University of Alberta

Hauntings:
Representations of Vancouver's Disappeared Women

by

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We inherit not "what really happened" to the dead but what lives on from that happening, what is conjured from it, how past generations and events occupy the force fields of the present, how they claim us, and how they haunt, plague, and inspirit our imaginations and visions for the future.

- Wendy Brown, <u>Politics Out of History</u>, 150

Abstract

In this dissertation I examine representations of the events surrounding the disappearance and murder of women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, in the interests of animating a sense of implication in these events among a wider public. To do so, I build on theoretical concepts developed in the work of Avery Gordon, Judith Butler, and Wendy Brown, namely the notions of hauntings, grievability, and inheritance. My approach to knowledge production builds upon Avery Gordon's theorizing about the significance of hauntings in particular. Following Gordon, I argue that while the women disappeared from Vancouver are no longer physically "there" in the Downtown Eastside, they do indeed maintain what Gordon describes as a "seething presence" in Vancouver (and beyond), one that suggests matters of some urgency for contemporary social and political life, and so my research traces those presences as they have arisen through my engagement with a variety of cultural productions (including documentary film, photography, journalism, art, and poetry). Building on insights from each of the three theorists listed above, I argue that ethical encounters with the ghosts of the women who have been disappeared require rethinking conventional ways of understanding the relationships between self/other and past/present/future.

Because the women disappeared from the Downtown Eastside are disproportionately Indigenous, I begin by investigating how histories of colonization, and in particular the frontier mythology so commonplace in western Canada, are implicated in these contemporary acts of violence. I argue that conventional understandings of space, temporality, and history are inadequate for

understanding these events in all of their complexity. From there, I investigate

how and why the women were initially cast, in a variety of representations, as

living lives that many assumed could not be widely recognized through the

framework of what Judith Butler has coined a "grievable life." And finally, I ask

after what kind of memorial practices might be most capable of hailing an "us"

into relations of inheritance with the women who have been disappeared - such

relations, I argue, are a necessary part of reckoning with our individual and

collective implication in the disappearances of women from the Downtown

Eastside.

Note to the Reader

This is not a conventional thesis. But the funny thing is, I didn't realize this myself until I happened to sit in on a session titled "Publishing and Marketing your Scholarly Book" at a recent Congress of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. This session was geared primarily towards doctoral students who might be thinking about trying to publish their dissertations, and the speakers included two acquisitions editors from Canadian scholarly presses. One of the biggest hurdles to transforming a thesis into a book, they suggested, has to do with the question of audience, for while a dissertation is generally written in the interests of securing the approval of five particular academics (the examining committee), a book, they insisted, even an academic book, must speak to a wider audience. This revelation came as a surprise to me, for it struck me quite suddenly that I had never, ever imagined that the five academics on my examining committee would be the only, or even the primary, audience for my dissertation.

From the outset, I imagined that my dissertation would, and ought to, be of interest to a broader public – and not necessarily just a broader academic public, either. Instead, I imagined it being picked up and read by members of my family, or by some of the people I have collaborated with outside of academe in activist and social justice circles. I also imagined that it might be read by some more anonymous members of the public who had read or watched much of the media reportage on the story of Vancouver's disappeared women and developed an interest in the topic. So, although I certainly wanted to enter into various

academic debates, I wanted to do so in a way that might still hold the attention

and interest of those for whom these debates might be entirely foreign. This desire

has had a tremendous impact on the way my dissertation has been written – more

impact than even I realized until I attended that session.

As a result, instead of attempting to demonstrate my mastery of a set of

academic debates, which is perhaps the terrain of a more conventional thesis, I

have written this dissertation in such a way as to animate my understanding of the

significance of those debates for a wider public. And while I certainly engage

with the ideas of a few theorists that I imagine to be some of the most important

critical thinkers of our times, I have in places deliberately opted not to trace the

genealogy of their ideas through the theorists that have influenced them, and those

that have in turn influenced *their* interlocutors, and so on. I definitely value this

approach to theorizing and recognize its importance, and I could certainly have

written that kind of a dissertation, but it would be a very different document from

the one you are about to read. My decision in this regard has to do, I believe, with

a set of ethical questions that have plagued me since I began this project: namely,

what does it mean to "do theory" as a response to the violence, suffering and loss

of others? And what are the risks of such theorizing? I don't have any

straightforward answers to these questions, but I have come to believe, through

the process of researching and writing this dissertation, that an ethical approach

offers an intervention of sorts, and that the kind of intervention that interests me

most attempts to interrupt ideas and various discursive framings as they are

circulating among a broader public, and does so in a way that aims to engage some members of that public in the debate.

Finally, I have also paid a great deal of attention to my approach to writing in this dissertation, because through the research process I began to realize that questions of writing and style were central to my approach to knowledge production, rather than peripheral. As a result, I have included a fair bit of critical reflection on some of my own experiences, both prior to and during the process of writing. This, too, is intentional, because as I was researching and writing I began to see how some of these experiences actually offered openings that allowed me to better animate the theoretical ideas that I was working with. These openings provided opportunities for me to get to the core of what it seems to me matters most within a set of academic debates – about subjectivity, temporality, and implication in particular. As a result, I have tried to write about those experiences quite carefully and deliberately in ways that animate precisely what it is that I believe to be at stake in those debates. Whether I have succeeded in doing so will depend very much on the sorts of effects that these passages, and my approach to writing in general, have on you, the reader, who has lurked in my imagination since the very beginning.

Acknowledgements

So many people have contributed to the writing of this dissertation that it is difficult to sort out where to begin. As with any written work, however, its shortcomings are of course all my own.

First to my co-supervisors: Daphne Read encouraged me to do this work from the very beginning, and her many generous readings gave me the courage and confidence to proceed when I would have just as soon turned away. She also pushed me to consider the limitations of the concepts of grievability and witnessing as I was using them, which has made this work immensely stronger. For all of her thoughtful contributions, critical reflections, reassurances, and for her encouragement throughout the process, I am immensely grateful.

Sharon Rosenberg's keen insights pushed my thinking and writing in so many ways that it is impossible to recall who "I" was before we began working together, and for all of those important pushes I am extremely grateful. Sharon's input and suggestions as co-supervisor, and her many detailed engagements with each draft of the dissertation, have had a tremendous impact on both its form and content. In addition, the opportunity to collaborate with Sharon and with Kara Granzow in work undertaken for Sharon's SSHRC-funded research project, "Opening the Present to the Violently Dead," had a profound impact on my thinking about temporality and the significance of the relationship between past and present, in particular.

I am indebted to Anne Stone for inviting me to join her as co-editor of a special issue of <u>West Coast Line</u> while I was working on this project.

Conversations with Anne as we worked on that publication and beyond have been enormously rewarding, and I am particularly grateful for her careful critique of a much earlier version of chapter four.

Without innumerable conversations with Kara Granzow about how to go about doing this work, my writing of this dissertation would quite simply not have been possible. I am grateful to her for a collaboration that is both intellectually challenging and immensely supportive and encouraging.

Several other people at the University of Alberta provided helpful suggestions along the way, including other members of my examining committee: Julie Rak, who pushed me to consider the importance of journalism and also asked, 'why grievability – why not mournability?'; Mike O'Driscoll, whose challenging and very thoughtful questions at both my candidacy and defence have really enriched my thinking; and Cressida Heyes, who has a real knack for challenging yet productive questions, and who continuously reminds me never to get complacent about any one approach to critique.

My good friend and fellow student Paul Ugor helped keep me sane throughout my entire PhD program, and offered insightful readings of several of my chapters. I'm grateful for the gifts of his friendship and keen intellect. My friend and colleague Shurli Makmillen engaged with me in an intellectual exchange of our work that challenged me to think and write in greater depth about many ideas, and in particular about my use of that pesky "we." I'm also grateful to Shawna Ferris for her collaboration on several productive conference panels

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Unsettled Theory

INTRODUCTION

"Woman's body found beaten beyond recognition …
Just another day / Just another death"?[1]

In the spring of 2000 I fulfilled a longstanding desire to move to the city

of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, that ocean-side metropolis renowned as

one of the world's most "livable" cities.[2] I had longed to live in Vancouver for

most of my adult life. This city was also the joyous destination of several

summertime family road trips during my childhood (two facts that are hardly

unrelated). At the time of my move there, I associated Vancouver with the ocean

(and the sense of peaceful solitude that sitting on a beach and listening to the surf

always evokes in me); with the end of long, cold prairie winters (which, coming

from Edmonton, I had lived in dread of my entire life); with incredible natural

beauty (year-round green spaces, flowers in February, cherry blossoms); and with

culture, diversity, and social justice activism (Vancouver, after all, has a whole

queer *district* and, unlike Edmonton, is also home to a network of people who call

themselves prison abolitionists, people whom I immediately sought out due to a

burgeoning concern about prison justice issues). At the time of this move it would

be safe to say that Vancouver was for me a much-beloved space, and so it

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[1] These lines are borrowed from a poem by Sarah de Vries, a woman who was disappeared from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in 1998. Poem © Maggie de Vries. Reprinted with permission. I go on to discuss De Vries' poem in more detail later in this chapter, and again in chapter five and in my epilogue.

[2] Vancouver has repeatedly been ranked as among the world's most "livable" cities by The Economist, which annually ranks cities of the world using its "livability index." See the report by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2007/08/23/bc-vancouver.html> Accessed 12 May 2008. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to analyze the politics and assumptions of the "livability index," but suffice it to say that my research will undoubtedly raise questions about *for whom* the city is made so livable and at what cost to others' lives. For example, what does it mean that the world's most "livable" city contains a neighbourhood that has been repeatedly described as "Canada's poorest postal code"?

remains, although my sense of the city is radically different now. I recall that for

months after I first moved there, as I crested Burnaby mountain on my way home

from Simon Fraser University (where I was starting a Master's degree) and caught

that first glimpse of Burrard Inlet, I would actually exclaim "I live here!" out loud

with so much joy and awe at that simple feat that I feel a bit abashed, now, at the

recollection.

When I arrived in Vancouver I knew little about the Downtown Eastside

(other than that Hastings Street was an area one should avoid – a vague warning

that caused me to decide against renting a terrific little apartment on East Hastings

near the base of Burnaby mountain. Of course, I learned later that this is a whole

city away from the area I had been warned about). I certainly was not conscious

of the 27 women listed by officials as missing from the Downtown Eastside at the

time of my arrival, although as it turns out I had already learned something of the

violence directed at women from that neighbourhood, even if I would not

necessarily have recalled it at the time. Several more women were disappeared

from the Downtown Eastside over the remainder of that year, but this likely did

not come to my attention until the fall of 2001, when reporters working for <u>The</u>

<u>Vancouver Sun</u> wrote a series of articles about the disappearances. By that time, I

knew much more about the area known as the Downtown Eastside – I had been

introduced to the neighbourhood through some of the activist work I was involved

in, and also by a lover who frequented the area for companionship and to alleviate

an addiction to crack cocaine. Yet, perhaps not so surprisingly, I only came to

connect these ties with the Downtown Eastside to my curiosity and concern about

the women disappeared from this neighbourhood in hindsight, as I began working

on this dissertation.

For those who might be unfamiliar with the events with which this

dissertation is concerned: 65 women who lived or worked in Vancouver's

Downtown Eastside neighbourhood are currently listed by a joint Vancouver

Police Department and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Missing

Women's Task Force as "missing."[3] The first woman to have been disappeared

from this neighbourhood, according to that task force, went missing in the late

1970s (although there is good reason to believe that many women were

disappeared from the neighbourhood before then, too[4]). Since that time, more and

more women have been disappeared from the community, with a sharp increase in

the numbers of women listed by police as "last seen" in the late 1990s and the

very early years of the twenty-first century. For many of the women on the

official list of the missing, those of us who did not know them before they were

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[3] I put "missing" in quotes here because it seems odd to me that a number of women whose remains were discovered by police before November 2003 were nonetheless still categorized as "missing" by those same police on a reward poster re-released in 2007. I understand that it might appear inappropriate for police to insist upon the guilt of the man (Robert Pickton) accused of the women's murders before he has exhausted the appeals process, and yet the physical evidence unequivocally confirms that at least some if not all of the women Pickton is accused of having murdered were most certainly dead at the time of this poster's reissue in 2007. To keep them listed as "missing" then seems curious, since the police certainly know through the discovery of their remains that they were killed, even if all of the details of those killings are yet to be definitively decided in court (as of June 2009, Pickton has appealed his conviction on 6 counts of second-degree murder to the Supreme Court of Canada). So "missing" seems somewhat misleading as a descriptor for these particular women at this point in time, although they certainly remain missing from the lives of their friends, family and loved ones.

[4] For example, the deaths of at least 10 women going back as far as 1965 have been connected to a man named Gilbert Paul Jordan, although he was convicted of manslaughter in only one of the women's deaths. The lives of several of his presumed victims are the subject of a remarkable play by Canadian playwright Marie Clements, titled The Unnatural and Accidental Women. Their deaths suggest that the heightened vulnerability of women, and particularly of Indigenous women (all of Gilbert's presumed victims were Indigenous), extends beyond the timeframe designated by the police task force, and I will also go on to argue in chapter three that it likely extends back much, much further still.

disappeared can now, in some cases, learn little more than their names and the

approximate dates when they were last seen:

Lillian O'Dare – September 1978

Wendy Allen - 1979

Rebecca Juno – June 1983

Sherry Rail – November 1983

Yvonne Abigosis – January 1984

Linda Grant – October 1984

Sheryl Donahue – May 1985

Laura Mah – August 1985

Elaine Allenbach – March 1986

Taressa Williams – July 1988

Ingrid Soet – August 1989

Elaine Dumba – 1991

Mary Lands – April 1991

Nancy Clark – August 1991

Elsie Sebastian – June 1992

Kathleen Wattley – June 1992

Sherry Baker – January 1993

Gloria Fedyshyn – February 1993

Teresa Triff – April 1993

Leigh Miner – December 1993

Angela Arseneault – August 1994

Catherine Gonzalez – March 1995

Catherine Knight – April 1995

Dorothy Spence – August 1995

Diana Melnick – December 1995

Frances Young – April 1996

Tanya Holyk – October 1996

Olivia William – December 1996

Cara Ellis – January 1997

Marie Laliberte – January 1997

Stephanie Lane – January 1997

Jacqueline Murdock – January 1997

Sharon Ward – February 1997

Andrea Borhaven – March 1997

Kellie Little – April 1997

Sherry Irving – April 1997

Janet Henry – June 1997

Ruby Hardy – July 1997

Cindy Beck – September 1997

Marnie Frey – September 1997

Helen Hallmark – October 1997

Cynthia Feliks – December 1997

Kerri Koski – January 1998

Inga Hall – February 1998

Tania Petersen – February 1998

Sarah de Vries – April 1998

Sheila Egan – July 1998

Tammy Fairbairn – July 1998

Julie Young – October 1998

Angela Jardine – November 1998

Marcella Crieson – December 1998

Michelle Gurney – December 1998

Jacquelene McDonnell – January 1999

Brenda Wolfe – February 1999

Georgina Papin – March 1999

Wendy Crawford – December 1999

Jennifer Furminger – December 1999

Tiffany Drew – March 2000

Dawn Crey – November 2000

Sharon Abraham – December 2000

Debra Jones – December 2000

Yvonne Boen – March 2001

Patricia Johnson – March 2001

Heather Bottomley – April 2001

Heather Chinnock – April 2001

Andrea Joesbury – June 2001

Sereena Abotsway – August 2001

Dianne Rock – October 2001

Mona Wilson – November 2001

It took a long time to carefully type out those names, some of which I now know

by heart, others of which remain less familiar. It takes a long time to read them,

too, and as the mind starts to grasp the length of the list the eye sometimes starts

to skip past a name here and there, seeking the ending point, particularly if we are

not searching for a name or names that we know. This is the trouble with names:

they tell us so little, almost nothing, about the women that they represent if we did

not know them in life, so that even strung together in such a long list it is difficult,

if not impossible, to take in the significance, the magnitude of the losses that their

disappearances mark. This particular list of names is also quite limited, as it

encompasses only the names of women currently designated by police as

"missing:" a list of the names of all of the women who have been disappeared

from the Downtown Eastside over the last several decades would span many more

pages still. For all of these reasons I hesitate to list any names at all; yet to

proceed with describing the events surrounding the disappearances of the women

listed, and in the next paragraph to name the man accused of murdering several of

them, without having offered space for even their names, seems unjust or possibly

even cruel. Listing the names of the dead is a far from perfect memorial strategy

but at the same time its importance persists, and so I offer it here with the

awareness that it is far too small and too simple a gesture.[5]

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[5] These brief thoughts on both the importance and limitations of listing the names of the dead as a
memorial strategy engage an already existent body of literature; for example, see Edith
Wyschogrod's <u>Spirit in Ashes</u> and Judith Butler's review of the latter; see also Sharon

Where charges have been laid in the disappearance of a woman on this list, a bit more information about her is available now in the form of a brief, almost obituary-like personal profile compiled by members of the Canadian Press.[6] In these, we learn that many of the women had children, or that they had a love of horses or a fondness for singing, or cooking, or playing softball, or a quirky sense of humour. Most of the women named above have friends, families, and lovers or partners who love and miss them and who noticed their disappearances almost immediately (in contrast to some initial suggestions otherwise). Many, perhaps most, of the women on this list did street-level, survival sex work at the time of their disappearances and were grappling with an addiction to drugs, which is what most of us lacking an immediate personal connection to the women first learned about them. A vastly disproportionate number of them, it is important to also note, are of Indigenous ancestry.[7] Their

Rosenberg's essay, "Violence, Identity and Public History." I will address this form of memorialization in more detail in chapter five.

[6] See Missing Lives: A Special Report from the Canadian Press. The entire collection of profiles is available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/pickton/missinglives.html > Accessed 26 Mar 2009. The profiles that make up this special report were published in many newspapers across the country at the onset of Robert Pickton's murder trial. They are currently available online on several different websites.

[7] There is much debate about how many of the women are Indigenous, but even conservative estimates suggest that at least a third were of Indigenous ancestry. When considered alongside the fact that Indigenous women make up only 1.9% of the total population of females in Vancouver (see Statistics Canada's Aboriginal Peoples Highlight Tables), it becomes obvious that their numbers here among the women disappeared from the Downtown Eastside are vastly disproportionate to their representation in the overall population. Throughout this dissertation I use the term "Indigenous" to denote and include all those who have descended from First Nations of Turtle Island (an Indigenous term for "North America"), regardless of whether the state considers them "Status Indians" or not. I am aware that there is much debate, both within and beyond Indigenous communities, about the use and meanings of terms such as "First Nations," "Native," "Aboriginal," "Indigenous," "Métis," etc. and so where possible and where relevant I will try to be as specific about the lineage of the person or group being discussed as I can be. Where this is not possible or where I am asserting a broader generalization, I will deploy the term "Indigenous" to refer to all individuals of such ancestry, regardless of degree. I take my cue for this use of the term "Indigenous" from recent events in Canada that employ the term, including the First International conference on murdered and missing women, "Missing Women: Decolonization, Third Wave

disappearances must therefore also be situated in relation to what the Native

Women's Association of Canada estimates to be at least 500 murdered or

unaccounted for Indigenous women across the country.

A much-belated police investigation into many, many reported cases of

missing women from this neighbourhood eventually resulted in a lone arrest: a

man named Robert William Pickton was charged initially with 2 counts of first-

degree murder in February 2002. By the summer of 2005, after an enormous

forensic investigation on his property in Port Coquitlam, Pickton had been

charged with murdering 26 of those 65 women on the Task Force's list of missing

women, and with one additional charge for the murder of an as yet unidentified

woman known only as "Jane Doe" (a charge that was set aside by the trial judge

in March 2006). The trial, which has received massive national and even

international media coverage, is ongoing at the time of this writing. Pickton was

tried and convicted of second-degree murder in 6 of the women's deaths in 2007,

while another trial, for the remaining 20 murder charges, was at one time slated to

begin in early 2008. Both the Crown and the Defence have appealed the initial

convictions, though, so it seems unlikely that any definitive legal outcome will be

forthcoming any time soon. Meanwhile, the remaining 39 women on the 2007

police list of the missing remain entirely unaccounted for, and one local activist

states that at least 29 additional women have gone missing or been murdered

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Feminisms and Indigenous People of Canada and Mexico," held at the University of Regina in
August 2008.

since Pickton's arrest.[8] These details remind me that this is a story that is changing rapidly – I have re-written this paragraph upwards of five times since I began this dissertation, signalling that these are events which bear heavily on the present, the losses they mark still very much ongoing.

