. 2, 3, 5). She writes also about the importance of cross-disability solidarity for the subjectivity of the self as a disabled person within an ableist world: "For most of my life it has been easier to perform a survival able-bodied-friendly version of myself, rather than nurturing the harder to live disabled-self-loving version of who I ache, desire and need to be. Because it has often meant the difference between a-little-bit-more-connection and a-little-less-isolation. But what is the point of connection, if you still feel isolated and alienated from your self? And what is that connection built upon and from? How do I want to be connected?" (para. 7).

conditions, the dominant, most readily available, image of disability that comes to most people's minds remains a body-mind that is biologically impaired, or a body-mind that is constructed as impaired and disabled by a discriminatory environment. Both ways of understanding focus on the experience, access to resources, and needs of the individual body-mind. This continues to fix disability as an individual experience and a personal problem. This is evident in the provision of disability benefits and services to individual service users within professionalized care settings that perpetuates the social control and violence against disabled and poor people through the use of coercive measures and discriminatory policies. Or the provision of academic accommodation to individual racialized and disabled students while neglecting the ableist and racist approach in course delivery, the lack of Indigenous and Black scholarship in the program, and the barriers that make access to classes difficult in the first place. What would it take to expand this understanding of disability: to confront the widespread violence of disposability that ableism is a product

of; to foreground the interdependence and social bonds that are necessary to sustain the survival and flourishing of all singular bodies-minds and beings in our analyses, critiques, strategies, and practices; to bridge the individual experiences of disabled people to the collective aims and practices of disability justice—to truly engage with every life as grievable and interdependent with our lives, in all of their varying degrees and ways of response-ability to others and to themselves?

What if *dis-ability* is understood as an effect of violence that disconnects people from their ability to respond to themselves and others in ways that sustain their survival and flourishing, individually and collectively? How does violence disconnect people from what they need to live and thrive? What does violence take? Violent patterns of relations take away our ability to trust ourselves and others in order to connect with, to receive care from, and respond to ourselves and others as valuable, irreplaceable beings. Violent systemic structures take away our senses and knowing of our needs for

rest and care by demanding productivity even in our rest and self-care as use value for capital. Violent social conditions take away collaborative connections, loving and caring relationships, and solidarity with others through the myth of independence, the lure of meritocracy, the threat of personal dissolution, and the fear of scarcity.<sup>69</sup> Violent traditions of colonial conquest and exploitation take away our awareness of our dependence and impacts, both destructive and nurturing, on other humans and beings and the earth with the pervasive culture of disposability. Violence takes away our own heart by disconnecting us from our ability to love and to grieve others and the earth.

## Love

I was once told that grief is love with nowhere to go. While Butler suggests that we don't have to love one another in order to treat each other as grievable, following bell hooks, I believe that grief does not exist without love, and vice versa. If grievability means the loss of the person would be intolerable, then I believe that it is love, a desire for this life to continue and

69. Addressing the challenges of disability justice activism, Mingus (2018) writes, "no matter how on-point our analysis is, if we can't treat each other well, our work will not get far. Because the systems we are up against will require collective work... It is always so amazing to me that disabled people, who are so incredibly isolated and exiled, will also isolate and exile each other. And I know most of us have been on *both* sides of this... if we can't love each other and ourselves, then what good is any of our work to get free? If we can't reach out to break isolation and the walls we've put up between each other, as disabled people, then we will have already lost before we've won any political battle. What good is it if we can wage amazing campaigns, if we all end up hating each other in the end?" (para. 32, 33, 36, emphasis in original) To bell hooks (1999), the lack of capacity to treat each other with care and love is a result of violence. She asserts that violence, including abuse and neglect, cannot co-exist with love and necessarily negates love. As a result of such experiences of violence and the absence of love, "the intensity of our woundedness often leads to a closing of the heart, making it impossible for us to give or receive the love that is given to us" (p. xxix). In turn, the "inability to connect with others carries with it an inability to assume responsibility for causing pain" (p. 39), thus perpetuating a vicious cycle, a repetition of the violent pattern of relations (Butler, 2021).



flourish, that fuels the sorrow at the thought of losing this person. Love can be perceived as a word that is overused, its meanings murky, bringing up different understanding or feelings for different people. bell hooks believes that the foundation to a different world is love.<sup>70</sup> Love for hooks is not the commercialized sentiments produced to maximize capitalist consumption, or a deceptive lure that aims for obedience and subjugation as a tactic of patriarchal and colonial domination. Love, for hooks, is the basis of interdependent flourishing through practices of care and justice. Thinking along with bell hooks and Shotwell, hooks' definition of love not as a feeling but a willful action may be understood as a form of open normativity.