The official details, of course, only tell part of the story. Downtown Eastside residents, sex workers, activists, service providers, and many friends and family members of the disappeared women were already working to draw attention to the disappearances and violent deaths of women from this community long before any police attention was paid to Pickton. In fact community activists have recently placed the total number of missing women at 72, but even this number encompasses only those who are still unaccounted for and those Pickton is accused of murdering. If we include the "closed cases" of previously accounted for deaths (the deaths of women whose murders were solved or who died of drug overdoses) then there are at least 296 women from this community who have either been disappeared or died unjust, untimely deaths in the last thirty or so years.[9] The fact that there continues to be so much uncertainty about how many

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[8] See the blog of Downtown Eastside activist Jamie Lee Hamilton, "Violence On Sex Trade Workers Post Pickton," posted on March 9, 2008. Journalist Lori Culbert of The Vancouver Sun has also investigated statements about ongoing disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside since Pickton's arrest, including Hamilton's. See "Nothing's Changed," published February 26, 2008. More recently, Catherine Rolfsen and Tim Lai of The Vancouver Sun also reported on allegations of serial attacks on women doing sex work in the Downtown Eastside. See "Police investigate reported attacks on sex workers," published August 23, 2008.

[9] This tally is taken from the list of names provided in the program of the 2006 Vancouver Valentine's Day memorial march for women from the Downtown Eastside, which lists 224 women's names *in addition* to the names of the 72 women either presumed murdered by Pickton or still unaccounted for. Several of the names in this list of 224 are recognizable as those of other women from the area who were murdered; many are likely those of women who died from drug overdoses. While the program itself states only "in loving memory of the following women," a banner carried during the march reads: "February 14th commemorates our sisters who have died as a result of violence or substance abuse in the Downtown Eastside and throughout Vancouver." I

women are missing or dead suggests that there is something the matter with how these disappearances and deaths are framed, understood, and contextualized by many who lack a personal connection to the women involved. As several of the women's family members have remarked over the years, if the disappeared women were university students, suburban soccer moms, or women from one of Vancouver's wealthier neighbourhoods, surely we would have a more thorough account of just how many are murdered or missing.

<p style="text-align:center">******</p>

When I relocated to Vancouver in 2000 I moved from Edmonton with a relatively new lover, a woman whose struggles with addiction were, unknown to either of us, on the verge of becoming life-consuming. Over the two and a half years that we lived together on and off in Vancouver and on Vancouver Island, my lover went missing many times. Sometimes she was missing in the sense of being away from me and from our home for lengths of time (days, sometimes, or hours at others) when I did not know her whereabouts. At these times I was left to my own imaginings about what might have happened to her. Other times she might have started out missing in this way but then was disappeared by people, usually men, who sometimes caused her terrible harm. When we lived in

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wonder if the phrase "and throughout Vancouver" is included to signal that many women from the neighbourhood have been killed in *other* areas of the Greater Vancouver Regional District or its outskirts, such as the women Pickton is accused of killing. Since the same unjust material and discursive conditions which increase women's vulnerability to such violence are also heavily implicated in addiction and drug overdose, I most strongly agree with the organizing committee that the actual number of deaths is significantly higher than official records suggest. The inclusion of women who died because of addiction complicates notions of "choice" in a compelling way – it suggests that larger social forces are at work in all of these deaths, and that they are, as a result, all in need of our immediate attention, whether or not each woman's particular death was, within conventional frameworks, "self-inflicted" or caused by another person.

Vancouver she often went missing *to* the Downtown Eastside to seek both the drugs she needed and the company of others who would not judge her for that need. Of course, these temporary disappearances became more and more anguishing for both of us as "Vancouver's missing women" started to receive some attention from news reporters and journalists. My lover was not disappeared in a permanent way, but so far as I know she continues to struggle with the social circumstances and vulnerabilities – the precariousness – that contribute to what has eventually been recognized as the forced disappearances and probable (or definite) murders of so many women.

Since I was long ago persuaded by Joan Scott's insistence that "[e]xperience is at once always already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation" (37), it seems important to note that I am well aware that what I offer here is an *interpretation* of past events in my life, one that has been refracted through what I only belatedly came to know about the disappearance of women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. As is the nature of experience, mine is radically different from those of the families of the women who have been disappeared in a permanent way, just as their experiences are radically different from each other's. I am also well aware that my experience is itself in need of further interpretation, an interpretation that I will develop in places in this dissertation to demonstrate why I have deemed this personal story relevant here. At its heart, the experience provided me with a number of insights into the meaning and character of what it means for someone to be missing, or to experience someone *as* missing, that I might not have developed otherwise.

Missing is, as I have already signalled, a curious term. It is, of course, a thoroughly *social* term, as a minimum of two people are required for someone to be considered missing: one to have (been) disappeared, and another to take note of her absence. In an essay titled "On 'Implicatedness,'" Vancouver-based cultural theorist Margot Leigh Butler draws our attention to some of the ways that the phrase "Missing Women" has become a problematic trope in relation to the disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside. She notes that in a commemorative pamphlet handed out at the annual memorial march for women missing from the neighbourhood, the women's names are followed by the phrase: "Our prayers remain with the women who are still unaccounted for." Butler explores the difference between the use of a phrase like "unaccounted for" and one like "missing," and I too like the phrase "unaccounted for" for the work that it does to suggest an obligation on others to account for the women's disappearances. As such I make use of this phrase occasionally in this dissertation, but I am seeking other language, too, that might help to communicate something more about the social dimensions of the events that have taken place.

Sometimes, a person who has disappeared does not consider herself to be missing (this was certainly the case with my lover more often than not – *she* knew where she was and whether or not she was okay. *I* was the one who was missing that information, missing her). Vancouver writer Anne Stone has also compellingly explored "what it means to be designated missing" through the texts of missing persons posters in her essay "Objective Hazard." While contemplating the missing poster of a young girl, Stone writes: "What is missing, then, what this

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poster marks the disappearance of, is her story from the minds of those who love her" (79). A missing person, Stone suggests, represents a "severed thread in a collective story" (79). That story, although changed, altered, re-routed, inevitably carries on. And the missing person may still be in *her* story, also carrying on, within a new or different collective. Or she may not be. Not knowing which of these is true for her is precisely what is most anguishing when a loved one is missing from a collective story in this way. The not-knowing is what marks this form of missing, the adjective kind (also ontological), as in "missing person" or "to be missing," from the verb kind, as in "I miss you, let's get together, let's catch up." In the latter we usually assume that the other person's story has carried on and that our place in it, in our collective story, also carries on, even across distance or through absence. We hope this to be true about a missing person too, but not knowing whether it *is* true marks the former as distinct.

Perhaps what we really fear when someone goes missing is that they have *been disappeared*, or forced out of our collective story against their will, perhaps permanently. And here I start to run aground on complicated questions about agency and choice. Could it really be the case that some people might *choose* to disappear, such that we imagine them to be missing while they experience their lives to simply be carrying on, perhaps taking a turn in a different direction but continuing nonetheless? Certainly this is what the police suggested, initially, about many of the women who were reported missing from the Downtown Eastside. They implied or outright suggested that the women's lives were carrying on elsewhere, that their disappearances were temporary and that they would re-

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enter the collective stories of their loved ones in time, if they chose to. We know now, of course, that for the most part they were terribly mistaken. Yet when the police officer who came to our home to collect the details for my first missing persons report on my lover suggested such a thing I insisted, horrified, that it could not possibly be true, only to learn shortly after that in this instance it was true, that he had been right. It seems important that we distinguish this sense of being missing from a situation where someone has been forcibly disappeared. But how might we do so? Can we only make such a distinction in hindsight, when we learn the details of what has befallen a missing person? What if those details are never forthcoming?

While the police must grapple with such questions (and I certainly do not envy them the task), it seems unlikely to me that there can be any definitive answers to them, just as it seems to me that to distinguish between types of disappearance based on assumptions about agency or choice becomes, from a certain vantage point, unimportant (not to mention impossible). It is odd to continue to classify a number of the women on the Missing Women's Task Force's official list as "missing," as I noted earlier, since their remains have been found and their loved ones no longer have that sense of not-knowing whether their stories are carrying on elsewhere. "Murdered" might perhaps be a more accurate descriptor for the women whose remains have been discovered, although it fails to encompass the enormous anguish of the time between when their loved ones found them to be missing and that time much later when they learned for certain that they had been killed. I am seeking a language, a vocabulary for that

time in-between. For help, I turn to social analyst Avery Gordon's writings on *los desaparecido* (the disappeared) of Argentina, to make a (hesitant) case for the applicability of this term to murdered and missing women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

There are compelling reasons for referring to Vancouver's murdered and missing women as "disappeared women" and compelling reasons against doing so. Disappearance as it was practiced in Argentina (and many other places in the world), and as it is taken up by Gordon in her chapter "the other door," refers to a state-sponsored, systematic array of practices including "[i]llegal abduction by the police, military and paramilitary squads, detention in secret centers, torture, usually death and improper burial, and denial by the authorities" (Gordon 72). It is most commonly a method for quelling political dissent, and as such has many characteristics that distinguish it from the violence directed at women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The evidence that is available to date suggests that the state and police are not *directly* responsible for the abduction, torture and murder of women from the Downtown Eastside. This is not a state-*sponsored* system of disappearance, then, and as such it seems essential to hold on to a distinction between what has happened in Vancouver and what happened in Argentina and elsewhere. As a result, I proceed to make my case for the use of the term "disappeared" in relation to the women I am writing about here with caution and more than an ounce of uncertainty.

That said, while the disappearances of women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside are apparently not state-sponsored*,* inaction allows one to

argue that they are certainly state-*supported.* Not only were officials extremely slow to respond with any degree of seriousness or efficiency to the disappearances of women from the area, but the Downtown Eastside itself has long suffered the neglect of local, provincial and federal governments. Further, as a number of organizations of and for sex workers have pointed out, the criminalization of sex work in Canada is a very significant factor in the horrendous levels of violence experienced by women involved in sex work, and street-level survival sex work in particular, since it effectively prevents those doing sex work from organizing and working in environments of increased safety. What I am endeavouring to argue is that state *in*action effectively amounts to a tacit system of support for the disappearance of women from the Downtown Eastside; that state *in*action has fostered many of the conditions that contribute to those disappearances. This implies that responsibility for the disappearances lies not only with the individual perpetrator(s) but also with the broader social fabric of Canadian society (inextricable, of course, from its state formations).

There are other reasons, though, why I think framing murdered and missing women as "disappeared women," with this term's associated resonances with *los desaparecidos,* is worthwhile and makes an important connection. In Argentina, for example, when people sought information about their disappeared loved ones:

> the state and its various representatives claim[ed] to know nothing. Or
> only that your child has gone abroad, or that your husband is having a

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secret affair, or that your guerrilla sister must be hiding out underground.

(Gordon 79)

Similar stories were told, we now know, to several of the families and friends of women from the Downtown Eastside, who were informed by police that their loved one had likely gone to work for awhile in another town, or was hiding from the law, or in fact was not missing at all (as was the case with Angela Jardine, whose mother was told that Jardine had been spotted in the neighbourhood after she disappeared. It turns out that Jardine was being confused with another Downtown Eastside resident, Sereena Abotsway, who was herself disappeared a few years later[10]). Again, while the state was not directly responsible for these disappearances, the rhetoric used to explain them and to diminish the significance of the growing numbers of women being vanished (which became a kind of public secret, since many in the city were aware of what was happening even as officials continued to deny its extent) is eerily similar to rhetoric employed in state-sponsored systems of disappearance.

Finally, and I believe most compellingly, I will also argue in this dissertation that the state-sponsored system of terror known as colonialism is indelibly tied to the present-day, ongoing disappearance of women from the Downtown Eastside. And while our Canadian governments and many Canadians themselves prefer to locate colonialism in our nation's distant past, I will argue that it is actively remade again and again in the present, belying its past-ness. This

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[10] Angela Jardine's mother has been one of the people at the forefront of calls for a formal investigation into police mishandling of the disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside. See Jane Armstrong's "Mother's pen documents frustration with police" in The Globe & Mail, published April 15, 2002.

is perhaps the paramount reason to draw connections or point to similarities between the disappearances of women that preoccupy me and *los desaparecidos* of Argentina. For although the tactics of colonialism are often much more subtle and less direct in their violence (in the present, at least) than those tactics employed by Argentinean state forces during the "dirty war," they are nonetheless undoubtedly implicated in extraordinary violence toward and neglect of people designated "Indigenous" in Canada – in what some have importantly labelled "Canada's genocide."

I am not alone in this claim, for the link between colonization and the contemporary disappearance of a disproportionate number of Indigenous women is being made by many scholars and activists. Beverley Jacobs and Andrea J. Williams of the Native Women's Association of Canada, for example, have argued that the disappearance and murder of Aboriginal women in Canada is a direct legacy of the residential school system and the discriminatory effects of the federal Indian Act, while Andrea Smith argues that sexual violence was deployed historically, and continues to be deployed, in the interests of American Indian genocide.[11] And, at a recent conference titled "Missing Women: Decolonization, Third Wave Feminism, and Indigenous People of Canada and Mexico" (held at the University of Regina in August 2008), connections between colonization and the disappearance and murder of Indigenous women in Canada and Mexico were

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[11] See also the Native Women's Association of Canada's "Sisters in Spirit" campaign. Information is available online at <http://www.nwac-hq.org/en/background.html> Accessed 10 July 2008. Amnesty International has also argued that the contemporary violence directed at Indigenous women is a "legacy of history." See their report, Stolen Sisters: Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada, available online at <http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters_overview.php> Accessed 10 July 2008.

a central theme. So, although in Canada state actors have not (so far) been singled out as *directly* responsible for the disappearances of women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, the material and symbolic dimensions of colonization are heavily implicated in these disappearances, leading me to lean towards viewing the terminology of "disappeared women" as a useful phrase for referring to those women who have been vanished from this neighbourhood, many of whom we now know were subsequently murdered. The term "disappeared women" seems to me to more clearly mark the social dimensions of the women's disappearances and murders; its resonance with *los desaparecidos* is intended to convey that a very broad array of actors and forces are (or ought to be) implicated in these events.

<center>******</center>

In the summer of 2003, a year before I left Vancouver to pursue my doctorate, Maggie de Vries published her memoir about the life and disappearance of her sister, Sarah de Vries. Sarah de Vries is one of the women listed on the Task Force's official list of missing women, and Robert Pickton has been charged with her murder. Maggie de Vries and her family were extremely influential in getting officials to finally take seriously the disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside. Her memoir, <u>Missing Sarah</u>, is an important and timely book, and is particularly poignant, for me, in its description of what it is like to witness a loved one struggling with an addiction to drugs, and in how eloquently De Vries captures the sensations of living with the anguishing uncertainty and ongoing, penetrating grief that arises when a loved one is

missing. De Vries' memoir importantly also introduced me to some of the writing of her sister Sarah.

In places in this dissertation I find myself returning to the writing of Sarah de Vries, who was disappeared from the Downtown Eastside in 1998. It would be fair to say that I find myself "haunted" by Sarah de Vries, in the sense that Avery Gordon makes of haunting:

> Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. (7)

And:

> Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition. (8)

When I suggest that I am "haunted" by Sarah de Vries, I am attempting to relate how her words and various representations of her life pull me affectively, as Gordon describes, sometimes against my will, into a transformative recognition of my own implication in those very social arrangements, norms and historical effects that culminated in her disappearance and untimely, unjust death. Sarah de Vries' story, as traced through media, through her sister's memoir, and through glimpses of her own writing, mingles with my own complex relationship to the disappearance of women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and compels me to investigate what it might mean to be repeatedly produced as a social figure

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whose loss has been frequently (and sometimes casually) cast as unworthy of widespread grief.

The poem by Sarah de Vries that I borrow from for this chapter's title addresses the reader through a direct challenge to what De Vries describes as an indifference to the murders of women involved in sex work in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside:

> *Woman's body found beaten beyond recognition.*
>
> *You sip your coffee*
>
> *Taking a drag of your smoke*
>
> *Turning the page*
>
> *Taking a bite of your toast*
>
> *Just another day*
>
> *Just another death*
>
> *Just one more thing you so easily forget*
>
> *You and your soft, sheltered life*
>
> *Just go on and on*
>
> *For nobody special from your world is gone* (in Maggie De Vries 233)[12]

De Vries' lines, "Just another day / Just another death," repeated throughout the stanzas of this poem, reflect the impact of sensing that one's own death might pass as anonymously and unremarkably as just another day gone by. It is precisely this too-easy connection between "just another day" and "just another death," as well as the many ways, as De Vries reminds us, that vulnerability to such a

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[12] Poem © Maggie De Vries. Reprinted with permission.

connection is so very unjustly and unevenly distributed and lived, that I seek to expose and ultimately contest (see also Butler Precarious xii). De Vries' insight helps me to imagine how things might have been, and might yet be, otherwise, which I take to be one of the overall projects of this dissertation. An attention to the haunting presences of De Vries and others like her allows me – indeed, demands that I begin to imagine a present (and future) that might be otherwise. And, perhaps more importantly, such an attention also demands that I begin to engage others in such an imagining.

"Imagining otherwise" is a phrase that is popular among theorists today; one sees it so frequently in the work of writers from a range of disciplines and theoretical backgrounds that it has become difficult to trace its origins. To imagine otherwise as a form of knowledge-making is a bit of a risky business, suspect as it is to accusations of impracticality, of not caring about or contributing something that matters to the "real world." In the next chapter I take up a number of specific concerns related to "doing theory" as a response to violence, suffering and loss, which includes an exploration of some ethical questions that arise when responding to such experiences with a form of theorizing such as critique. Here, though, I want to explain in more detail what I mean when I suggest that one of my projects in this dissertation is to imagine otherwise, and to engage others in such an imagining.

Avery Gordon, whose notion of haunting I have already introduced, suggests that imagining otherwise has much to do with a theoretical insight put forth by Patricia Williams in her important book, The Alchemy of Race and

Rights: "That life is *complicated*," Williams writes, "is a fact of great analytic importance" (Williams in Gordon 3, emphasis added). "That life is complicated," Gordon continues, "may seem a banal expression of the obvious, but it is nonetheless a profound theoretical statement – perhaps the most important theoretical statement of our time" (3). The fact that life is complicated requires us to pay a particular kind of attention to those whose lives inform our academic study. It requires us to remember, according to Gordon, that "even those who live in the most dire circumstances possess a complex and oftentimes contradictory humanity and subjectivity that is never adequately glimpsed by viewing them as victims or, on the other hand, as superhuman agents" (4). Striving to recognize and represent that complexity in all of its messiness is a part of what it means to imagine otherwise.

It is perhaps particularly difficult for those of us with strong political commitments and entailments to continuously keep in mind this "complex and oftentimes contradictory humanity" (Gordon 4) that we all possess. Sometimes, for the purposes of advancing a political claim, it becomes necessary to emphasize an individual or group's status as victims (or as autonomous, freely-choosing subjects, for that matter). And sometimes we get so caught up in advancing that claim that we forget that life is complicated, forget that our subjects' lives are often much more complex than how we are constrained in representing them. I have certainly found myself bound by such constraints in other times and places, and no doubt I will again. But here in this dissertation I hope to hold such constraints at bay in the interests of imagining possibilities for

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sociality and subjectivity that can more fully capture the complexity and contradiction that Gordon (via Williams) reminds us of.

This does not mean that I imagine my work is apolitical, but it does mean that in the pages of this text I will try to eschew political standpoints, which usually require a high degree of certainty in support of their assertions, in the interests of theoretical musings that are perhaps somewhat less certain of themselves (more on this in the next chapter). I do so for the sake of trying to find language that does some justice to complexity, language that will inevitably be shakier, more stumbling, less certain than the language of political standpoints is usually permitted to be. Similarly, I hope that my writing might be taken up by activists or cultural producers, but I do not theorize directly *for* those actors. The key reason for this lies in cultural theorist Stuart Hall's famous characterization of "the distinction between theory and politics as that between a domain in which meaning is opened up, potentially infinitely, and one in which it is intentionally and strategically arrested" (as described in Brown <u>Politics</u> 41). Theory's task, Hall insists, is to "'make meaning slide'" (cited in Brown 41), while politics necessarily requires a strategically unshakable standpoint. I want, then, to follow Hall and political theorist Wendy Brown in cultivating what Brown describes as a "spirit of shamelessness about intellectual inquiry shaped by political concerns but unmoored from an obligation to specific political entailments" (15). As Brown insists:

> We do no favor … to politics or to intellectual life by eliminating a
> productive tension – the way in which politics and theory effectively

interrupt each other – in order to consolidate certain political claims as the premise of a program of intellectual inquiry. (41)

I approach my writing with an awareness of the urgency of the questions which drive this work but simultaneously with a desire to hold some of that urgency at bay in the interests of letting "meaning slide" towards a now that might be otherwise.

I maintain, then, that the strategy of imagining otherwise has much to offer for social and political life even if it cannot dictate clear directions or generate much in the way of definitive answers to some of the urgent questions of our times. Gordon describes imagining otherwise as a "folk theoretical statement" (5). "It is a theoretical statement," she writes:

that invites us to see with portentous clarity into the heart and soul of [Canadian] life and culture, to track events, stories, anonymous and history-making actions to their density, to the point where we might catch a glimpse of what Patricia Williams calls the "vast networking of our society" and imagine otherwise … We need to know where we live in order to imagine living elsewhere. We need to imagine living elsewhere before we can live there. (5)

Mine is a project that aims to both unpack where it is we currently live and vividly engage in a process of imagining what living elsewhere might involve. Both are, as Gordon signals, necessary for getting to that elsewhere, even though of course whatever I can offer of that imagined elsewhere is necessarily partial,

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necessarily circumscribed by the fact that I am one person offering one glimpse, one trace, one limited possibility for what "otherwise" might mean.

By developing an analysis of where we live and by imagining living elsewhere, then, I will in the pages of this dissertation trace "what lives on" from Vancouver's disappeared women, to return to the epigraph from Wendy Brown that prefaces this dissertation (<u>Politics</u> 150). My dissertation is not, nor does it pretend to be, an investigation into "what really happened" to the women who concern me here. I have said all that I intend to say about what really happened to them in this introductory chapter, even though I do believe that determining what really happened to disappeared persons is an essential task, one that we cannot do without, and I do not mean to seem dismissive of such efforts. But in the drive to sort out all the details of what really happened (and to prove them beyond a reasonable doubt), it is my contention that some important questions get pushed aside or lost – questions such as: How does what happened "live on," or matter, in the present? What social norms and arrangements, what shared understandings of what it means to be human, are implicated in what happened? In what ways can what happened be read as evidence of a past that continues to haunt and claim us? And what might it mean to inherit "what lives on" from so many women when one did not know them in life? These are the questions that impel my research.

This is a text that undertakes a series of complicated, interconnected, and at times even somewhat contradictory journeys.[13] Endeavouring to address the question of what it might mean to inherit "what lives on" from the disappeared

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[13] My thanks to Sharon Rosenberg for providing me with this helpful language with which to describe my work.

women has led me to conclude that such a mode of attending to the lives of others requires, first and foremost, rethinking conventional ways of understanding the relationships between self/other and past/present/future. This dissertation, if nothing else, offers one approach to rethinking those relationships. I attempt to rethink them both through critical reflection on aspects of my own biography and through an engagement with the ideas of several other theorists and with a selection of cultural artefacts that re-present the disappeared women, always with an eye to how I can extend an invitation to engage in this rethinking to others, too (to you, the reader). It is my overall argument that inheriting "what lives on" requires rethinking both the limits of an "I" and the temporal linearity of past, present and future, and thus each chapter in this dissertation builds and supports this argument by exploring how "I" have come to rethink and refashion these relations and simultaneously by attempting to engage an "us" in this project of rethinking and refashioning. I have much more to say about this process of engaging an "us" (and of addressing a "we") in the next chapter, but suffice it to say here that the connections between an "I" and a "we" are of central concern to my thinking throughout the dissertation.

Before I begin to trace "what lives on" from the disappeared women, then, I find it important to write about my practice of critique in more detail and to raise questions about the ethics of critique as they pertain to this research project. While this kind of reflection is important to all academic work, I find it particularly important here, where, as I have mentioned, I am examining events that bear heavily on the present, where the suffering of those who were

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disappeared and the loved ones they left behind is still intensely exposed and visceral, and where others continue to be vanished. The questions that I raise in this next chapter will inform and shape the chapters that follow, questions that I will continue to return to as my theorizing develops in the interests of keeping issues of ethics paramount.

In chapter two, the final chapter in this first section of the dissertation, I will expand on the theoretical concepts that have been central to my research, namely the notions of haunting, grievability, and inheritance, and the connections between them. These analytical concepts (or tools), borrowed from the work of Avery Gordon, Judith Butler, and Wendy Brown, respectively, are very useful, I will argue, for tracing what lives on from the disappearance of so many women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. For the remainder of the dissertation I put these concepts to work in my analysis of cultural artefacts and productions through which I have stumbled upon traces of what lives on from the disappeared women.

After arguing, in the first section of the dissertation, that my perspective on the work of theory (and the purpose or value of critique) has been quite thoroughly unsettled as I continued to work on this project, I move on to a series of chapters, each of which aims to animate just what that unsettlement means for my practice of theorizing – these are the chapters that make up the second section, entitled "Haunting Matters." I encounter many layers of haunting in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in chapter three, where hauntings contemporary and historical are animated in the interests of arguing the limitations of conventional

understandings of space, temporality and history. The concept of grievability is central to chapters four and five: in chapter four, I analyze several different visual representations of the women who have been disappeared, tracing shifts in how the women are constituted in relation to discourses of grievable/intelligible subjectivity, and in the process asking questions about the significance of humanization and recognition as these relate to those addressed by the representations that I examine. In chapter five, the last chapter of this section, I explore how those shifts are navigated by projects that aim to memorialize the disappeared women, and I investigate what kind of memorial or memorial practice might be most capable of hailing an "us" into relations of inheritance with the women who have been disappeared.

The concluding section develops an argument that necessarily arises from my theorizing in the first two sections: namely, that conventional ways of understanding futurity become impossible to maintain when notions of temporality and subjectivity are re-thought and challenged. Thus the final chapter wades into questions about judgment, responsibility and justice as they circulate in relation to the figure of Robert Pickton; questions that are, due to both the timing and nature of the legal processes that are still ongoing, necessarily speculative, hesitant, and partial. I argue that Pickton has become a kind of vessel of responsibility for the disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside, making broader questions about responsibility at the level of the social more difficult to ask, and that this has implications for any more just future we might care to imagine. Finally, I also argue (in an epilogue) that any move towards such

a future requires reckoning, individually and collectively, with both the past's presence in our present and with the limits of the "I" as it is conventionally thought.

In each chapter, as mentioned, reflections on the ethics of my critique will play a central role in shaping my theorizing, even when they are not made explicit. Each chapter also deals with the issue of inheritance, with what it might mean to inherit the events that occupy my work as what social theorist Roger Simon has named a "terrible gift" ("Terrible Gift" 187). And each chapter also devotes a portion of its theorizing to the project of imagining otherwise. But first I turn to questions about the ethics of critique, questions that began as peripheral to this project but over time turned out to be much more central than initially perceived.

ONE

Critique, Criticality, Certainty:
"Doing theory" in the wake of violence, suffering and loss

[C]ritique is not equivalent to rejection or denunciation ... the call to rethink something is not inherently treasonous but can actually be a way of caring for and even renewing the object in question .… (Brown Edgework x)

What ethical issues are involved in theorizing about Vancouver's disappeared women? And how are these ethical issues particularly acute when the theorizing in question involves critiquing well-intentioned representations, memorials, activism, or cultural productions that respond to those disappearances? These questions haunt my dissertation. They are the backdrop to every chapter, every paragraph, every idea. There is a way in which *any* critique of such actions or artefacts might appear unethical, since these cultural practices are so often performed or created by (or hold special meaning for) those with close proximity to the losses they mark. A handful of challenging and at times quite painful conversations with friends or family of some of Vancouver's disappeared women about the merits (or lack thereof) of my own critiques of some of the memorials and cultural productions discussed in this dissertation have left me with many unanswered questions about the ethics of this kind of critical practice, in spite of my overall agreement with the sentiment expressed by Wendy Brown in the epigraph above.

In a situation where women were disappeared and/or murdered so recently, where mourning is still very much ongoing and necessary, where some charges have been laid but significant numbers of women remain entirely

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unaccounted for, "doing theory" (and in particular the scholarly practice of critique) is undoubtedly a risky business. It can appear to be both irrelevant (because theoretical) and overly relevant (because it raises questions of some immediacy) to contemporary social and political life. It can affect mourners and loved ones of the women who have been disappeared, and it has the potential to sway public opinion as well as political responses to the losses it takes up, or to influence changes to public policy. Of course, such theoretical work might also very well do none of these things. That is the risk, really, of writing theory: one cannot ever control all the possible readings, significations and uses that might arise once it enters a public realm. The same could be said of writing in general, but writing that is produced within the academy arguably carries with it a certain added credibility, at least in some circles – a certain shared understanding or agreement that what it contains is truthful and of some authority.

Such risks might lead one away from "doing theory" as a response to violence, suffering and loss. Yet cultural productions (in the form of books, journalism, photography, film, theatre, art, and memorials) that address the events surrounding the disappearance of women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside have continued to abound and proliferate. So it seems to me that we need to be thinking and debating and yes, theorizing about the potential readings, meanings, or even material effects of all of the cultural productions that have been created in the wake of these losses. One way to do this is through a practice of critique. And while I am certainly aware of the difficult ethical terrain crossed by critiques of well-intentioned cultural responses to suffering and loss, I am also uncomfortable

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with the often too-easy equation (which Wendy Brown points to in the epigraph above) of critique with rejection, denunciation, or even treason. It seems to me that critique *can* be a way of caring for, or enriching, or expressing concern for one's subject, as Brown insists. In fact, this is precisely where the question of ethics arises: whether a critical practice is ethical or not might have much more to do with its form, I will argue, than with its content, or its capacity to be critical. Critique is often taken to be negative, dismissive, or even cruel, and no doubt there are certainly forms of critique that merit such an understanding. Yet is it not possible that one can offer critical interpretations which ask difficult questions and point us to some potential readings of cultural productions that perhaps have not been thought about very much, without seeming to somehow betray that production's creator(s)? I am hopeful that such a critical theoretical practice is possible; indeed, this dissertation is an extended exercise in developing such a practice. In this chapter, I explore the concept of critique in the interests of grasping toward such an ethical critical practice, one which I will continue to develop throughout this dissertation.

<u>What is critique?</u>

As a scholar in the humanities, what I am trained to offer in response to an event, any event, is critique. I have spent the last ten or eleven years of my life honing this skill. Yet I find myself becoming increasingly dissatisfied with straightforward critique, particularly as a response to the terrible suffering and violent loss of human life that this dissertation takes up. Critique is beginning to

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seem limited by its tradition of removal or distance from its "objects of investigation," as it is precisely a tendency to distance ourselves from the suffering or violent erasure of others that I want my practice of critique to work against. Critique is also becoming dissatisfying to me because of its usual tendency to position itself as authoritative, foregoing uncertainty and tentativeness in its pursuit of definitive knowledge and academic expertise. Yet the more I delve into the events surrounding the disappearance of women from the Downtown Eastside and the various responses to those events, the less I feel that I have anything very authoritative or definitive to say. As a result of my research into this story of violence, suffering, loss and injustice, I find myself feeling much more unsettled and uncertain than when I began. Uncertainty and hesitation have become characteristic of my reaction to the material I am studying here: I can form no definitive answers to the questions with which I began this project, offering instead many tentative or partial answers, and certainly many questions. In fact, the only thing I seem sure about at this point is that too much certainty seems to do a kind of injustice to the stunning complexity that surrounds the events that this dissertation examines. As such, I intend to make a case here for a practice of critique that retains its critical capacity but is nevertheless something a bit different from how critique is conventionally thought and practiced.

The title of this section echoes the title of a now-famous talk-turned-essay by historian and philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault's oft-quoted pronouncement that critique is "the art of not being governed so much" (386) offers a useful starting place for exploring both what critique might be and what

we might see as its limitations as well. Foucault took great care to point out that he was not arguing for critique as a practice of not being governed so much *in general*, but rather that critique might be the art of "not being governed *like that* and *at this price*" (384, emphasis added). Here he is pointing to the specificity of critique, to how critique always already relies on its subject for its very existence, how it is (according to Judith Butler's interpretation of his essay) "always a critique *of* some instituted practice, discourse, episteme, institution, and it loses its character the moment in which it is abstracted from its operation and made to stand alone as a purely generalizable practice" (Butler "What is Critique" 1). Thus, when considering what critique might be in relation to Foucault's famous pronouncement about "not being governed so much," one must always ask what it might mean to be governed less *in relation* to the subject of one's inquiry.

What might it mean to not be governed so much when one's subject of inquiry, the subject of one's critique, includes well-intentioned representations and memorials responding to the untimely, unjust disappearance or murder of so many women? Foucault speaks much about critique's applicability to *systems,* to "the system of mental illness, of punishment, of delinquency, of sexuality, and so on" (394). It would be difficult to locate a lone system to critique in relation to the murders or disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside, although surely many of the same systems that concerned Foucault are implicated here. But for Foucault, the art of not being governed so much includes "a neutralization of the effects of legitimacy and an illumination of what, at a given moment, makes them acceptable and which allows for their actual acceptance" (394). Thus he

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advocates a double-task for the theory-maker: "Bringing out the conditions of acceptability of a system and following the lines of rupture that mark its emergence" (395). If we can see "system" as including "social circumstances" here (and I think that we can), then to not be governed so much in this instance seems to me to necessitate unpacking the convergence of assumptions and discourses which made it seem acceptable (to many, but importantly not to all) that so many women could disappear over such a long stretch of time without warranting a state of emergency, an overwhelming amount of public attention and concern, or, at minimum, an official investigation (until it was, for so many, far too late). What convergence of conditions, what "nexus of knowledge-power" (Foucault 394) made this situation appear acceptable? Any critique I develop here will necessarily be guided by such a question.

Elaborating on Foucault's "double task" for the theory-maker, Butler offers a useful description of the critic's second task in particular:

> [N]ot only is it necessary to isolate and identify the peculiar nexus of power and knowledge that gives rise to the field of intelligible things, but also to track the way in which that field meets its breaking point, the moments of its discontinuities, the sites where it fails to constitute the intelligibility for which it stands. ("What is Critique" 14)

If I can assume that the conditions of acceptability of the disappearance of women from the Downtown Eastside can be traced by unpacking how the women were initially cast as "ungrievable" subjects, to borrow Butler's own language (Precarious xiv), then the question at hand may become: What is it that makes a

person's life intelligible as grievable? Or, put another way, what is it that makes a person intelligible as human? This is of course a question that Butler herself explores at some length in her book Precarious Life and elsewhere, and one that I will go on to explore in much more detail throughout various chapters of this dissertation.

If addressing this broader question through assessing the particular conditions of acceptability through which the women were cast as ungrievable is the first task of my critique, then what of that second task? I will argue that the "breaking point" of the field of intelligibility for what makes a person's life widely recognizable as "grievable" can be exposed by tracing the production of the "missing women" as a social figure, which demonstrates the discontinuity of the field by illuminating a noticeable shift in representations of such figures.[1] In the mid-to-late 1990s, when the media and local officials were first beginning to pay attention to the disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside, the social figure of the "missing woman" was largely (re)produced, I will argue, as humanity's outside, as she was represented primarily through the deployment of images and terms ("prostitute," "drug addict," "street-involved") that carry a heavy burden of stigma. But more recent representations of the women that re-cast them in the roles of "mothers, sisters, and daughters" suggest that the definition of (normative) humanness has stretched to encompass this figure, belying the assumptions underpinning the categorization in the first place.

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[1] I do not mean to suggest that this field meets its breaking point *only* through the production of the "missing women" as a social figure, but instead that the production of such figures provides but one of many possible compelling examples of such a moment of discontinuity, which could also be exposed through exploration of the production of many other figures of abjection.

Exploring the significance of this shift is the "double task" of critique, as gleaned

from Foucault, that lies ahead of me, and hopefully following it, unpacking this

specific "nexus of knowledge-power" (394) will help me to show its association

"with a domain of possibility *and consequently of reversibility, of possible*

reversal" (Foucault 397, emphasis added). For above all, the role of critique

might well be described as helping us to imagine how such circumstances might

have been (and might yet be) otherwise.[2]

Towards criticality

I also indicated above that I believe there to be some limitations to the

practice of critique. For insight on how to explain what I have come to see as the

limitations of Foucault's notion of critique (and Butler's explication of it), I turn

here to Irit Rogoff, a theorist of visual culture, who, in an essay titled "Looking

Away: Participations in Visual Culture," advocates that we move:

> … from criticism to critique to criticality – from finding fault, to
>
> examining the underlying assumptions that might allow something to
>
> appear as a convincing logic …, to *operating from an uncertain ground*
>
> which, while building on critique, wants nevertheless to inhabit culture in
>
> a relation other than one of critical analysis; other than one of illuminating
>
> flaws, locating elisions, allocating blames. (119, emphasis added)

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[2] I am keenly aware that any enactment of some form of "reversal" of the nexus of knowledge-power that I am examining here arrives far too late for the women who have already been disappeared in a permanent way. By reversal here, I am referring (as I believe Foucault is also) to a reversal of the conditions that continue to foster such disappearances in the present (and, without intervention, in the future).

Here, Rogoff pushes us beyond a Foucaultian notion of critique to a practice she describes as "criticality," one that requires "operating from an uncertain ground" (119). While the practice of critique remains important here (indeed, for Rogoff, criticality crucially *builds on* critique), Rogoff is looking for something more.[3]

The something more that Rogoff is after with her notion of criticality relates very much to the questions about "doing theory" that interest me in this chapter. Rogoff and I share a tendency to use pronouns like "we" or "us" in our writing, and she has frequently been questioned about or criticized for this practice – rightfully so, given how often "we" is deployed unconsciously to evoke a seemingly unquestionable norm, a dominant group, or a supposed "moral majority." But I quote Rogoff again at some length here because her explication of how her use of "we" denotes a particular orientation toward "doing theory" sparks a flash of recognition in me, mapping with remarkable precision my own desire to employ this often-troublesome pronoun:

> Well, the "we" I have in mind is not identity-based – it cannot be found in the named categories by which an identity is currently recognized in the world. Rather, it comes into being fleetingly as we negotiate a problem, a mood, a textual encounter, a moment of recognition …. In the context of this particular writing the "we" I have in mind is designated through recognition of shifts taking place in the project of "theory." A shared transition, albeit expressed in different ways, that the project of theory has

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[3] For an important elaboration of Rogoff's notion of criticality, see Sharon Rosenberg's essay "Facing Losses / Losing Guarantees." Many thanks to Rosenberg for first drawing my attention to this passage from Rogoff.

moved on from being a mode of analysis by which you understand what

lies behind and beneath the workings of knowing and representing. Instead

"theory" can become the space of making, or re-making, of culture, of

envisaging further possibilities rather than explicating existing

circumstances. Those who agree to a suspension of the purely critical, to

momentarily shared imaginaries, to a bit of groundlessness, lost and

regained – that's us, that's who I mean. (123-24)

It is this explicit "shift" in the project of theory that allows the use of "we" as a

mode of address to make sense for Rogoff; indeed, its use, I would argue,

becomes a political act, one aimed at engaging collectives in imagining otherwise.

I too desire theory to be a "space of making, or re-making, of culture, of

envisaging further possibilities" (124). So although my theorizing in this

dissertation also aims to unpack "what lies behind and beneath the workings of

knowing and representing" (123), my use of "we" and "us" is definitely directed

towards those who might be willing to agree to some "momentarily shared

imaginaries" (124). Writing about his own use of "we" in a recently published

essay, social theorist Fuyuki Kurasawa insists that the pronoun can be "much

more performative than constitutive, since its use operates politically to constitute

the entity to which it is directed instead of designating an already constituted …

entity" (14). Following Kurasawa, I intend my use of the pronoun to work

politically to *form* such a collective rather than to mark one. This intentional and

strategic creation of a collective through "momentarily shared imaginaries" marks

a way of "doing theory" that aims to move beyond critique and towards the practice that Rogoff has coined criticality.

My desire to form a collective by addressing my writing to a "we" in this dissertation is tied to my desire to imagine otherwise (as discussed in the previous chapter), and in particular to my desire to engage others in such an imagining. As argued in the previous chapter, it is my contention that a very broad array of both individual actors and social forces are implicated in the events that this dissertation examines, and thus my use of "we" could be read as one technique for provoking an opening that might allow others to begin to recognize, or feel, a sense of that implication. I am working here with a notion of implication that is admittedly not fully formed (can it ever be?), but I have found the following provocative questions from Margot Leigh Butler useful for thinking about the concept. In her essay "On 'Implicatedness'," Butler writes:

> What is 'implicatedness'? What if it was considered a practice, a method, a technology for noticing and engaging with what we're part of, within relations of power? And if 'implicatedness' is … an approach to felt, involved and involving, lived politics, can we, with it, reconstrue our political engagements and possibilities?" (n.page)

It may well be the case that one needs to see oneself as implicated in events of mass suffering, violence, and loss in order to be open to developing the relations of responsibility and inheritance that I will go on to advocate. Thus my use of "we" can also be read as a strategic attempt to invoke a more widespread sense of

"implicatedness" in the events that I write about, with the hope that this in turn

provides further opportunities for rethinking relations between self and other.

Returning for a moment to Rogoff's notion of criticality, I am also

compelled by her description of this as a practice of uncertainty, which she writes

about in more detail in her blog. In an entry entitled "What is a Theorist?" she

writes:

> Rather than the accumulation of theoretical tools and materials, models of
>
> analysis, perspectives and positions, the work of theory is to unravel the
>
> very ground on which it stands. To introduce questions and uncertainties
>
> in those places where formerly there was some seeming consensus about
>
> what one did and how one went about it.[4]

Uncertainty, then, is key to criticality, to what Rogoff here calls "the work of

theory." I love her description of theory's job as "unravel[ling] the very ground on

which it stands," as this seems to so precisely describe something I desire of my

own theoretical writing (but lacked the language to describe so eloquently). No

doubt this is a way of "doing theory" that is unnerving and unsettling, disrupting

as it does "some seeming consensus" about what theory is and how one produces

it. Nonetheless, I have come to the conclusion that such an approach offers a way

of "doing theory" that explicitly engages with ethical issues, which seems

particularly important for theory produced in the wake of violence, suffering and

loss.

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[4] This entry was made by Rogoff on April 8, 2006 and can be found online at
<http://www.kein.org/node/62> Accessed 10 July 2008.