By now we are acutely aware that relations of violence are repeated through professionalized care.<sup>71</sup> Through the stories we witnessed and our own experiences as people who work in service systems and people who have accessed service systems, the collaborators of this project and I—and many people whose knowledges I have drawn on in this work—can attest

70. hooks (1999) points out the importance of defining love as a “starting point for the imagination” (p. 14), for what “we cannot imagine cannot come into being” (p. 14). She describes this definition as a map. A map that is the starting point of imagination implies that this definition of love is open to shifting and transforming and things being otherwise, resonating with the idea of open normativity as discussed by Shotwell (2016). hooks (1999) defines “love as the will to nurture our own and another’s spiritual growth” (p. 6). She argues that love is not a feeling but an act of will, a choice that one makes repeatedly in their relationships with others. By spirit, she is referring to the “dimension of our core reality where mind, body, and spirit are one... a life force” (p. 13). Moreover, she believes that “To be loving is to be open to grief, to be touched by sorrow” (p. 201), and “to give homage to our dead, to hold them” (p. 203). For hooks, defining “love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility” (p. 13).

71. Like Butler (2021), hooks does not advocate care alone as the basis of ethics. She specifies that while care is an important aspect of love as action, “simply giving care does not mean we are loving” (p. 8). Indeed, from the Canadian Residential Schools to coercion and surveillance in professionalized care settings, it is evident that violence has been repeatedly enacted through the deception of social control and subjugation disguised as care.

to the reality that care does not equal justice. Care is in fact violent in many spaces. As we think about our response-ability, knowing what we know now, there may be the urge or a feeling of urgency to build a different world, different system, different structure, completely separate from the state and other systems of domination. Indeed, one of the aims of transformative justice is to devise alternative ways to address and interrupt harm that do not rely on the state.<sup>72</sup> We dream of this world without state harm, without domination and subjugation. However, if we tell the truths in our bodies and the truths we have witnessed, we can likely weave together a very complex tapestry of interdependence that includes racialized, poor, and disabled people who work for the state; people whose livelihoods rely on professionalized care work as a worker or/and as service user; people who work for non-profit or even grassroots organizations that could not continue to support its workers and offer services without funding coming from or somehow enabled by the state; people who are only able to contribute funds and time to grassroots organizing because they

72. Describing transformative justice, brown (2017) writes that the goal and the practices are to first become aware of the reality of state harm, then look for alternative ways to address and interrupt harm which do not rely on state interventions, mainly by relying on community created and sustained strategies, in order to transform the root causes of violence, not only the individual experiences of people who have experienced and/or caused harm.

**Figure 25**

*The Master's Tools Will Never (detail)*



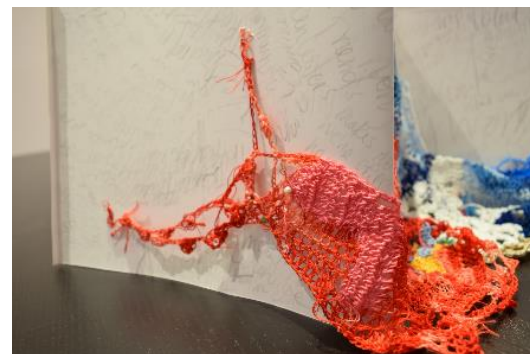
have employment in state sanctioned businesses or organizations; people who have lost all connections with their families and friends because of the intensity of their woundedness and the only support they have are state employed care workers who are guaranteed to return time after time despite hurtful language or even physical violence because it is their job. The world we dream of is stateless and free of domination and hierarchy and it is a world in the future. But the world that is different is not one that is in the future; *it is a world in the making* and it includes state sponsored businesses, organizations, infrastructures, and all the people whose lives are interdependent with such infrastructures.<sup>73</sup>