<u>The problem of certainty</u>

There is little in Foucault's essay to suggest whether he would embrace the notion of uncertainty that Rogoff introduces in her discussion of criticality. At one point, he suggests that the practice of critique he is outlining offers "[n]o founding recourse, no escape into a pure form" (395), which might lead one to suspect he might be in favour of a little uncertainty. On the other hand, he also insists that "not wanting to be governed" means "not accepting as true what an authority tells you to be true …. Rather, it is to accept it only if one thinks oneself that the reasons for accepting it are good." As such, he insists that "critique finds its anchoring point in the problem of *certainty* in the face of authority" (385, emphasis added). One might get the impression here that he is arguing *for* such certainty in the face of authority, for certainty to be upheld against the force of an authority that might re-invoke the truth-value of the "conditions of acceptability" that one's critique is aimed against. Thus Foucault would be raising an important point here: there are times when a degree of certainty is necessary for opposing the taken-for-granted hegemonies of "conditions of acceptability." To remain uncertain in the face of such authority might indeed be unethical.

Butler's reading of Foucault also (perhaps quite appropriately) offers little in the way of definitive answers to this problem of the relationship between critique and uncertainty. At one point she asks, "[t]o what extent … is [epistemological] certainty orchestrated by forms of knowledge precisely in order to foreclose the possibility of thinking otherwise?" ("What is Critique" 4), lending one the impression that she might be in support of some uncertainty in the

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interests of this project of "thinking otherwise." But later in her essay she also asks: "How does one call into question the exhaustive hold that such rules of ordering have upon certainty without risking uncertainty, without inhabiting that place of wavering which exposes one to the charge of immorality, evil, aestheticism?" (11). I would like to ask her, why not take this risk? Is this not in fact the most important risk our critique can take, to risk this wavering and at the same time to ask others to take our critique seriously? I am far from certain what her answer would be. It seems likely that the degree to which uncertainty makes sense (or can be endured) depends very much on the context in which theory is being produced and the uses to which one hopes it may be put. So the problem of uncertainty's relationship to a practice of critique is an ongoing one. It is a problem I return to again and again throughout this dissertation.

The question of certainty is also analyzed by sociologist Andrew Woolford in his book Between Justice and Certainty, which is (coincidentally) also an examination of the process of treaty-making between governments and First Nations in British Columbia. Woolford notes that understandings about both justice and certainty, about what justice and certainty might look like, vary greatly among the many different parties involved in land claims processes. While he ultimately argues for a "balance" between justice and certainty in order to facilitate the practicalities of the treaty-making process (12), he also notes some significant differences or discrepancies between how these two concepts are usually deployed. "[S]ubstantive justice," he writes, "addresses the specific needs called for by the injustice that has been experienced, while certainty asks that the

present not be disrupted in repairing the past" (10). Woolford remains skeptical about whether certainty is possible in situations where justice has not been achieved, arguing that "[w]ithout … justice, the stability of certainty may be disrupted as political and material disputes threaten to rekindle conflicts over rightful ownership and government jurisdiction" (3). These statements are provocative; they ask us to consider that certainty may not be possible without justice and at the same time might be antithetical *to* justice.

I can appreciate the necessity of some degree of certainty in relation to the practical determination of land claims settlements, and yet I am struck by Woolford's insight that "certainty asks that the present not be disrupted in repairing the past" (10). This statement nicely sums up the difficulty I have with certainty, for it seems unlikely to me that anything resembling justice can come about *without* a significant disruption of the present. The disruption of the present I have in mind, though, is not so much about "repairing" the past as it is about recognizing and acknowledging how the past is very much a part of the present, how our assumptions about the linearity of past and present actually begin to crumble under close examination. So while for the purposes of practical problem-solving I can see how a degree of certainty might be necessary (even when it cannot, as Woolford rightly points out, ever be guaranteed), I nonetheless want to hold onto the value of *un*certainty in critique, to the value of theoretically provoking the disruptions of present and past that Woolford suggests certainty works against, in the interests of imagining otherwise.

Uncertainty tends to be a condition that is difficult to tolerate, however, so it seems likely that there are questions to be explored about the ethics of a critical practice that wants to evoke and maintain it. Here I take counsel from James Young, a prominent scholar of history and memory, who, in his essay, "Germany's Holocaust Memorial Problem – and Mine," raises questions about the value of skepticism (which one might argue is a practice of uncertainty) for the immediate needs of social and political life. He comes to such questions through his engagement with Germany's struggles to develop a permanent Holocaust memorial; while Young initially insisted that ongoing debate about the form such a memorial might take would be infinitely better than "any single 'final solution' to Germany's memorial problem" (57), he began to worry that this position was both a source of undue hardship for Germans who very much felt a need for a memorial, and was also entirely ineffective for "warn[ing] or chasten[ing] a new generation of xenophobic neo-Nazis – part of whose identity depends on forgetting the crimes of their forebears" (60). Hence Young comes to see skepticism as a uniquely *academic* privilege and notes with some concern that he "... was making a fine career out of skepticism" (60). "[My] unimpeachably skeptical approach," he continues, "… was now beginning to sound just a little too certain of itself" (60). Young decides instead to throw himself headlong into trying to convince and support Germany to embrace a memorial structure that could communicate unsettlement through its form, one which could, in his words, "embody the intractable questions at the heart of German Holocaust memory rather than claiming to answer them" (60).

Young's insight that skepticism (or, I would argue, uncertainty) might in some instances be a uniquely academic privilege is important, and ties into Woolford's assertion that some balance between justice and certainty might be necessary for practical processes such as treaty-making. The needs and desires of academics do not always, and perhaps even rarely, seem to meet or measure up to the expectations of the communities we write about, and of course there is a long and troubling history of academic exploitation and appropriation of various communities, particularly marginalized and oppressed communities, resulting in one's own career advancement.

It is unavoidably the case that my work on Vancouver's disappeared women will advance my career, and that this might be viewed by some as unethical or exploitative. It is also quite likely that my desire to explore and sustain uncertainty in relation to some of the questions that arise in this study would be particularly dissatisfying to some of the people with close proximity to the disappeared women I write about, who might understandably have had quite enough of uncertainty and might instead be more interested in some finality or closure, in putting this traumatic history behind them in the interests of survival, of moving on with their lives. These are some of the risks that my work is inescapably enmeshed with, and I do not want to downplay them. But the alternative, of course, would be to walk away from research projects such as this, or to offer false palliatives that would certainly not do justice to disappeared women or their loved ones. I am aware that my desire to embrace uncertainty makes most sense, or is perhaps most sustainable, in the realm of theorizing. Yet I

also believe that this theorizing may perhaps be useful for social and political life, from which academia, contrary to some popular contentions, is not separable. Either way, I am grateful to Young for pointing to the limits of his own skeptical approach to scholarship.

Literary scholar Patricia Yaeger has similarly addressed questions of what it means to make one's academic career through an examination of the traumas of others. In an essay titled "Consuming Trauma; or, The Pleasures of Merely Circulating," Yaeger insists that there is inevitably some degree of pleasure in theory-making about the dead, and that to deny this is to do a kind of injustice to those missing or dead persons who occupy one's thinking:

> Given the dangers of commodification and the pleasures of academic
> melancholy – of those exquisite acts of mourning that create a conceptual
> profit – what are our responsibilities when we write about the dead? ….
> What happens when we 'textualize' bodies, when we write about other
> people's deaths … as something one 'reads'? (29)

Aside from increased, cautious attention to how we represent the dead in our theory, Yaeger too advocates a critical practice that embraces uncertainty. "The writer needs to stutter …" she writes:

> … to explore the possibility that [the dead] might experience their
> 'texting' as posthumous harm, might not consent to the critic's own
> figurations. Without this discursive doubt, the critical ecstasy and self-
> certainty that spins off these spectral bodies tells us too much. It creates
> the possibility that these … bodies tell us more about the cultural critic's

own investments, and still more about the easy commodification of the

dead in the face of a critic's own desire … (46)

Attention to the importance of such "discursive doubt" in one's writing helps to

expose the risk of commodification, although it certainly cannot eliminate it. To

eliminate it is impossible, and therefore it seems wise to stumble, to stutter, to

maintain an uncertainty about one's theoretical writings that might move us away

from critique as it is conventionally written and thought, towards a practice of

criticality.

While those with close proximity to women who have been disappeared or

killed may understandably wish for something like closure, or may well desire to

put this past behind them, unsettlement and uncertainty in relation to these events

seems crucially important to me because the social circumstances under which so

many women could be disappeared or killed have not changed. So, while there is

much talk about needing an end to the legal proceedings against Pickton in order

to procure this sense of closure, there are still many, many hard questions to be

faced. As Anne Stone writes in her prefatory remarks to our co-edited issue of

West Coast Line, we need writing which can "help us better understand what has

happened in [a] city's thinking that so many women for so long could disappear:

disappear from th[e] city, and disappear (in whole or part) from the polis of public

representations as well" (7). And so, despite the many risks, hazards, and ethical

issues that arise, I will continue to advocate for and hone a critical approach to

"doing theory" in the wake of the disappearance of so many women from

Vancouver. Building on Rogoff, what I seek is a practice of criticality that is

thoughtful, that is cautious but not censoring, that unsettles our taken-for-granted

assumptions, that evokes our differing implications in these events, and that,

above all, leaves us dwelling with uncertainty, and with more questions. I work to

develop such a practice here in this dissertation, yet will try to keep in mind both

the occasional strategic importance of certainty and the possibility of an ethical

limit to uncertainty, particularly in response to the violence, suffering and loss

that this dissertation takes up. As I have argued, I suspect that this form or

approach to theorizing may offer a way of keeping issues of ethics paramount,

much more so than any effort one might make to censor theory's content or

capacity to be critical.

TWO

Hauntings, Grievability, Inheritance:
Following ghosts

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. (Gordon 17)

As previously mentioned, in this chapter I will write about my dissertation's three central analytical concepts or tools –hauntings, grievability, and inheritance – as they relate to my overall project. I build on these concepts as they are developed in the work of Avery Gordon, Judith Butler, and Wendy Brown, respectively, as I have found each of their approaches very useful for tracing what lives on from the disappearance or murder of so many women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. As I have already signalled, Gordon's notion of hauntings as a method for both recognizing knowledge and writing about it has been especially pivotal to my approach to researching and writing this dissertation, and as a result I will afford it a much more lengthy discussion here at the start of this chapter, after which I will discuss the other important conceptual contributions that I develop from the writings of Butler and Brown.

I will also use this chapter to introduce the three social figures that this dissertation investigates: the figure of the "missing women;" the figure of the Downtown Eastside; and the figure of the man whom the courts are attempting to hold individually responsible for the disappearance and murder of 26 women so designated. What might it mean to investigate a social figure, and how might that be different from writing about individual persons or places? How are my chosen analytical tools useful for investigating the production of these social figures in

particular? These are questions I will address. This chapter, then, expands on my borrowed conceptual tools and on the significance of my use of these three social figures, in the interests of more thoroughly introducing the reader to the overall project of the dissertation.

<u>Hauntings</u>

Hauntings and ghost stories are somewhat unusual terrain for scholars, associated as they are with the deliberate scare tactics of commercial haunted houses and Hollywood horror films, or the purportedly irrational beliefs of those with an interest in "the occult or in parapsychology" (Gordon 8). But the conceptual framework for encountering hauntings that I develop in this paper has little to do with the term's more conventional resonances. Instead, it is a framework for a different approach to doing academic research. As social analyst Avery Gordon explains in her book <u>Ghostly Matters</u>, such a practice could "be conceived as entering through a different door, the door of the uncanny, the door of the fragment, the door of the shocking parallel" (66). For Gordon, the notion of hauntings describes "how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (8). She is interested in projects which track "that which makes its mark by being there and not there at the same time" and in forces that "cajol[e] us to reconsider … the very distinctions between there and not there, past and present …" (6). Hence encountering hauntings is in part about a different way of approaching knowledge, a different way of understanding what knowledge *is* and how we

might recognize it, since we are tasked with looking not for what *is* there but for the "seething presence" of what "appears to be *not* there" (8, emphasis added).

Encountering and animating hauntings thus offers a way of producing scholarship that requires "a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of production" (Gordon 7). This change in the way we know is brought about in part, according to Gordon, by postmodernism, or more specifically, by "the claims and summons poststructuralism, in particular, has made on our traditional notions of the human subject, meaning, truth, language, writing, desire, difference, power, and experience …" (9-10). But Gordon does not halt her description of the shifting understanding of knowledge required for the recognition of hauntings at poststructuralist interventions. She is also interested in how "some feminists and critical theorists have sensibly insisted on retaining … a double structure of thought that links the epistemological and the social" (11). I too am committed to maintaining this "double structure" of thought, an approach to thought that takes seriously the epistemological challenges brought about by poststructuralism but that insists on contemplating the relation of those challenges to contemporary social and political life.

Taking my cue from Gordon, and in particular from where her theorizing seems to overlap with Judith Butler's work on grievability (which I will come to in a moment), I believe that an analysis of representations of disappeared women alone would not be able to do justice to either the complexity of those disappearances or their broader social implications. "Coupling problems with representation to an ongoing and aggressive concern with representability,"

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Gordon writes, "in the political sense, is what enables epistemology to be properly situated in the ensemble of social relations of power in which such epistemologies are ensconced" (11-12). Following hauntings not only demands a different way of recognizing knowledge, then, but also a different approach to knowledge *production*, and in that sense it is a kind of methodological approach, although not only that. It is a way of knowing and a way of producing knowledge, one that attempts to account for significant theoretical shifts in the humanities and social sciences, but that wants to do so in a way that situates such knowledge in relation to social life. "Could it be," Gordon wonders:

> that analyzing hauntings might lead to a more complex understanding of
> the generative structures and moving parts of historically embedded social
> formations in a way that avoids the twin pitfalls of subjectivism and
> positivism? (19)

"Perhaps," she replies. "If so, the result will not be a more tidy world, but one that might be less damaging" (19). I am attracted to Gordon's conceptual analysis of hauntings, to her thoughts about where following ghosts might lead, because a more complex but ultimately less damaging world seems a laudable goal to me as well.

So what might it mean to explore "how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence" (Gordon 8), to track "that which makes its mark by being there and not there at the same time" (6)? And what might it mean to take all of this seriously as a valid and important form of knowledge? While conducting my research on Vancouver's disappeared women, I started to notice

how certain unexpected things would emerge and demand my attention, leading me down pathways of thought that I originally had no intention to follow (or else it had not occurred to me to follow them). Such disruptions can be read as signs that a haunting is taking place. In Gordon's words, "I came to write about ghostly matters not because I was interested in the occult or in parapsychology, but because ghostly things kept cropping up and messing up other tasks I was trying to accomplish" (7-8).

Following Gordon, then, it is my argument that while disappeared women from Vancouver are no longer physically "there" in the Downtown Eastside, they do indeed maintain a "seething presence" in Vancouver (and beyond), one that we would be wise to pay attention to. It is also my argument that to pay attention to that seething presence allows us to know something different(ly) from knowing the facts surrounding the disappearances of so many women, something that is nonetheless quite important for contemporary social and political life. In fact, when we do not make note of the ways that the ghostly traces of disappeared women maintain a "seething presence," our abilities to know how those disappearances matter in (and for) the present become quite circumscribed, as does our ability to imagine how these circumstances might be otherwise. Throughout the various chapters of this dissertation, then, I see it as my project to track those seething presences at their moments of (often fleeting) exposure in a variety of representations.

However, it is also essential to consider how representing *Indigenous* subjects as ghostly risks reiterating the problematic trope of the "disappearing

Indian," so troublingly commonplace in North America in the wake of European

colonization. Literary critic Renée Bergland raises this problem in her book, The

National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects, in which she traces

representations of the "ghostly Indian" through three hundred years of American

literature (1). As she insists:

> The image [of the Indian ghost] … draws ideological power from the
>
> sense of *fait accompli* (the Indians are already gone), and from reinforcing
>
> the intractable otherness of Indians (they are so other that they are
>
> otherworldly). (5)

When I, as a descendent of European colonizers racially marked by whiteness,

evoke the ghostly figures of women who have repeatedly been racially marked as

Indigenous "others," I undoubtedly risk reinscribing the "ideological power" of

this trope – which is no small or insignificant risk, and one that I want to take very

seriously. I do intend to speak *to* and not *for* the ghosts I encounter, though, which

Aimee Van Wagenen, in her review essay, "An Epistemology of Haunting,"

argues is a practice that "respects the ghost and the *intersubjective* nature of a

haunting" (292, emphasis added). This focus on the intersubjectivity of haunting

seems to me to have the potential to draw attention to colonization as a *shared*

history in ways that images of "Indian ghosts" that presume to speak *for* those

ghosts perhaps cannot.

Bergland also notes in her conclusion that "metaphors of Native

spectrality *can* work to empower Native people and to challenge United States [or

in my case, Canadian] hegemony" (169, emphasis added). She seems here to be

suggesting that there may be some ambivalence to this metaphor, then, or perhaps that *how* it works might depend more on the context in which it is used than on the fact of its use. The empowering metaphors that Bergland refers to are all drawn from literature written by Native Americans, but it is not at all clear to me that one is necessarily a precursor for the other. I will, for example, contextualize my evocation of the ghostly presences of Indigenous women within a narrative that aims to expose how colonization and its ongoing effects are at the root of such ghostly-ness, rather than some naturalized, inherent predilection for disappearance. I am cautiously optimistic that this difference in framework matters in an important way.

Disappeared women are also not the only presence this dissertation tracks, and tracing how spaces can also be figured as sites of haunting might help me to minimize (but of course not eliminate) the risks of reiterating the problematic trope of the "disappearing Indian." The Downtown Eastside is itself a site of multiple hauntings, as I will go on to argue in the next chapter, and while a history of sometimes brutal and sometimes subtle colonization is now at times acknowledged as an aspect of Vancouver's past, seldom is much thought given to how this past lives on in the present. To look for signs that this past is not just past but continues in the present in particular ways is to "reconsider … the very distinctions between there and not there, past and present …" (Gordon 6). Colonization is a far from finished project and I contend that it is continuously remade in the nexus of power relations and structuring forces in the contemporary Downtown Eastside. The best method for measuring and providing evidence for

this remaking is to follow and expose the hauntings that are the signs or indicators of this past's presence in the present state of things in this neighbourhood. Hence exposing and animating hauntings becomes a crucial practice for reframing usual ways of understanding or knowing about space, temporality, history, and the connections between them, which I will explore in much more detail in the next chapter.

Following Gordon, then, my method in this dissertation involves "producing case studies of haunting and adjudicating their consequences" (24). But, Gordon asks, "[w]hat kind of case is a case of a ghost?" She replies, in part:

> It is not a case of dead or missing persons sui generis, but of the ghost as a social figure. It is often a case of inarticulate experiences, of symptoms and screen memories, of spiralling affects, of more than one story at a time, of the traffic in domains of experience that are anything but transparent and referential …. It is a case that teaches a lesson (or two) about how to write what can represent that haunting reminder, what can represent systematic injury and the remarkable lives made in the wake of the making of our social world. (25)

This is a method, then, that is as much about *how* one writes as it is about *what* one writes. Here is where Gordon's interest in hauntings meets Rogoff's interest in developing a practice of criticality: for both of these authors, questions about writing style, about how we represent and communicate what we have come to know (or perhaps more appropriately, what we have come to know we don't know) are paramount.

My project in developing a practice of criticality that is influenced by

Gordon's conceptual analysis of hauntings is thus two-fold: first, it involves

exposing a haunting's significance, and second, animating that haunting for the

reader, which involves writing about my "own reckoning with how [I am] in these

stories, with how they change [me], with [my] own ghosts" (Gordon 22). Hence a

part of my project is to find ways to write about my own reckonings with the

stories I am writing (about), as I began to do in my introduction and will continue

to do throughout the remainder of the dissertation. The trick is to write about such

reckonings without, as Rogoff warns, "falling prey to endless anecdotal and

autobiographical ruminating which stipulate (sic) experience as a basis for

knowledge."[1] One way to avoid such a trap is to continually link these reckonings

with their implications not just for my individual life but more broadly for *social*

life. This is perhaps why Gordon insists we must not only produce "case studies

of haunting," but also, importantly, "adjudicat[e] their consequences" (24),

thereby exposing their social or collective significance.

 According to Gordon, reckoning with hauntings can draw our attention to

the complex connections and interweavings of the individual and the social, and

as such reckonings are a necessary part of what it means to follow ghosts. As she

explains:

  To be haunted and to write from that location, to take on the condition of

  what you study, is not a methodology or a consciousness you can simply

  adopt or adapt as a set of rules or an identity; it produces its own insights

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[1] See Rogoff's blog entry, "What is a Theorist?" <http://www.kein.org/node/62>. Accessed 3 Apr 2009.

and blindnesses. 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 those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing

ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but

also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was

produced in the first place, towards a countermemory, for the future. (22)

Gordon is not suggesting here that we collapse the differences between ourselves

and the disappeared or dead persons who might preoccupy us; to the contrary, she

is insisting that while we are each "in the story," we are in it in our own particular

and differently-implicated ways.[2] Animating hauntings involves exposing how I

am in the story and how that realization might change me and "refashion the

social relations in which [I am] located," which is quite a different thing from

suggesting that the story is, or could just as easily be, my *own* story. As social

theorist Roger Simon repeatedly insists, what is required instead is "an

attentiveness to an otherness that resists being reduced to a version of one's own

stories" (Touch 4).

Rogoff is similarly concerned with how we situate ourselves in relation to

those whose lives we take up in our theoretical writings. In that same blog entry,

"What is a Theorist?" she writes:

In "criticality" we have that double occupation in which we are both fully

armed with the knowledges of critique, able to analyse and unveil while at

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[2] For more on this line of thought see the work of Roger Simon, and the introduction to Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert's Between Hope and Despair.

the same time sharing and living out the very conditions which we are able

to see through. As such we live out a duality that requires at the same time

both an analytical mode and a demand to produce new subjectivities that

acknowledge that we are what Hannah Arendt has termed "fellow

sufferers" of the very conditions we are critically examining.

As with the quotation from Gordon above, it would be possible to interpret

Rogoff as suggesting here that the distinction between self and other is, and ought

to be, collapsible. But such a reading would not do justice to the complexity of

thought apparent in the writing of these two theorists. What seems to be at issue

for Rogoff here is that tendency towards remove in academic writing, which I also

took issue with in the previous chapter. Instead, when Rogoff (borrowing from

Arendt) suggests that we are "fellow sufferers" of the social conditions we

analyze, she is not saying that we all suffer the same things in the same way –

rather, I suspect she is insisting that when we practice criticality *we can no longer*

locate ourselves outside of that suffering, as though it has little or nothing to do

with who, where, and what we are in the present. Taking my cue here from

Gordon and Rogoff, I have throughout this dissertation attempted to take seriously

the challenge of locating myself *in relation* to the suffering that I write about,

disrupting overly-simplistic self/other binaries yet, crucially, not collapsing them.

This dissertation owes a great debt to Gordon's conceptual analysis of

hauntings, then, for both its content and form. In my examination of what lives on

from Vancouver's disappeared women, following the various ghosts that have

"cropped up" has greatly changed the shape and at times the direction of this

research. I initially thought, for example, that Judith Butler's notion of "grievability" would provide the overarching conceptual framework for my research, but engaging with Gordon's analysis of hauntings, with what following ghosts can teach us "about how to write what can represent that haunting reminder, what can represent systematic injury and the remarkable lives made in the wake of the making of our social world" (25), has provided me with greater insight not only into how Butler's concept is most useful, but also into some of the limitations it might hold for representing those "remarkable lives" in all of their complexity. As such I have found that these two concepts work best for my purposes when employed in relation to each other, with careful attention to the "insights and blindnesses" (Gordon 22) that come with each.

Grievability

In Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence, Judith Butler explores "how certain forms of grief become nationally recognized and amplified, whereas other losses become unthinkable and ungrievable" (xiv). "Some lives are grievable," she writes, "and others are not;"

> the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death? (xiv-xv)

Although Butler is writing about the "differential allocation of grievability" between Afghani and Iraqi lives lost in war compared to those Americans killed on September 11th 2001, I find her conceptualization very useful for my analysis of the disappearance of so many women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. I will argue, for example, that disappeared women such as those from Vancouver were initially constituted as "unthinkable and ungrievable" losses due largely to how they were repeatedly marked (and re-marked upon) as "prostitutes," as "drug addicts," and more subtly as impoverished and racialized "Others:" in other words, by how they were quite definitively marked as *not* belonging to hegemonic conceptions of the normatively human.

I will also argue that there has been a noticeable shift in how the women are constituted in relation to ungrievability – a shift brought about by many of the women's family, friends, and Downtown Eastside activists' deliberate efforts to re-present the women as having lived "grievable lives."[3] This shift has proven an important, perhaps essential, political strategy, I will argue: one that forced officials to finally begin to take seriously and attempt to account for the significant numbers of women being disappeared from this neighbourhood. And yet, I worry that the effort to stretch the categorization of "grievable lives" to encompass disappeared women, to include them in a categorization of "the normatively human," risks reinforcing this category much as it is rather than rupturing it. That is, I worry that accepting the rhetorical terms and conceptual

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[3] Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young refer to this shift as a "counterframe" and argue that it "still succumbed to a dominant hegemonic frame that made these women more intelligible, and hence acceptable, through their positioning in 'respectable' societal roles" (903). I go on to discuss this shift or "counterframe" in more detail in chapters 4 and 5.

frameworks that necessitate proving that the lives of disappeared women should broadly be understood as grievable might *reproduce* the idea that some lives are grievable and others are not (or are less so). This strategy, it seems to me, risks implying that it is in fact possible, or even desirable, to define a narrow conception of normative humanness, and that this definition must be bolstered by a constitutive outside that, I will argue, remains more or less intact. This is the dilemma that confronts my efforts to trace how the lives of disappeared women have been made (and unmade) to fit a framework for grievable lives.

Further developing her notion of grievability, Butler asks: "How do our cultural frames for thinking the human set limits on the kinds of losses we can avow as loss? After all, if someone is lost, and that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?" (32). It strikes me that it is precisely through acts of public mourning that the families and friends of the women disappeared from Vancouver have made a case for those women as "someone," as human, as grievable, working quite explicitly against a cultural frame for thinking the human that often excludes "the prostitute," "the drug addict," the racialized "other," and other figures of abjection. Butler insists that we "have to ask, again and again, how the obituary functions as the instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed" (34). I have come across no obituaries for Vancouver's disappeared women, but through the determination of families, loved ones, and a handful of investigative journalists, we have more recently seen many obituary-like profiles of some of the women in the press, profiles that represent the women in ways that attempt to make their grievability

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intelligible to a broader audience. This shift might be read as an index of the limits of a prevailing discourse on the human: to what lengths did the discourse need to be stretched to include disappeared women within its limits? As already suggested, I am not convinced that this stretching constitutes a rupture, a moment of break-down or an undoing of a binary of grievable/ungrievable lives, and will instead argue that efforts to stretch the category of the human to encompass disappeared women have at times missed important opportunities for the rupturing of such a binary. These are points to which I will return in my fourth and fifth chapters, on representation and memorialization respectively.

Why might it matter whether disappeared women were at one time routinely and casually represented as ungrievable subjects, especially if such a way of representing their lives has now shifted? There is a link, Butler argues, between ungrievability and violence, between being constituted as outside of the human, as outside of the "real," and our ability to recognize violence *as* violence. "If violence is done against those who are unreal," she writes, "then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated" (33). Since the lives of disappeared women were, at least initially, so often cast as ungrievable, cast as outside of a cultural frame for thinking the human, in part through how their disappearances were not considered "newsworthy" or described in any way as mattering to "Canadians" on a national scale, I believe there is an argument to be made about the link between that casting and the violence inflicted on the disappeared women. It is not only a matter of the physical violence they suffered, but also a matter of a non-response

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to that violence, which repeats the violence, in a way, by negating that life *as* a life, again and again. It is this wider social context of negation and indifference that can be usefully articulated through the concept of grievability.

There are risks to employing grievability as an analytical tool in this research, though. I stumble in my use of this concept over how my deployment of it risks reifying the very sorts of categorizations I aim to work against. That is, I worry that, in a way, articulating how the women were produced as "ungrievable" subjects risks repeating that production yet again. The women's lives were never ungrievable to those who knew and loved them, for example, so to talk about the ways their lives were cast as ungrievable risks positioning those loved ones outside of the realm of "the social" or "the public" who might have initially perceived them that way.[4] This is particularly problematic when we consider that most of those loved ones are working class or living below the poverty line, and many are Indigenous – categorizations that are already often problematically excluded from normative notions of "the social" or "the public." There does not appear to be any way out of this dilemma. So I endeavour to employ the concept of grievability with caution and an awareness of the risks involved (which cannot, of course, eliminate those risks).

Contemplating the risks of employing the concept of grievability has further convinced me of the necessity of employing it in tandem with the conceptual practice of analyzing hauntings, for it seems to me that the very notion

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[4] My friend and colleague Kara Granzow first alerted me to this problem, and is further theorizing this difficulty with the concept of social indifference in her doctoral dissertation for the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta.

of grievability is itself haunted by what it cannot contain, haunted by those who are posited as within and outside of the categorization of grievability even as my deployment of the concept is intended to decry such categorizations. Further, those who are cast as ungrievable have a very particular (and, I will argue, very persistent) way of haunting our social world, such that their hauntings become increasingly difficult to ignore if one looks in any sustained way at how such categories are produced and maintained. As such, my use of hauntings as an analytical tool enhances my use of Butler's notion of grievability, potentially helping me to address some of the risks that inhere in the use of this concept. These risks also raise questions about relations of inheritance and responsibility, about the specifics of how and why those risks might require further examination, which is why I have also found it useful to investigate and employ the conceptual tool of "inheritance" in this research project.

Inheritance

Although inheritance is not explicitly a major theme of Wendy Brown's work, she compellingly introduces it in her essay "Futures" (subtitled "Specters and Angels: Benjamin and Derrida") in Politics Out of History, which provides a useful starting place for my development of inheritance as an analytical tool. In this essay, Brown inquires into what it might mean to "inherit … what lives on" from the dead, to return to the epigraph to my dissertation – into what it might mean to grasp "how past generations and events occupy the force fields of the present, how they claim us, and how they haunt, plague, and inspirit our

imaginations and visions for the future" (150). Eng and Kazanjian, editors of the

anthology <u>Loss</u>, raise similar questions through their desire to focus our attention

on "what remains:"

> [T]he dawn of the twenty-first century is a moment when the pervasive
>
> losses of the twentieth century need to be engaged from the perspective of
>
> what remains … This attention to remains generates a politics of mourning
>
> that might be active rather than reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic,
>
> abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather
>
> than reactionary. (2)

Following these theorists, then, this question of what it might mean to inherit

"what lives on" from Vancouver's disappeared women, to pay attention to "what

remains," has become a preoccupation of mine, and is perhaps the overriding

concern of this dissertation, intertwined as it is with the question of what it means

to imagine otherwise.

Brown is writing about our collective responses to events of historical

trauma. While one might argue that the disappearance of women from

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is hardly a "historical" event yet, since it is

ongoing, and since those who stand accused in relation to some of the

disappearances still await legal appeals or public inquiries, there is nonetheless a

sense in which the events that surround these disappearances have become a

"historical event" in ways similar to how the events of September 11th 2001 were

proclaimed "historical" even before the day drew to a close. I would suggest, for

example, that the belatedly massive media attention to the disappeared women

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after Robert Pickton's arrest, the proclamation of Pickton's trial as a "trial of the century," and the sheer magnitude of the cultural productions available now that respond to the loss of so many women might be read as indexes of the "historical" register of the disappearances, in that through such responses they have been (belatedly) rendered as worthy of a degree of public attention. What might it mean, then, to inherit "what lives on" from such events? And how might we be better encouraged or supported to recognize ourselves *as* inheritors of "what lives on"?

Turning to these questions, I intend to explore first, in the next chapter, how the question of inheritance can be employed to challenge conventional understandings of temporality that render time in the linear manner of past-present-future. As Brown insists, contemplating what lives on from the dead involves a consideration of how "these histories constrain, produce, and occupy the present" (Politics 141), and also of how "[t]he complex *political* problem of the relation between past and present, and of both to the future, is resolved neither by facts nor truth" (141, emphasis in original). In thinking about what lives on from the disappeared women, then, it is necessary to consider how the past is implicated in the present from which the women were disappeared, as well as how this past and present and the relations between them project into the future, constraining and delimiting it well before its arrival. Part of the answer to how to go about rectifying the injustices of the present may be found, Brown argues, in articulations of "how we might refigure the relation of the present to the past, how we might articulate the mass and force of the past in the present when they can no

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longer be captured by a progressive narrative" (139). I take the question of how one might articulate "the mass and force of the past in the present" as a direct challenge from Brown, one that I attempt to address in several places throughout this dissertation.

The second way that I will take up the question of inheritance (and through which I will move on somewhat from Brown's deployment of the concept) relates to the problem of witnessing, of what it means to bear witness to the traumas of others and to traumatic historical events like the disappearance of women from the Downtown Eastside. This question of witnessing is vexed by problems of proximity, by whether one knew those who have been disappeared in life or only belatedly, through the public attention brought to bear on their disappearances and murders, as well as by problems to do with identity formations, and how we are sometimes cast as appropriate or "false" witnesses to events of historical trauma on the basis of our perceived categories of identity. These are problems that I will explore in chapter five, but suffice it to say that they leave me with no definitive answers and more than a little uncertainty.

The relations between witnessing and inheritance I take up through Roger Simon's notion of the "terrible gift," which he develops in his essay "The Terrible Gift: Museums and the possibility of hope without consolation." For Simon, what we come to know of historical traumatic events might most appropriately be viewed as a "terrible gift," a form of knowledge that we might be tempted to turn away from but which may, if we engage it in a relation of inheritance, also be read as a kind of gift, albeit a difficult one. As Simon explains, "[s]uch a gift sets the

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demanding task of inheritance, a process with the potential to open a

reconsideration of the terms of our lives now as well as in the future" (188). In

this article, Simon outlines his planned use of testamentary materials from the

Vilna ghetto in a museum exhibit intended to evoke relations of inheritance and to

invite participants to reflect on what it might mean to be inheritors of such

histories.[5] Simon describes his deployment of the concept of inheritance as

follows:

> A practice whose outcome is not guaranteed in advance, the work of
>
> inheritance is an inescapable consequence of the actions of another who
>
> has sent you something and that implicates you in the necessity of a
>
> response (even if that response is ultimately to ignore or destroy the
>
> bequest). (194)

The "you" addressed by Simon here echoes the "you" addressed by Sarah de

Vries in the poem that is discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, and

again in both chapter five and my epilogue. De Vries' poem, so clearly addressed

to a "you," functions in the way that Simon describes as the something that is sent

(from the past) and that has the potential to implicate her readers (in the present),

necessitating a response. De Vries' poem (and a host of other cultural artefacts

and productions through which the lives and/or the address of disappeared women

are traceable) sets in motion a relation of inheritance, even though I did not know

her in life. And certainly I am not the only one addressed by De Vries "you,"

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[5] As explained by Simon, the exhibit will use "remnants of Jewish Vilna, a community that was
first incarcerated and subsequently annihilated in the context of the systematic genocide carried
out by the occupying Nazi troops and their local accomplices during World War II" (189).

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which leaves me wondering: what might it mean if we read her "you" as addressed to "us," both individually *and* collectively? It is clear to me through her mode of address that De Vries asks something of me (and of us); as her sister Maggie de Vries relates in the prologue to her memoir, <u>Missing Sarah</u>: "[w]hen [Sarah] wrote, she imagined readers. She imagined you" (xiii). What precisely it is that Sarah de Vries asks of her readers is not clear, but her address beckons us into a relation of inheritance the character of which I will spend much of this dissertation trying to discern.

Such relations of inheritance are important not only as they are taken up (or not) in the present, but also for the future, for, as Simon explains, "there is no futurity (no break from the endless repetition of a violent past) without memories that are not your own but nevertheless claim you to a responsible memorial kinship and the corresponding thought such a problematic inheritance evokes" (203). I take up this question of futurity in the final section of the dissertation, but the questions, problems, and limits raised by a notion of inheritance weave throughout the dissertation. They are questions that risk appearing personal and individual (i.e. about what it means for *me* to inherit the loss of so many women). Certainly they register at the level of the personal but importantly never only there, for, as Simon insists, inheritance of historical trauma must also register at the level of the social, as "an inheritance to which all (in different ways) can be heirs and upon which we might work in order to determine our ethical commitments and build our interrelated futures" (189). This tension between the personal and social registers of inheritance persists throughout the dissertation;

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rather than resolving it, which is simply not possible, I am interested in mining that tension to further develop an understanding of how relations of inheritance might be enacted through one's social existence.

Questions of inheritance arise in this dissertation not only in relation to the legacy of the women who have been disappeared, but also in relation to the two other social figures the dissertation investigates: namely, the figure of the Downtown Eastside and the figure of Robert Pickton, the man who stands accused of murdering 26 women from this neighbourhood. What it might mean to form a relation of inheritance with this space and this individual man is discussed in chapters three and six respectively, but here it seems important to address the questions I raised earlier about the significance of these chosen social figures and about what it means to write about the ways that individuals or places are produced as social figures as opposed to merely about individual or particular persons or places. Social figures, of course, are not always ghostly and certainly are not always produced in such a way that they represent only dead or missing persons. In fact, I will argue that they are not necessarily representative of people at all, and can be made to stand in for spaces as well. As the next section explores, we are wise to pay attention to where certain spaces or lives get (re)produced as social figures, for this can tell us much about the workings of sociality and in particular about the fields of intelligible subjectivity and humanity that drive this research.

<u>Social figures, spectres, ghosts</u>

My efforts to locate sources to assist me in further understanding and articulating what I mean by the notion of a "social figure" have proved rather fruitless. In fact, searches of academic databases have predominantly turned up obituaries from the <u>New York Times</u> in which the individual being eulogized is described, usually in passing, as a "social figure," with no direct explanation for what it might mean for someone to be described thus. Initially this seemed to imply exactly the opposite of the meaning I was grasping after, since "social figure" was clearly deemed applicable to individual and particular lives, but after some consideration I think perhaps it is not so far from the mark as I originally assumed. I take the obituary writers to be implying, through their deployment of the descriptor "social figure," that the individual they describe lived a life that received some form of social recognition – that they were somehow in the public eye, and hence that others among certain publics might have assumed themselves to know something about that individual's life even if they did not know the individual personally. Now of course, everyone's life registers in some way at the level of the social, and the politics of who is deemed a "social figure" for the purposes of warranting an obituary in the <u>New York Times</u> has much to do with the vexing questions of grievability that concern me in this dissertation. Yet I believe what the obituary writers are gesturing towards with their use of this term is a sense that the individual's life came to symbolize something to people who actually had no personal connection or proximity to that individual in life, which

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is not terribly distant from the way that I imagine the notion of the "social figure" to work in this dissertation.

After I had all but abandoned the search for academic work on the notion of social figures, I happened to pick up Sara Ahmed's remarkable and important book, Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality. Ahmed makes strong and compelling arguments about the significance of figures; her book is about the figure of "the stranger" and how that figure is both produced and deployed in various examples drawn from contemporary social life and practices of representation. Much of what Ahmed argues helps me to articulate the difference between writing about individual lives and writing about social figures. She writes, for example, that her book:

> attempts to question the assumption that we can have an ontology of
> strangers, that it is possible to simply *be a stranger*, or *to face a stranger*
> in the street. To avoid such an ontology, we must refuse to take for granted
> the stranger's status as a figure. (4, emphasis in original)

When we do take for granted someone (or something)'s status as a figure, we "conceal the histories of determination which were already concealed in the discourses" through which "the stranger" is traceable, thus risking a "fetishism of figures" (4). "What is at stake," Ahmed writes, "is the 'cutting off' of figures from the social and material relations which over-determine their existence, and the consequent perception that such figures have a 'life of their own'" (5).

Ahmed's arguments represent a significant precaution for my work on social figures. They also lend some support for my approach, for it has always

been precisely by what "histories of determination" the "missing women," the Downtown Eastside, and Pickton are *produced* as figures that has interested me. Nonetheless, I take her concern about the risks of ontologizing and fetishizing figures seriously, and as such I attempt to deploy my analysis to *de*naturalize a tendency to 'figure' these complex spaces and lives. I do not take for granted that the figures of the "missing women," the Downtown Eastside, or Pickton "simply *[are]*" (5); instead, it is precisely where and how and for what purposes they are turned *into* figures that concerns me. Or, to borrow again from Ahmed, what concerns me is "*how that figure is put to work, and made to work,* in particular times and places" (15, emphasis in original).

I take seriously Ahmed's concern that 'figuring' people or places can be harmful, and therefore find it necessary to be very cautious about what I risk reproducing when I critique representations (visual or textual) in which such figuring takes place. For, as literary critic Ernst van Alphen insists, "images, like people, can *do harm*" (269, emphasis in original), and one of the key ways that they do harm is by "fixing" (or, one might also say, figuring) their subjects. Van Alphen insists that evocations of such "fixity" (often in the form of stereotypes) are "constitutive elements of colonial discourse" (269); his essay is on the subject of colonialism as a form of historical trauma, and in it he examines how that trauma is (re)invoked by various images and representations that employ such fixity as a rhetorical strategy. As Van Alphen, building on the work of postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha, explains:

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[T]he harmfulness of the stereotype resides in its function of maintaining

an ideological construction of otherness … [T]he *constative* message of

the image … conserves and repeats an ideological meaning of otherness

…. But images can also do harm more directly, and in a really painful

way. Such damage relates less to the constative content of the image than

to its performative effect: what it does to the world, or more specifically,

to viewers who look at it. (269-70)

Van Alphen goes on to offer an analysis of a series of representations which risk

evoking both "a traumatised collective historical memory" for colonized viewers,

and a "repetition of colonialism for the other – white – audience" (271, 273). He

is very concerned with the ways that such images affect different viewers, with

how "representations of racism perform differently according to the public they

address" (272).