When I worked on the photography and stitching piece about the institutional walls and the world building from underneath and behind it, I was thinking that even the walls are part of interdependence. Infrastructure is part of the social bond. It moves with me, pulls and constraints my stitches and movement as I stitch and craft and build away from it. Capitalism along with colonialism, white supremacy,

73. Describing how to best practice non-violence, Butler (2021) asks, “if we can imagine this dependency within personal life and intimate forms of dependency, can we not also understand that we are dependent on institutions and economies without which we cannot persist as the creatures that we are?” (p. 100). At the same time, Angela Davis (2006) in her lecture about how change happens, remarked that it is crucially important not to ascribe permanency to the existing systems, that, as she was reminded by her mother, things will not always be this way. It is therefore important to collectively imagine and work toward a world that is different.

**Figure 26**

*The Master's Tools Will Never (detail)*



ableism, and cisheteropatriarchy is altogether a wily system. I'm not certain if there is any way of living that is completely outside of its reach. Not even the threads and the stitches and the ways they interact are outside of existing social arrangements and cultural intelligibility which are parts of dominating systems. It is not a binary between the walls and the newly stitched fabric. In some ways, the newly stitched fabric is shaped by the walls and as such carries with it, or embodies, aspects of the walls. But this is by no means hopeless. The further I move away from the walls the more movable I become, the more I am able to stitch and build something different. The more we build the harder for the wall to stand. Eventually the wall may be taken down by the weight and the force of our collectivity.

This is not to say that we should not believe that a world that is stateless and free of domination and hierarchy can exist. This is to say that to dismantle the sources of oppression and domination altogether may require building anew elsewhere, and it may also require taking over the infrastructure itself.<sup>74</sup> Taking over may

74. As lives cannot be separate from institutional structures, Butler (2021) argues that the "institutional life of violence will not be brought down by prohibition, but only by a counter-institutional ethos and practice" (p. 61). Such counter-institutional ethos and practices must therefore be "expanded to a political principle that seeks to safeguard lives through institutional and economic means, and to do so in a way that fails to distinguish between populations that are immanently grievable and those that are not" (p. 100). Resonantly, hooks (1999) writes that responding to injustices and taking responsibility means that "in the face of barriers we still have the capacity to invent our lives... Every day we practice this shape-shifting to cope with realities we cannot easily change" (p. 57)

look like including more people with marginalized identity markers or adding a program or policy within an existing ableist, white supremacist institutional structure and we know that these strategies are of limited use but that may be the best that could be done with the resources available at the time. Perhaps somewhere along the way someone will pick up the threads and the loose ends and these attempts of change become the foundation or inspirations upon which new open normativities, revitalized unruly rules of engagement, of grievability and of love can be enacted, expanded to, and infiltrated within structures of the state and of capital, such as professionalized care and the academy. Countless partial, situated attempts have already been made toward a more livable world. Finding spaces and moments to enact an open normativity of grievability and love within the infrastructure (is there an outside of it?), to slow down and take time to care for and listen and hold open space for belonging and differences, to wait for everyone to arrive in agreement before we move forward together, in deliberate defiance of the relations of capitalist exploitation and the myth of

safety in approximation of white-able-bodiedness and the narrow path to happiness by competition, may be one way of repeating our embeddedness in this institutional life differently, thus shifting the world that exists toward the world we want, by shifting ourselves and our response-ability, often one relationship at a time. After all, our ways of being will always exceed the boundaries of any structure of domination.<sup>75</sup> If we ourselves can be the unruly tools, amplifying the destabilizing effects of our excesses and deviations, shape-shifting to reinvent our realities at every turn, interdependent through the embodied knowing that none of us is disposable because all of us are grievable, then the master's tools will never take us down.

75. As Butler (1990) writes in the closing paragraphs of *Gender Trouble*, "The task here is not to celebrate each and every new possibility *qua* possibility, but to redescribe those possibilities that *already* exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible. If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old" (p. 203, emphasis in original).

**Figure 27**

*The Master's Tools Will Never*



*Note.* Patricia Ki, *The Masters Tools Will Never*, 2022-ongoing. Graphite and embroidery on photo paper, crochet with salvaged threads and beads, approximately 8.5"x45".

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