As a result of the potentially (and differentially) harmful effects of images,

Van Alphen is critical of "the practice of lavishly reproducing objectionable

images in the context of a critique of colonialism" (272). He cites cultural critic

Mieke Bal on this issue, and here I will reproduce the citation at length because it

conveys so precisely my concern with re-presenting damaging images or text that

(re)produce the "missing women," the Downtown Eastside, or Pickton as (fixed)

figures in this dissertation. "The critic," writes Bal:

cannot help being the expository agent, the pointing subject who shows

the image, even if the image is the object of the subject's negative

analysis. You can show and critique, but the gesture of showing itself is

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constative and bears no modal qualifications; it cannot say 'no' to its own

object. (Bal in Van Alphen 272-73)

I take this precaution to heart; while I cannot help but point to some images or

representations which 'figure' the subjects of my analysis in harmful ways, I will,

where possible, try to avoid unnecessarily or "lavishly" re-producing them.

It is my contention that Vancouver's disappeared women, the Downtown

Eastside, and Robert Pickton are each transformed into social figures when each

is made (or assumed) to signify a range of (innumerable) things beyond their

particular or individual characters. While one could never hope to specify all of

what each might signify, depending on audience, at any particular place and time,

I believe it is nonetheless important to consider how each is described or deployed

as figurative of particular aspects of sociality – in this instance, usually of a

particular set of what are conventionally framed as "social problems." I am

interested in exploring how, for example, the particular lives of many diverse

individual women came to be lumped together as "Vancouver's Missing

Women," such that this catch-phrase has repeatedly been made to stand in for a

set of assumed particulars and assumptions about a shared life narrative (troubled

childhood, broken family, children's services, adolescent rebelliousness, and then

a fall from innocence brought about by drug experimentation, prostitution,

addiction, mental illness, criminality, etc.) that are both true and not true, both

overdetermined and oversimplified. How have the particularities of one woman's

life story been related to, or at times been made to stand in for, those of the

others? What kinds of cultural work does the name "Vancouver's Missing

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Women" perform, what is it evocative of, and what are the potential effects of its many significations? These are questions I will return to throughout the dissertation, with a particular focus in chapters four and five.

As mentioned in my introduction, I will at times in this dissertation refer to some of the women who were disappeared as individuals, and examine the particular artefacts or remnants of their lives that are traceable by a member of the public who did not know them personally. There are risks involved in focussing on individual women in this way, just as there are risks involved in writing about the women as a homogenous group or as figures without re-presenting them as having lived complex, particular lives. I worry that writing about some of the women as individuals risks (re)producing a hierarchy of grievability among them, implying that some of their lives are more worthy of attention than others. This risk of course has the potential to undermine or work directly against my goal of rupturing dichotomous understandings of grievable/ungrievable lives.

And yet, it remains true that despite the best efforts of hosts of investigative journalists, there is simply more information available to the public about some of the individual women's lives than there is about others. Dirk Meissner of the Canadian Press reports, for example, that information about Diana Melnick is "scarce." "Where's her family?" he asks, "Where did she grow up? How did she end up on the streets? The answers aren't easily found. What's left are the … bare facts provided by police and court documents."[6] By contrast,

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[6] This quotation is taken from Diana Melnick's profile in <u>Missing Lives: A Special Report from the Canadian Press</u>. The entire series is available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/pickton/missinglives.html> Accessed 26 Mar 2009.

countless newspaper stories have been published on the life of Sarah de Vries (as

recounted by various family and friends), the story of her disappearance was

featured in an episode of the television program <u>America's Most Wanted</u>, and her

sister, as mentioned, has published a book full of memories of De Vries' life and

some of De Vries' own writing. I do not want to frame Sarah de Vries as though

she is in some way "representative" of Vancouver's disappeared women (thereby

risking turning her into a figure myself), and yet the striking differences in the

availability of information about the women's lives make it possible to write

about some of their lives with more attention to detail and particularity than is

possible for others. This remains at present an irresolvable dilemma, and points to

the ongoing importance of investigating the facts surrounding the women's lives

and disappearances – the details of "what happened" – *as well as* contemplating

"what lives on from that happening" (Brown <u>Politics</u> 150).

De Vries has at times been produced as the kind of social figure that I am

curious about, in that the particulars of her individual life have occasionally been

employed as stand-ins for "Vancouver's Missing Women," signifying beyond the

specific details of her life narrative in ways that both oversimplify that narrative

and overdetermine how that narrative is likely to be received. Yet De Vries, too,

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Meissner's sense of what would qualify as relevant or important information about Melnick's life differs somewhat from my own, but nonetheless his point about an overall lack of information is well taken. It seems important to note, though, that a recent posting on the guestbook of the website Missingpeople.net provides an important counterpoint to Meissner's findings. A woman who states that she is Melnick's adopted cousin writes: "I looked all over the web to see if there was more information on Diana, and it is suggested that no-one knows anything about her... which is not true. For whatever reason, the family has decided not to enlighten the public, which I do respect, but I just couldn't help but want others to know, that yes she was loved and is missed and we still think of her often... and there's many of us who have been following the news from the very beginning." Available online at <http://www.e-guestbooks.com/cgi-bin/e-guestbooks/guestbook.cgi> Message #385. Accessed 23 Sept 2008.

has frequently been represented in ways that fix her as a particular sort of person. Her sister Maggie de Vries writes, for example, about her dismay at witnessing an image of Sarah caught on film by a CBC news crew; an image she knew the CBC was going to use in a documentary about the "missing women." Maggie de Vries clearly articulates the problem with representations that fix their subjects in this way:

> Ironically, that last moving image [of Sarah] freezes her. CBC will include it in their documentary. They will call it the last image of Sarah de Vries, and viewers will think, oh, that's how she was before she died. She was out of it. They won't see the time she spent preparing that day – bathing, selecting an outfit that stood out and worked together, getting her makeup just right. They won't hear the conversations she had that day, animated, connected …. (258)

Although in the end De Vries expresses satisfaction with the way her sister is represented in the documentary that the CBC produced, her concerns about how this image fixes her sister Sarah in a very narrow and particular way deserve attention.

When I write about Sarah de Vries, or other individual women, in this dissertation, I try to strike a balance between acknowledging and recognizing that I am talking about a complex, individual human life, and at the same time exploring how that life has come to signify beyond its particularity. This is no small task. Conveying a deep respect for the individual woman's life mixed with an awareness that what most of us can learn about that life now is already

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constrained and mediated by an array of forces, frameworks, and representations may well be the best that I can offer. Faltering, stumbling, indeed *failing* in the attempt to represent a life in all of its complexity may perhaps be an important ethical strategy in relation to such efforts at representation.[7]

The notion of social figures also finds traction in the language of hauntings, or in the practice of following spectres and ghosts. For, since most of us came to know something about Vancouver's disappeared women only after they were disappeared, what we know of them is apparitional, appearing in traces or remnants or in stories that are necessarily mediated through those who knew them in life. When I write about individual women in this dissertation, it is usually their ghostly forms that I have stumbled upon. And, as Gordon reminds us, "[t]he ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (8). I take Gordon to mean here that ghosts of course had individual lives, were individual people, but in their ghostly forms they also frequently signify beyond the realm of those individual lives. Perhaps those who are ghosted by untimely, unjust deaths are particularly prone to being produced as social figures, since their ghosting occurs precisely at the intersection, or convergence, of those social injustices and their individual lives. As a result, such ghosts become of significance to the rest of us, to those of us left behind, even if we did not know them in life, although we may need to feel ourselves *as* left behind in order to comprehend or want to investigate something of this significance. It is

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[7] For more on the significance of representation as failure, see Butler <u>Precarious</u> 144.

what such ghosts might index of the workings of contemporary social life that interests me most in the pages of this dissertation.

The name "Downtown Eastside" is also frequently made to do a certain kind of symbolic cultural work, I will argue, signifying beyond the particular character of the neighbourhood that bears that name.[8] Frequently described as "Canada's poorest postal code," this neighbourhood has become a stand-in for urban poverty, illicit drug use, disease, "degeneracy," and a host of social ills, not just among Vancouverites but across the country, and quite possibly even more broadly still. Again, I will ask, what are the potential effects of such significations? How has the name "Downtown Eastside" come to be a kind of shorthand for so many different social problems in the imaginations of so many? And in what ways has this series of significations been challenged – in what ways can it be continually challenged through an attention to the work of local residents and activists, for whom the name "Downtown Eastside" frequently signifies very differently? I am also of course concerned with how the social figures of the "Downtown Eastside" and "Vancouver's Missing Women" dovetail with one another, such that one can scarcely utter one without conjuring the other. What

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[8] For example, in advance of mobilizing plans to revitalize an inner-city neighbourhood in Edmonton, Alberta, city planners renamed the area the "Downtown East." As a result, some local news media began referring to the neighbourhood as Edmonton's "seedy Downtown Eastside." I contend that this re-naming is not innocent, as it does a kind of cultural work that bolsters the ideology behind the revitalization plan. For an analysis of the effects of this re-naming, see Granzow and Dean, especially page 100. Needless to say, we argue that the symbolic weight of the name "Downtown East" functions to support the City's desires to "clean up" the neighbourhood in question and displace the residents who currently call the neighbourhood home. After the revitalization plan was approved, the area was renamed yet again in the interests of attracting new investment.

are the potential effects of this slippage between figures? These are the questions that preoccupy me in chapter three.

I am also concerned in this dissertation with the social figure of Robert Pickton, with what the individual particularities of his life and story signify to a broader public. It is extremely complicated to contemplate Pickton at all, though, particularly at a time when his culpability for the murders of 26 of Vancouver's disappeared women is not yet conclusively legally determined. By investigating how Pickton is transformed into a figure in relation to the disappearances and deaths of the women he is accused of murdering, some readers might assume that I am seeking explanations or excuses for his violence. In chapter six, I take up the question of individual responsibility as it relates to Pickton in more detail, but my theorizing there does not mitigate the possibility that my desire to think about Pickton as a complex person who has been 'figured' in particular ways might lead some to conclude that I am interested in exonerating him. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth: questions of individual responsibility and accountability must be asked, but must also be contemplated within a broader social framework that frequently situates perpetrators of such heinous violence as themselves outside the category of the human (partly accomplished, as Ahmed's work suggests, by fetishizing them as figures). When I suggest that Pickton is also produced as a particular kind of social figure, I am arguing that he has been discussed or framed in ways not entirely dissimilar to other individuals who have committed terrible acts of violence, and that there are risks to positioning such

subjects outside the realm of the human even when the temptation to do so might be overwhelming or appear justifiable.

Butler's work is again useful for thinking about what it might mean to contemplate how individuals like Robert Pickton are produced as social figures, particularly in relation to questions of individual responsibility. Here I quote from her at length because I find her enunciation very useful for thinking about this problem in all of its complexity:

> We need to distinguish, provisionally, between individual and collective responsibility. But, then we need to situate individual responsibility in light of its collective conditions. Those who commit acts of violence are surely responsible for them; they are not dupes or mechanisms of an impersonal social force, but agents with responsibility. On the other hand, these individuals are formed, and we would be making a mistake if we reduced their actions to purely self-generated acts of will or symptoms of individual pathology or "evil" …. [T]o take the self-generated acts of the individual as our point of departure … is precisely to foreclose the possibility of questioning what kind of world gives rise to such individuals. And what is this process of "giving rise"? What social conditions help to form the very ways that choice and deliberation proceed? Where and how can subject formations be contravened?
> (Precarious 15-16)

The figure of Robert "Willie" Pickton looms large in the imaginations of many, and I am interested in exploring some of the many things this figure is made to

signify at the level of the social, not in the interest of exonerating Pickton's

actions but very much in the interest of asking after how those actions have also

been socially formed, and how they might thus be contravened.

This section has aimed to offer some degree of clarity, some further

understanding about what I mean when I say I am investigating the individual

people and places this dissertation takes up as "social figures." In doing so, I do

not mean to seem dismissive in any way of the extraordinary complexity and

richness of the individual lives and neighbourhood I discuss, although I certainly

recognize that the language of "social figure" risks seeming thus. Still, I am

grasping toward a language to help me describe how individual lives and places

caught up in events of historical significance and thus propelled into a public

purview can come to signify more than their individual stories can contain.

Despite its imperfections and risks, I deploy the language of "social figures" to

help me with such descriptions and explanations. Investigating the production of

social figures, spectres and ghosts is one method, after all, for engaging myself

and others in a process of imagining otherwise.

In the last three chapters I have aimed not only to introduce my research

but to situate my approach to theorizing. I desire to unsettle certain conventional

notions about theory and critique even as I am myself unsettled by what these

unsettlings entail. The production of unsettlement and uncertainty are important

goals of this research, and as such, in the next three chapters I endeavour to

provoke such responses through an animation of a number of encounters with

hauntings that I have come across in my research. Through such haunted

encounters, I hope to enact the approach to "doing theory" that I have developed in this first section. It is to this project of animating hauntings that I now turn, through a rendering of multiple layers of haunting encounters in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Haunting Matters

THREE

Space, Temporality, History:
Downtown Eastside hauntings[1]

[T]he relationship between present and past is the battleground on which interventions could be distinguished from repetitions. (Van Alphen 279)

An image of a ghost town evokes abandoned urban space, a town without life or people, a place of hauntings. In nineteenth and early twentieth century British Columbia (B.C.), ghost towns were left standing in the wake of gold rushes as discouraged miners literally rushed to the next purported hot-spot. As a child I loved visiting one such spot, pieced together from abandoned buildings and towns to form a tourist attraction near the B.C.-Alberta border. The Three Valley Gap ghost town was a necessary stopping point on family road-trips from Edmonton to Vancouver Island and was indelibly tied to my sense of what it meant to have crossed into "B.C." From there I have some of my earliest memories of learning about the spaces of the Western frontier. In a ghost town, it is virtually impossible to escape the feeling that one is surrounded by ghostly presences. A child with an active imagination can read the historical plaques and positively feel nearby the ghosts of the people they tell stories about. Yet the ghosts these plaques speak of are often relatively benign: they do not tell us much of the story of the frontier at all, for in a frontier ghost town the ghosts themselves are haunted by the pasts that their stories (or at least, the versions presented on the plaques) disavow. What might happen if such hauntings and such feelings of

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[1] A version of this chapter has been accepted for publication: Dean, Amber. "Space, Temporality, History: Encountering hauntings in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside." In <u>The West and Beyond: Historians Past, Present and Future</u>. Sarah Carter, Alvin Finkel and Peter Fortna, Eds. Collection currently under review by Athabasca University Press.

being surrounded by ghosts were presented not in a location and language which imply a historical past-as-past, but instead animated in (and for) the present?

In this chapter I transpose the traditional site of the ghost town with the space of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in the interests of unsettling a conventional tendency to understand past, present and future as a linear relationship. I am curious about the possibilities that might arise when ghosts mess around with conventional notions of space, temporality and history: what might encounters with hauntings be able to tell us about the past's claims on the present, the past's ongoing *presence* in the present state of things in a space like Downtown Eastside Vancouver? In other words, these encounters with hauntings are in part about sorting out a way to reconfigure connections between past and present in particular. They involve bringing the two together to sort out how they are enmeshed, thereby staging what Van Alphen, in the epigraph to this chapter, describes as an "intervention" instead of a "repetition" (279). When we look to the past for lessons we can learn, we often, and perhaps unwittingly, secure that past's place as past, over-and-done-with, or settled. When we look to the past for how it is evident in the conditions and arrangements of the present, we provide openings for haunting encounters, which in turn unsettle conventional understandings of these two concepts, past and present, as linear and separable.

I will argue that encounters with Downtown Eastside hauntings have the potential to disrupt conventional ways of understanding space as containable and static across time, temporality as linear, and history as something fixed, finished, and past. When we recognize the contingency of designations of space and

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separations of past from present it seems to me that it becomes impossible to claim spatial boundaries or the past's relationship to the present as "settled" in any way. I contend that such a realization has the potential to draw us into a new way of relating to one another, of knowing ourselves to be related to one another. If we see "settlement" of the land now known as Vancouver (or western Canada for that matter) not as something that happened between Europeans and First Nations in the distant past, for example, but as an ongoing process of colonization, evident in the way our spaces and identities are constituted today, then a different understanding of our relation to each other becomes necessary. It is my argument that unraveling these notions of space, temporality, and history as they are conventionally thought might work to implicate a broader public in the injustices and violence experienced by many who live in the Downtown Eastside today, unsettling us at the same time that these notions are themselves shown to be far from settled.

I am hopeful, then, that animating the Downtown Eastside as a space of multiple hauntings might contribute to radical reformations of how that space and the women who have been disappeared from it are imagined, as well as to how we imagine ourselves to be related to this space and those women. Taking counsel from Gordon's thinking on the significance of such haunting encounters, I turn first in this chapter to a consideration of the current state of things in Downtown Eastside Vancouver; in other words, to return to that passage from Gordon I first mentioned in my introduction, to an assessment of "where we live" in the present (5). Recognizing the importance of this task, I am therefore concerned in this

chapter with telling stories about the Downtown Eastside that aim to both "repair representational mistakes, [and] also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, towards a countermemory, for the future" (Gordon 22). This contemporary story about the Downtown Eastside will then be considered alongside evidence about the past's haunting presence in that present state of things – a juxtaposition that I hope serves to evoke a sense of "implicated-ness" (Butler, Margot Leigh n.page), thereby creating an opening for the formation of relations of inheritance, relations that are always cognizant of the ongoing presence of both the dead and the living in this neighbourhood.

I will conclude with a story about my own encounter with the haunting presence of a woman named Sereena Abotsway, who was, among other things, an activist in the Downtown Eastside before she was disappeared in 2001 and subsequently murdered. This encounter, I will argue, aptly exposes the power of hauntings to unsettle conventional understandings of space, temporality, history and the relations between them, which might work to in turn unsettle conventional arguments about who or what is responsible for the disappearance and murder of Abotsway and other women from the Downtown Eastside. Thus the encounter encourages us to begin to "imagine living elsewhere" (Gordon 5).

The Downtown Eastside today

There is an indelible connection between how the space of the Downtown Eastside is constituted – how it is visually represented, how it is imagined, thought, written, or talked about and subsequently *produced as* a defined and

definable space – and how the women disappeared from this neighbourhood were initially cast as living lives (at the time of their disappearances) that many assumed could not be widely understood or recognized through the framework of what Butler has coined a "grievable life" (Precarious 20). Feminist anti-racist scholar Sherene Razack insightfully describes this effect as "the spatial ordering of how much we can care" ("Race, Space and Prostitution" 358).[2] The disappeared women came to be categorized and referred to as "*Vancouver's Missing Women*" in part due to a controversy arising from how they were labeled on the first poster advertising their disappearances, which was published by the British Columbia Ministry of the Attorney General and the Vancouver Police Department in 1999.[3] In this first version of the poster, a heading that reads "Missing Downtown Eastside Women" (significantly, not "Vancouver Women") sprawls horizontally in bright yellow across the top of the women's photographs. Labeling the women as of the "Downtown Eastside" (as opposed to claiming them as "of Vancouver") was controversial (see Pitman 176) – for although the women listed as missing in this early version of the poster all unquestionably had ties to the Downtown Eastside, it seems likely that family members of the disappeared, many of whom viewed this as a problematic naming, worried that emphasizing the women's connections to this community might diminish or undermine public interest in or compassion about their disappearances.

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[2] Readers might also wish to consult Geraldine Pratt's insightful theorization, in which she deploys Giorgio Agamben's work on bare life to argue that the Downtown Eastside is cast as one of Agamben's "spaces of exception." Pratt uses Agamben's work to help explain how "absences and lapses in state policing and regulation …. become the norm for certain people in certain places" (1053).

[3] The original (1999) reward poster can be viewed online at <http://www.missingpeople.net/neweastside.htm> Accessed 28 Aug 2007.

In the next chapter I offer an in-depth analysis of this poster's later incarnations, but here I am interested mainly in why this particular labeling of the women as of the Downtown Eastside was controversial (so controversial that it was dropped from subsequent versions of the poster). I speculate that this was so because of what the words "Downtown Eastside" conjure in the imaginations of many: namely, a space where drugs, prostitution, crime and violence flourish amid filth, decay, vermin, disease and untimely death. By describing the Downtown Eastside in this way, I risk reifying this as a "true" description of the neighbourhood even as I want to problematize such an understanding. While the Downtown Eastside is often imagined thus, I want to underscore that such narrow imaginings of this space serve particular political purposes and that I will take issue with such imaginings throughout this chapter.

A striking image of a street in the Downtown Eastside was captured in a photograph recently by Vancouver artist Stan Douglas. His composite photographic panorama, Every Building on 100 West Hastings, was displayed as part of a broader exhibition of Douglas' art at the Vancouver Contemporary Art Gallery in 2002. This sixteen-foot piece seamlessly brings together twenty-one separate photographs of the various buildings on the south side of the 100-block of West Hastings street in the heart of the Downtown Eastside. The first thing about Douglas' photographic composite that likely strikes anyone who has ever been on the 100 block of West Hastings is the curious absence of people: a street that is usually teeming with humanity is eerily deserted, with not a single person anywhere in sight. The only thing visible is a row of old buildings, many boarded

up and in need of repair, alongside a few remaining businesses – a convenience store, a pawn shop, the entrance to a single room occupancy (SRO) hotel. The image is evocative of a modern ghost town, and I imagine that standing in front of it one would get the feeling that one was visiting just such a space. The sheer size and length of the photograph prevents the eye from fixing on a single point; as art critic Denise Blake Oleksijczuk points out in an essay on Douglas' photograph, "[t]here is no zero-point from which the image would spatially make sense *as a whole*. Instead, it has many viewpoints that compete for the observer's attention" (108, emphasis in original). Instead of fixing on one aspect of the panorama, then, the viewer scans the length of the street, looking, searching even, for a spot on which to rest one's gaze.

As my eyes scanned this photograph for the first time, searching for what was missing, for why I could not settle my gaze on any one point, I realized quite suddenly that of course what is missing from the space of the Downtown Eastside today (and also from this photograph) are hundreds of women, most of whom were violently murdered, many of whom remain unaccounted for. For a moment, as this realization dawned, I felt chilled by the photograph's haunting absences. With reference to the disappeared women, Oleksijczuk insists that the timing of Douglas' photograph cannot be considered accidental: "A picture of this block at this time … has the potential to indicate that a space of tragedy, and its long-term dismissal by those at a safe distance from it, lies at the core of Vancouver's social and psychic life" (99). Yet the absences in the photograph might also point us towards others whose unjust, untimely deaths might be further in the past or even

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more recent, for also missing from the Downtown Eastside today are those who died from a drug overdose or from terrible illnesses like smallpox, tuberculosis, HIV or Hepatitis C. Then there are those who committed suicide in despair, or who died from some of the many other brutal effects of colonization, genocide, poverty, homelessness, displacement, starvation, isolation, loneliness. It could be any combination of these individuals that the viewer is invited to visually search for in Douglas' panorama, or all of them.

In the act of looking for what is missing from Douglas' photograph, Oleksijczuk argues that we may start to see ourselves as implicated in the losses it invokes: "The multiple perspectives of *100 West Hastings* demand that we as spectators adopt a staccato-like act of viewing that keeps our eyes moving as if we were engaged in a frantic search for something we have lost" (109). While photographs which contain "single vanishing points," or points we can fix on easily, allow spectators to "obtain an illusion of mastery and control," Douglas' panorama, Oleksijczuk argues, avoids this trap (107). Similarly, rather than photographing the residents of the Downtown Eastside themselves, which most often provokes feelings of "pity, or worse, of being comforted by the fact that [we ourselves] are much better off," Douglas instead presents us with this conspicuously empty block, and in doing so perhaps shifts our focus to "broader social issues" (Oleksijczuk 104). "Douglas' panorama may encourage spectators to cross both social and psychic boundaries not simply to feel empathy by putting themselves in [the missing] women's shoes, but to consciously and corporally implicate themselves in that which is disavowed," Oleksijczuk argues (100).

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Through that sense of implication, the self/other binary so common in popular representations of the Downtown Eastside starts to break down and a different relationship to the disappeared women is suggested – a relationship through which their disappearance cannot be held outside of or separate from what it means to be who we are and where we are in the present.

Of course, Douglas' panorama also risks reifying the notion that the Downtown Eastside is an *empty* space, when in fact it is a neighbourhood populated not just by ghosts but also by local residents and many social justice activists, all very much alive and often actively involved in preventing suffering, loss and displacement among those who live in the community. Vancouver writer Reg Johanson points out, for example, that in 2002, a year after Douglas shot 100 West Hastings, the same photographs would have been "impossible to take again," since the people "missing" from Douglas' photograph had returned to mount an enormous protest against homelessness and the loss of social housing (known as the Woodwards Squat) on that exact block; as Johanson puts it, "[s]uddenly, and all too briefly, the streets were filled with people who refused to disappear" (98).

Douglas' photograph therefore raises a number of questions about both the possibilities and the risks of representations of absence. Oleksijczuk develops a compelling psychoanalytic argument about the photograph's potential to invoke a sense of implication in viewers through its animation of haunting absences. But, building on Johanson's insights, I think it is also important to consider that representing the space of the Downtown Eastside as an empty space is a risky

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business, potentially reinforcing some contemporary desires to render this space empty for the purposes of encouraging gentrification (which I will, following geographers Jeff Sommers and Nicholas Blomley, go on to refer to as "resettlement"). As such, I want to hold onto the photograph's potential for animating hauntings and at the same time to contest its representation of the Downtown Eastside as empty space through a consideration of the activist work of some Downtown Eastside residents, work that demonstrates how the Downtown Eastside is anything but empty.

Geographically speaking, the Downtown Eastside is actually a space that is difficult to define. A recent City of Vancouver publication indicates that the area encompasses the distance between Clark Drive in the east to the end of the 400 block of West Hastings (at Richards) in the west, and from the end of Thornton park at Main and Terminal in the south to the outskirts of the industrial area that borders Burrard Inlet in the north. This same document also acknowledges, however, that "[t]hese areas do not, nor are they intended to, reflect neighbourhood boundaries which are perceived differently by the diverse communities that live and work in this part of the city" (City of Vancouver 4). Such a disclaimer signals that among the "diverse communities" living and working in the area, the boundaries of the Downtown Eastside are contested.

Confusingly, another page on the City's website proclaims the space of the Downtown Eastside to be "bound by Burrard Inlet to the north, Clark Drive to the east, Hastings Street to the south, and Main Street to the west," a dramatically

smaller area geographically than that described in the first document.[4] More

confusing still, the map accompanying this second statement indicates that the

neighbourhood boundaries extend from Burrard Inlet to well past Terminal

Avenue (much further south than Hastings Street). On some maps (such as the

one designed for tourists that I was handed recently while attending a conference

in Vancouver) the Downtown Eastside does not figure at all. Surrounding

neighbourhoods like Gastown and Chinatown are named but the name

"Downtown Eastside" is conspicuously absent (even though its geographical area

is included on the map) – it is imagined away, perhaps because deemed a less-

than-desirable space for tourists to visit.

The Downtown Eastside also appears not to have figured by that name at

all in the census data collection for 2006; the area previously described as

"Downtown Eastside" is here subsumed under "Strathcona," which in the report

mentioned earlier is described, by contrast, as a neighbourhood *of* the Downtown

Eastside.[5] City population statistics for the area are just as confusing: reports

relying on 2001 census data pit the area's population at just over 3, 500 people in

one document, to an estimate of just over 16, 500 in another.[6] And since there is

no indication in either of these documents whether those who are homeless or

who live in SROs are included in this data, the actual population may well be

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[4] See <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/community_profiles/downtown_eastside/
didyouknow.htm> Accessed 29 Aug 2007.

[5] See <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/planning/census/2006/localareas.pdf>
Accessed 29 Aug 2007.

[6] See <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/community_profiles/downtown_eastside/
documents/DowntownEastsideDemographics.pdf> versus City of Vancouver 70. Accessed 29
Aug 2007. No doubt this discrepancy has to do with the discrepancies in delineating the
geographic area of the Downtown Eastside, but regardless the data is confusing.

higher. These discrepancies also suggest the contested nature of the space of the Downtown Eastside – discrepancies such as these of course can and do occur in descriptions of other neighbourhoods, but I suspect not often so frequently or to the same degree.

Given that the geographical boundaries of the Downtown Eastside are clearly difficult to define (and depend much on who you ask and for what purpose you ask them), it is surprising that there is nonetheless a sense that this neighbourhood is marked by what art critic Reid Shier refers to as a "border that often differentiates Hastings Street, and its residents and habitués, from the rest of Vancouver" (10). Social anthropologist Jean McDonald has aptly exposed how this sense of a border around the Downtown Eastside is both invoked and perpetuated through numerous mainstream media representations. News stories frequently cast the Downtown Eastside as "seedy" or "degenerate" (116), she argues, offering only formulaic descriptions of the area. "[C]haracterization of the Eastside as a space of degeneracy and disease – a space clearly in need of containment, if not eradication" is a "predominant theme" of such representations, McDonald finds (117). Geographer Beverley A. Pitman similarly identifies a "'bad neighbourhood' stereotype of the Downtown Eastside in dominant representations of Vancouver" (175), and Andrew Woolford has studied how Vancouver-based print newspapers often represent the Downtown Eastside as a "tainted space" that requires "distance or cleansing" ("Tainted Space" 49).

Each of the authors cited in the last paragraph documents numerous examples of such stigmatizing representations of the Downtown Eastside, and

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because I am keenly aware that these sorts of representations not only reflect but are also constitutive and, when reiterated, potentially performative of this sense of the neighbourhood as "degenerate," I see no reason to repeat them here. As discussed in the previous chapter, I agree with Ernst van Alphen that "images, like people, can *do harm*" (269, emphasis in original). Van Alphen, himself following cultural critic Mieke Bal, alerts scholars and critics to the potentially damaging effects of our reiterations, even when it is our intention to offer a negative analysis. "[A] quotation is always inevitably a repetition," he writes, summarizing Bal, "which can easily contaminate the critical discourse in which it is embedded" (273). As a result, it should suffice to say here that media representations of the Downtown Eastside, and in particular news media and documentary media (a genre to which I will return shortly), contribute significantly to this sense of the neighbourhood as a bordered, "degenerate" space.

Geographers Jeff Sommers and Nicholas Blomley argue that this stigmatization of the Downtown Eastside "can be traced for most of the twentieth century" (29). The Downtown Eastside is Vancouver's oldest neighbourhood and as such has a long, varied, and often contentious history. A great deal has been written about the neighbourhood already, so, rather than repeat that work, I will highlight those aspects that bear most on my project.[7] In the early part of the

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[7] Those desiring a more complete history might enjoy Nicholas Blomley's Unsettling the City; Shlomo Hasson and David Ley's essay "The Downtown Eastside: 'One Hundred Years of Struggle'" in their edited collection Neighbourhood Organizations and the Welfare State; Jeff Sommers and Blomley's essay, "The Worst Block in Vancouver;" Paul Taylor's edited collection, The Heart of the Community: The best of the Carnegie newsletter; and the archives of the

century it was primarily the neighbourhood's reputation for social activism that established it as a trouble-spot for police and local governments. As early as 1904 the management of the Woodwards department store, which had at that time just recently opened its mammoth location at the corner of Hastings and Abbott, wrote an angry letter to city council complaining that:

> its customers were prevented from entering the store by the crowds of people congregating on the streets outside, selling and buying labour newspapers, listening to radical speakers, or simply enjoying the ambience (as summarized in Sommers & Blomley 29).[8]

In the 1930s the area was a "hotbed of political mobilization" on labour and anti-poverty issues and several Downtown Eastside buildings and parks were occupied by unemployed workers or strikers, causing numerous confrontations between protestors and police (Hasson & Ley 174; see also Sommers & Blomley). It seems likely that this early sense of the Downtown Eastside as a space of social activism contributed to its later representation as a space of degeneracy and social deviance to some degree, since these protests were often described as "riots" and clashes sometimes turned violent.

Carnegie Community Centre's newsletter, some of which are available online at <http://carnegie.vcn.bc.ca/index.pl/newsletter> Accessed 23 Nov 2008.

[8] The Woodwards buildings remain a source of tension in the neighbourhood, as anti-poverty activists continue to struggle with government authorities (and sometimes police) over the buildings' destined purpose: anti-poverty activists demand social housing while city officials have long desired to see the buildings used for condo-development. Since the time of the Woodwards Squat, when activists occupied the buildings and/or surrounding sidewalk for several months in 2002, a permit has been granted to a developer and reconstruction of the building is well underway. Although the City lauds its commitment to maintaining 20-40% of the new residential space as social housing, activists have long insisted that a commitment to 100% social housing would be a more just use of the space. For more on the Woodwards Squat see West Coast Line 41 (37.2/3), "Woodsquat," edited by Aaron Vidaver.

An early reputation for social deviance was also likely tied to the Downtown Eastside's proximity to Chinatown and Japantown. Sometimes described as neighbourhoods of the Downtown Eastside and sometimes as its neighbours, Chinatown and Japantown have not always been viewed as welcome developments within the city of Vancouver. In 1907, for example, a riot motivated by racist ideologies damaged or destroyed several Chinese and Japanese businesses in the area, further perpetuating its reputation as a trouble-spot. Constructions of immigrants as "outsiders" to the nation has impacted understandings of what Sunera Thobani calls the "exalted subject" of Canadian citizenry in sometimes similar ways to how Indigenous subjects have been cast, and thus their struggles are in many ways intertwined even when they are not perceived to be. Thobani argues that "the national, the Indian, and the immigrant" are "fundamental categories of Canadian nationhood, born in the violence of the colonial encounter … It is the relationality among them," she insists, "… that gives these categories their concrete – sometimes explosive, but always political – meanings" (28). Thobani's work offers an excellent starting place for theorizing the relationship between the people and spaces of Chinatown, Japantown and the Downtown Eastside, and while it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this dissertation to justly theorize these complex connections, suffice it to say that the stereotypical representations of the discordant relationship between Chinatown and Downtown Eastside residents and business owners all too common in mainstream media cannot do justice to the complexity of the coalitions and

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relationships that exist between members who recognize themselves as part of each (often overlapping) community.

After the second world war, as a result of significant economic changes throughout the province, a neighbourhood that had for years been populated largely by men doing work that supported various resource-based industries slowly began to change. In the early 1950s newspaper articles began to describe the Downtown Eastside in very similar terms to how it is often construed by the press today: in 1952, for example, it was described by <u>Vancouver Province</u> journalist Bill Ryan as a location populated by "criminals, alcoholics, drug addicts and sex perverts … pick-up girls and prostitutes," overrun with "Tuberculosis and other infections" (cited in Sommers & Blomley 33). Sommers and Blomley argue that the present stigmatization of the neighbourhood stems in large part from what they describe as the "moral panic over drugs and HIV," which became conflated in the 1990s with increasing "signs of growing poverty and marginality such as homelessness, begging, and 'squeegee kids,'" as well as sex work, I would add, resulting in "the pathologization of the entire neighbourhood" (21). It is without doubt a neighbourhood where the unjust and uneven effects of urban poverty are deeply felt, but these more common perceptions or imaginings of the Downtown Eastside cannot do justice to the area's fierce sense of community and activist spirit.

Long recognized as one of the few neighbourhoods in Vancouver offering anything close to affordable housing for those on a fixed income, the Downtown Eastside is nonetheless losing low-income housing today at an alarmingly ever-

greater pace in the lead-up to the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. This displacement

of local residents has not escaped the notice of neighbourhood activists, and is

being documented in the interests of challenging the City's repeated insistence

that displacements due to "revitalization" of the area will not occur. According to

a new report by the Carnegie Community Action Project (C-CAP), 174 rooms in

SROs have closed in the first few months of 2008, with another 225 rooms in

immanent danger of closing.[9] While C-CAP certainly acknowledges that SROs

frequently provide less-than-ideal accommodations to local residents, they also

argue that the rooms they do make available are some of the only affordable

housing in the city and can provide "stopgap" housing while more social housing

is developed.

Meanwhile, new condominium projects with few or no commitments to

social housing are being given a green light by the City despite resistance from

local activists and residents.[10] Clearly, the City's "zero displacement"

commitment is not being met, as the thrust of "development" forces low-income

residents either out of the neighbourhood or onto the streets. Likely at the

insistence of local residents and activists, the City was careful not to imagine

away the existing Downtown Eastside community through the design of a recent

"revitalization" project, repeatedly emphasizing that the revitalization was

intended for the benefit of the existing community, not a community of new urban

middle-class "pioneers" yet to come. Nonetheless, residents of the Downtown

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[9] The C-CAP report, Disappearing Homes: The Loss of Affordable Housing in the DTES, is available online at <http://ccapvancouver.files.wordpress.com/2008/04/ccapreport08d4.pdf> Accessed 20 May 2008.

[10] See the coverage of the proposed Concord Pacific site at 58 West Hastings on the Save Low Income Housing Coalition's website: <http://slihc.resist.ca/> Accessed 20 May 2008.

Eastside are today facing displacement at an alarming rate, seemingly to make room for "settlers" who will stake claims on this space that are deemed by many to be more legitimate. It is hardly coincidental that the language and metaphors frequently invoked to describe or represent the space of the Downtown Eastside today very closely resemble those used to describe the land now known as British Columbia (or western Canada more broadly) around the time of initial contact between European colonizers and First Nations. As Sommers and Blomley explain, the Downtown Eastside is frequently cast today as a "mythical frontier" that is "wild, dangerous, and, ultimately, [an] empty space, ripe for (re)settlement" (45). This repetition or recycling of language and metaphor indicates that colonization is not a finished, "settled," or past project, but instead is ongoing and continually remade in the present.

Colonial (present) pasts

The space now designated the "Downtown Eastside" was of course not always demarcated by this name. In fact it did not become known as the Downtown Eastside until around 1973, when the Downtown Eastside Residents' Association was founded to try to change negative public and civic perceptions of the area, then most commonly referred to as "Skid Road" (see Hasson & Ley).[11] But before the City of Vancouver was incorporated as such in 1886, before the

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[11] "Skid Road" is a logging term used, according to Jeff Sommers and Nick Blomley, to describe "the corduroy roads along which fallen trees were 'skidded' to the mill" (30). The term was applied to the neighbourhood that was later renamed as the Downtown Eastside because of the "agglomeration of bars, hotels and bordellos that sprang up near logging camps and mills to service their workers" (ibid), and only became a pejorative in the 1950s. For more on the use of the term "Skid Road," see Hasson & Ley's "The Downtown Eastside" and Sommers & Blomley's "'The Worst Block in Vancouver.'"

province now known as British Columbia entered into the Canadian Confederation in 1871, before Vancouver Island was established as a British colony in 1849, and before the establishment of Fort Langley in 1827 brought about regular contact between European settlers and Indigenous people (Harris 76), the space now known as the Downtown Eastside was travelled across, lived on and occupied primarily by Coast Salish First Nations (who of course were not known and did not come to know themselves as "Coast Salish" or as "First Nations" until the violent imposition of a colonial settler society on what is now known as the west coast of British Columbia). The people of these nations lived on these lands for centuries prior to the arrival of European colonizers. Mid nineteenth and early twentieth century representations of this space, this land, as vast, empty, rugged wilderness (see Blomley 117, 123; and Harris xvi, 194) have contributed to a social imaginary that frequently eclipses those with prior claims and ties to this space, claims and ties that were not dealt with justly but instead were outright denied or suppressed through a decimation of the peoples who stood to make them.

Such is the weight of discourses that posit the colonization of British Columbia as the discovery of a vast, empty wilderness that they continue to influence the way histories of colonization are written and understood today (for a succinct critique of some recent examples of such histories, see Blomley 117). In his book The Resettlement of British Columbia, Cole Harris reflects on the impact such discourses had on the history he was writing and publishing in a reputable academic journal as recently as 1985. As he explains:

When I wrote that there was no evidence of Native settlement near Idaho

Peak [in the British Columbia interior], I did not know about the smallpox

epidemics of 1782 and 1862, or about the measles epidemic of 1848, or

about influenza in 1849 …. Mine is another example, from one who

should have known better, of the substitution of wilderness for an erased

Native world. (xvi)

Colonial acts that effected the erasure and/or displacement of First Nations

peoples and communities (Harris documents how by 1877 much of the

Indigenous population of the lower mainland was sequestered on reserves) shape

the organization of space and social life in contemporary British Columbia and, I

will argue, continue to have a significant impact on how the space of the

Downtown Eastside in particular is imagined today.

In her book On the Edge of Empire, historian Adele Perry carefully

documents the turbulence and anxieties provoked by efforts to resettle the land

now known as British Columbia with settlers of European descent. Prior to its

entry into the Canadian confederation in 1871, British Columbia, Perry writes,

"hung precariously at the edge of Britain's literal and symbolic empire" (3).

Colonialists were routinely frustrated and/or outraged that this outpost of empire

"bore little resemblance to the orderly, respectable, white settler colony that

imperial observers hoped it would become" (3). At a time when Indigenous

people still outnumbered their colonizers, when white women were scarce and

mixed-race relationships (between white men and Indigenous women)

commonplace, considerable effort was required to try to bring this colony in line

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with colonial ideals and imaginings. Such efforts would not only bring about a profound displacement and destruction of Indigenous communities, but would also constitute and sanction a particular understanding of Indigenous womanhood, one that I will argue is indelibly bound to the violence directed at such women in the Downtown Eastside (and Western Canada more broadly) today.

Anxieties over sexual and/or domestic relationships between white men and Indigenous women were part of the reasoning behind official policies aimed at evacuating Indigenous people from the burgeoning urban spaces of the new colony. There were many debates among governors and clergymen about the merits of officially wedding such couples. Some argued that "white men's morality would inevitably be imperiled by connections with Aboriginal women" (Perry 107), while others argued that Aboriginal women should be protected from the debasement of extramarital relationships with European men. Regardless of their reasoning, Perry writes, "[a]ll shared the motivating conviction that relationships forged between white men and Aboriginal women were indicative of the failure of respectable gender and racial organization to develop on this edge of empire" (97). Significant efforts were thus taken by colonial governors and by the church to prevent or disrupt such relationships.

Calls from across the colony to restrict the presence of Indigenous peoples in the developing cities of Victoria and New Westminster led to official and unofficial policies intended to produce this effect. In April 1861, for example:

> Police issued orders 'to drive all Indians found in town after 6 o'clock
> p.m. across the bridge' that separated settler-Victoria from the

Lekwammen (Songhees) reserve. Aboriginal people found on the wrong side of the racial divide after 10 p.m. were to be searched and prevented from returning until morning unless they could produce documentation of a clear and subservient relationship to the colonial community, namely 'passes from white persons by whom they are employed.' (Perry 113)

While anxieties over mixed-race relationships were not the only cause of such policies (Perry suggests that smallpox was another convenient and perhaps coincidental excuse for them), they were certainly one cause. Such determined efforts to rid urban spaces of the presence of Indigenous peoples, and of Indigenous women in particular, hauntingly (and alarmingly) foreshadow contemporary examples of similar practices.

Another technique for discouraging mixed-race relationships in the colony was to employ language and imagery that would eventually secure a near-synonymous equation of the categories of "Indigenous woman" and "prostitute." As Perry explains, "[a] convenient shorthand for signifying the immorality of First Nations womanhood was the suggestion that Aboriginal women were, by definition, prostitutes" (54). This mapping became so pervasive that at the time it took "little to 'prove' [Aboriginal women's] participation in the sex trade" (110), which was in turn used as both a tool and a justification for ejecting Indigenous people, and Indigenous women in particular, from urban centres. In December 1862, for example, a Victoria city councilor "proposed a by-law 'declaring it to be unlawful for any person to Harbor Indian women within the City limits …'" (Perry 119). To legitimize this proposal he insisted that "'the squaws might all be

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considered as prostitutes, and that was sufficient grounds for their rejection'"

(ibid). While his proposal was not successful, it suggests a generalized tendency

towards this conflation of Indigenous womanhood and prostitution in colonial

British Columbia.

A common reaction to Perry's findings might be to dismiss the racist

ideologies they document as belonging to a bygone era, the injustices of which we

have securely put behind us in the interests of a more tolerant, pluralist,

multicultural present. But Sunera Thobani's research offers much evidence to the

contrary. As already briefly mentioned, Thobani argues that Canadian nationality

is built upon a notion of "exaltation." "In the case of Canada," she writes, "the

historical exaltation of the national subject has ennobled this subject's humanity

and sanctioned the elevation of its rights over and above that of the Aboriginal

and the immigrant" (9). The exalted subject *is* the national subject, and its

outsiders (as already discussed, for Thobani these are primarily those constituted

as Indigenous persons and immigrants) are cast (in law as well as in national

mythology) as outside of the bounds of the human, belonging to spaces outside of

the rule of law. As she explains:

> Racial difference, as a system of hierarchy within the Canadian socio-legal
>
> system constitutes the national, the Indian, and the immigrant as different
>
> kinds of *legal* beings. In the process, it also constitutes them as different
>
> kinds of *human* beings at a symbolic level …. (28, emphasis in original)

What it means to be constituted as a Canadian national is indelibly bound to what

it means to be constituted as Indigenous in Canada; this, Thobani argues, is the

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founding distinction on which our national mythology is based, a mythology that informs our present as much as our past.

The violent colonial encounters that constituted subjects as exalted Canadian nationals or as Indigenous outsiders to the nation are inseparably related to divisions of space within the boundaries of the Canadian state. Building on the work of Franz Fanon, Thobani argues that "[t]he colonial world emerged as a world divided" (38). For the settler, cities, lawfulness, and wealth prevailed, for the "native," reservations, lawlessness, and poverty. While such divisions are obviously overly simplified, the connections Thobani makes between understandings of space and subjectivity are important. Not only do they suggest that whether or not someone is recognizable as human (and therefore as "grievable," if we can return for a moment to Butler's language) has much to do with which spaces they occupy, but, if we take her insight a step further, one could also argue that such spaces do not remain static across time; that different spaces are constituted on similar terms during different historical epochs. Thus, the reservation became the space of containment for Indigenous "outsiders" in the late nineteenth century, while as already discussed the Downtown Eastside is frequently framed through similar terms – as a space of containment – today. That the population of the Downtown Eastside today is disproportionately Indigenous should thus come as little surprise. Different spaces, defined in different epochs by similar rhetorical terms. Similarly, during initial contact, the lands now known as British Columbia were described on very similar terms (as empty space awaiting "improvement") as the Downtown Eastside sometimes is today. The

mythologies used to define particular spaces are thus trans-temporal, while such

spaces, despite their refusal to remain static, are nonetheless used to *contain* those

subjects whose humanity is, in relation to the "exalted" subject, rendered un- or

less-intelligible.

I contend, then, that the kinds of mythologies and rhetorics tracked by

Perry and Thobani, although historical, are nonetheless certainly not *past* (when

the past is construed as settled, finished, over-and-done-with) but instead shape

the contours of the present of British Columbia. In fact, as already discussed,

some very similar symbolic and material practices are evident in the Downtown

Eastside today, and it is to these symbolic and material practices of colonialism as

they arise in (and haunt) this neighbourhood in the present that I now turn.

A new urban frontier: Images and encounters[12]

The contemporary Downtown Eastside has become notorious for drug use,

prostitution and extreme poverty not just through news reportage but also in part

through the immense popularity of a National Film Board of Canada (NFB)

documentary titled Through a Blue Lens. This film documents the lives of several

people who at the time of filming are addicted to substances and living for the

most part on the streets in the Downtown Eastside, as filmed (and framed)

through the gaze of a group of Vancouver police officers (who contribute much of

the footage), and it is frequently used in drug education and awareness programs

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[12] This section builds upon shared research I have conducted with Kara Granzow, PhD Candidate
in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta (see Granzow and Dean). The title of
the section echoes the title of geographer Neil Smith's important book, The New Urban Frontier:
Gentrification and the Revanchist City.

in Canada and beyond. According to the police-turned-filmmakers, <u>Through a Blue Lens</u> is "the NFB's most successful video in their history" and has been viewed by "tens of millions of viewers worldwide."[13] <u>Through a Blue Lens</u> constructs the Downtown Eastside along the lines of the "mythical frontier" that Sommers and Blomley describe: the film's opening shots of drug deals and people smoking and injecting drugs emphasize the supposed "degeneracy" and "lawlessness" of the neighbourhood and are accompanied by steel guitar music intended, according to geographer Jennifer England (based on an interview with the film's director, Victoria Mannix), to "give the inner city a purposeful wild-west groove" (301). In an interview with England, Mannix explained that her aim was to represent the Downtown Eastside as "an untamed frontier: a place of good guys and bad guys, cowboy cops and outlaw addicts" (ibid).

     <u>Through a Blue Lens</u> is rife with scenes evocative of the Wild West. In one scene, for example, with the steel guitar again twanging in the background, a police officer encounters a man in an alleyway, makes him dump his heroin on the ground and then says, "Turn your pocket inside out there, *partner*." When he is satisfied that the man has no additional drugs, the officer instructs him to "move along, *partner*." The music and language here are right out of a typical Western. The scene concludes with the officer's statement that Downtown Eastside residents addicted to drugs have "really tragic, pathetic, wasted lives." This construction of Downtown Eastside residents as "pathetic" and as "waste"

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[13] See <http://www.oddsquad.com/EN/through_a_blue_lens/> Accessed 29 Aug 2007. A NFB sales manager corroborates that the film is "one of the NFB's most successful productions" and has been viewed "by millions of viewers worldwide." Al Parsons, personal communication, 30 Aug 2007.

legitimates claims that the neighbourhood ought to be "cleaned up" in the interests of (good) citizens who desire to resettle the area (perhaps not so coincidentally, the film was released just shortly after the neighbourhood began undergoing a city-sponsored revitalization).[14] The reference to "waste" echoes nineteenth century rationales for colonizing the space that has become Vancouver; as geographer Nicholas Blomley explains, "Native lands … were deemed unimproved, and could thus be justly expropriated by those who were capable of reclaiming the 'waste'" (116; see also Perry 126). Blomley also documents how contemporary developers imagine the Downtown Eastside today as *terra nullius*, a legal notion used to refer to empty or undeveloped land, and one that not surprisingly was also deployed to support European usurpation and theft of lands occupied and used by Indigenous people in the nineteenth century.

As Blomley points out, "[t]o characterize a dense, inner-city neighbourhood – containing several thousand people – as 'empty' seems a striking claim" (91). Initially, I found myself confused by the tendency to conflate "degeneracy" with emptiness in descriptions of the Downtown Eastside – after all, a space requires contents, people and places and events, in order to be rendered "degenerate." Yet I have come to see that there is a definite connection between images and productions of the Downtown Eastside that emphasize "degeneracy" and "waste" and those that render it empty. The logic goes something like this:

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[14] It also legitimizes a form of "anything goes" Wild West policing intended to "bring order" to a presumably disorderly space. The overwhelming documentation of extensive police brutality in the Downtown Eastside lends support to the idea that this sort of mentality is at play in policing of the area. See Pivot Legal Society, To Serve and Protect: A Report on Policing in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, available online at <http://www.pivotlegal.org/Publications/reportstsap.htm> Accessed 30 Aug 2007.

because "waste" is non-productive, in economic terms, it can be easily rendered as nothing-ness, and therefore as nothing *there*. This kind of (indisputably capitalist) logic is thoroughly bound up in the modernist principals of development and progress, those taken-for-granted markers of triumph and success that are in turn thoroughly immersed in the logics of imperialism and colonization. So the characterization of life in the Downtown Eastside as "degenerate" and as "waste" is an old frontier trick remade for a contemporary moment.

What are the potential effects of representations that invite us to imagine the space of the Downtown Eastside through the language and metaphors of the Wild West? What sorts of encounters might such images invite? In his book The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the revanchist city, Neil Smith argues that in the late twentieth century, frontier mythology became characteristic of urban "revitalization" projects aiming to "clean up" and transform the character(s) of inner-city spaces across North America. "In the end," he writes, "… the frontier discourse serves to rationalize and legitimate a process of conquest, whether in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century West, or in the late-twentieth-century inner city" (xv). The use of frontier mythology to describe the space of the Downtown Eastside serves to (re)define it as in need of taming and resettlement by (presumably white and wealthy) "pioneers," although the class and race dynamics of such urban projects are often ignored or outright denied. As Smith explains:

> the term "urban pioneer" [often used to describe those imagined as the
> desirable new occupants of a "revitalized" inner city] is therefore as

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arrogant as the original notion of "pioneers" in that it suggests a city not yet socially inhabited; like Native Americans, the urban working class is seen as less than social, a part of the physical environment. (xiv)

The urban working class is posited by such mythology as outside of, or not belonging to, the social – a dangerous presupposition that portends a dehumanization which then rationalizes and naturalizes violence toward and displacement of people positioned to be "of" this class. Because Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is a neighbourhood with a disproportionate number of both urban poor / low-income / working class people *and* Indigenous people, the frontier mythology evoked to describe this neighbourhood today becomes all the more salient: the visible presence of "real Indians" lends legitimacy to the idea that struggles over the Downtown Eastside are aptly captured by this mythology.

The echo of early descriptions of Indigenous people in contemporary descriptions of residents of inner-city neighbourhoods should make us curious about what kinds of encounters such descriptions might authorize. As Nicholas Blomley explains:

Characterization of the residents of the inner city as mobile and unfixed bear a striking resemblance to many representations of native people. In both cases, the effect is to force a separation between a population and the space it occupies, rendering a collective claim to this space void, even invisible. (xx)

Blomley argues compellingly about the relationship between property and citizenship, underscoring that the characterization of groups of people as "mobile

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and unfixed" places them outside of the category of property-owner (often equated with citizen) and, by extension, outside of the realm of the social. Such descriptions are used not only to rationalize a resettlement of urban spaces but also to explain away the displacement or even disappearance of people belonging to spaces like the Downtown Eastside, and then to legitimate an official strategy of non-response. For example, those who followed early media coverage of the belated realization that dozens of women were "missing" from the Downtown Eastside in the late 1990s will recall that the women were frequently described as "transient" and "mobile" and thus, officials insisted, there was no reason to look for them (or else it was deemed impossible to look for them). These two claims: that a space slated for resettlement is "empty" and that the people who occupy it are "transient" and "mobile" work together, through the logic of private property (see Blomley), to rationalize not only displacement but also a sense that those supposedly transient and mobile lives are less valuable, less grievable, and therefore less worthy of attention if they are disappeared.

The pervasiveness of frontier mythology in descriptions of the Downtown Eastside is also intimately tied to the violent encounters all too frequently experienced by women who occupy that space today. In her article "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice," Sherene Razack argues, for example, that the murder of Pamela George, a Saulteaux woman from the Sakimay First Nation in Saskatchewan, who at the time of her murder did street-level survival sex work in an inner-city neighbourhood in Regina, Saskatchewan (another western Canadian city), is overly determined by how Canada's colonial history

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constitutes and constrains the identities of George and her murderers and simultaneously legitimizes assumptions about contemporary inner-city spaces as "degenerate." "The city belongs to the settlers," Razack insists, "and the sullying of civilized society through the presence of the racial Other in white space gives rise to a careful management of boundaries within urban space" (97). Razack argues that George's murderers saw themselves to be crossing a border into a "degenerate," frontier-like space when they visited "the Stroll" in Regina's inner-city on the night of George's murder. She suggests that the violence George experienced was "fully colonial – a making of the white, masculine self as dominant through practices of violence directed at a colonized woman" (96).

Razack's delineation of how colonialist legacies naturalize violence against certain bodies occupying certain spaces (in this instance, the body of an Indigenous woman occupying an inner-city neighbourhood in western Canada) is persuasive. Her argument becomes particularly instructive when considered alongside the predominant use of frontier mythology to describe and rationalize contemporary efforts to "clean up" and resettle inner-city spaces like the Downtown Eastside. In an earlier article titled "Race, Space and Prostitution," Razack analyzes how spaces where prostitution happens are produced as racialized spaces, asking "how is prostitution always about race, class, and gender, even when the prostitutes are white?" (345). Her analysis of the racialization of the spaces where prostitution happens is essential, I believe, to understanding the connections between British Columbia's colonial past and the disappearance of women from the Downtown Eastside today. For, as previously

mentioned, it is not as though all of the women who have been disappeared from the Downtown Eastside are Indigenous; in fact, it is possible that fewer than half of them might be (although this would still mean that they are enormously overrepresented).

But I would argue, building on Razack's analysis, that a kind of metonymic slippage is also at work here. In the racialized spaces of the contemporary western Canadian inner-city, spaces that are often described much as the frontier was described during early contact between Europeans and First Nations, histories of colonization, and in particular that aspect of those histories which produced an indelible connection between Indigenous womanhood and prostitution, works to render "the prostitute" in such spaces as Indigenous, such that she is in effect racialized as "other" even when her skin may be read as white. What a spatial analysis reveals here is how racialization is produced concomitantly through the histories which also (re)produce particular understandings of particular spaces, such that "race" signifies quite differently in different spaces and epochs. This insight can help us to understand how such histories are implicated in the contemporary encounters I am analyzing.

I have found it useful to consider Razack's analysis alongside Sara Ahmed's theorizing about the significance of encounters in her book Strange Encounters. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ahmed is interested in the figure of "the stranger," in how encounters between those deemed familiar and unfamiliar (or strange) *produce* those subjects *in* the encounter. As she explains, "the encounter itself is ontologically prior to the question of ontology (the

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question of the being who encounters)" (7). For Ahmed, then, our analysis should be concerned with the question of "how contemporary modes of proximity *reopen prior histories of encounter*" (13, emphasis in original). She is interested in investigating "how colonial encounters are both determining, and yet not fully determining, of social and material existence" (11). Read alongside the "histories of encounter" between Indigenous women and white men in colonial British Columbia, I believe it is necessary to consider the violence experienced by Indigenous women in the Downtown Eastside (and in neighbourhoods cast as "new frontiers" in western Canada more broadly) today as encounters that are fully enmeshed with that history, belying its pastness. Yet, although a history of colonization certainly impacts the encounter, it is important to note that it does not *fully* determine it; that because the history *produced* the categorizations rather than the other way around, other outcomes were and are possible. As Ahmed reminds us, "rethinking the primacy of the encounter over ontology is … a means by which we can introduce historicity, as the very absence of any totality that governs the encounter" (10).

The return of significant numbers of Indigenous people to urban centres in the 1960s and 1970s in western Canada created considerable anxieties resulting in efforts to contain Indigenous urbanites within particular spaces in the city and/or to (re)expel them from urban centres. Building on comments by the Native Council of Canada, Razack notes that the rearrangement of space during the colonial period continues to sustain a "'perception that being Aboriginal and being urban are mutually exclusive'" (Native Council of Canada in Razack,

"Gendered Racial Violence" 102; see also Pratt 1059). In her analysis of the murder of Pamela George, Razack draws our attention to the fact that George's murderers first drove her to the outskirts of Regina, where they murdered her and abandoned her body. She locates this violent act on a continuum of similar contemporary efforts to violently expel Indigenous bodies from cities in western Canada, such as the horrific police practice of driving Indigenous people out of the city and abandoning them there, which has been linked to the freezing deaths of several Indigenous men in recent years.[15] Note the haunting parallel between these contemporary events and the historical efforts to remove Indigenous people from the newly-developing colonial cities discussed above.

        Many of the women disappeared from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside were of course also removed from the inner-city, their remains discovered on a rural property in the suburban outskirts. The pattern has been similar in Edmonton, another western Canadian city, where the bodies of women involved in survival sex work in the inner-city have, over a period of several years, been found in fields outside of the city limits. It is the same pattern documented by journalist Warren Goulding, who writes about the murders of at least three Indigenous women whose bodies were discovered on the outskirts of Saskatoon, and the pattern is also evident in Winnipeg, where three bodies of women involved in sex work have been found near the city's northern outskirts.[16] This is *precisely* the kind of encounter that is authorized by the contemporary use of

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[15] It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on these heinous acts of police violence, but interested readers should consult Reber and Renaud's <u>Starlight Tour</u>.
[16] See "Third prostitute found dead in Man," published in the Saskatoon <u>Star-Phoenix</u> on September 5, 2007.

frontier mythology to describe the inner-city spaces where such women lived and worked – a deeply unsettling illustration of the social and psychic legacies of a colonialism that is anything but past.

A haunting encounter

I suspect that the use of frontier mythology to describe contemporary inner-city neighbourhoods (such as the Downtown Eastside) thus alerts us to a haunting. As already discussed, for social analyst Avery Gordon, "haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (8). The resurfacing of frontier mythology in recent efforts to resettle the Downtown Eastside (and other neighbourhoods like it[17]) seems to me to be an indication that these efforts are haunted by the city's colonial past, a past with claims on the present that are frequently disavowed and are yet to be reckoned with. Frontier mythology slips into these efforts and makes this colonial past "there and not there at the same time" (Gordon 6): "there" because the mythology evokes this past, but "not there" because the past's significance to the present is so frequently disregarded. Instead, efforts to effect a present-day displacement of Downtown Eastside residents rely on a taken-for-granted assumption that the past is past, is "settled," so to speak, and therefore irrelevant to the present. But the frontier mythology allows the presence of the past to seep in, haunting the present by

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[17] For an examination of how similar casting was deployed to support the planned gentrification of an inner-city neighbourhood in Edmonton, see Granzow and Dean.

calling attention to the ways that the relationship *between* past and present is far less linear than conventionally conveyed.

What, then, might it mean to recognize and reckon with the ghostly contours of Downtown Eastside spaces, the haunting aspects of the frontier mythology frequently evoked to describe this space today? By tracing Downtown Eastside hauntings throughout this chapter, I have aimed to provoke reconsiderations of the past's claims on the present and, to borrow from Wendy Brown, to inspire "strategies for conceiving our relation to past and future that coin responsibility and possibilities for action out of indeterminacy" (Politics 155). Brown acknowledges that "even when avowed, [a haunting] does not make perfectly clear what its meanings and effects are" (153). The outcome of the haunting, any path it might suggest towards greater justice for Downtown Eastside residents, is not neatly laid out for us. Anything it might signal is necessarily partial, contestable, situational. So what good comes from recognizing hauntings, one might ask, when to do so does not guarantee a different approach or a different outcome? To offer a partial answer to this question, I need to convey a story about my own recent encounter with the haunting presence of Sereena Abotsway, a woman who has been disappeared from the Downtown Eastside.

A walk through the Downtown Eastside today is likely to result in an abundance of ghost-sightings, if one is looking for them. There is a ghost on nearly every corner – in fact, on some corners they jostle for room. Often times these ghosts are only noticeable, though, through the "seething presence" of absence: the absence of their human forms. Absent presences mark the ghostly

spirits that are visited and paid homage to each year during an annual Valentine's

Day march in the Downtown Eastside, when marchers pause and perform smudge

ceremonies at corners where women were last seen before they were disappeared,

vanished, made absent from the spaces where their ghostly presences now hold

court. They are also the ghosts of disappeared women from the Downtown

Eastside whose absent presences haunt Marker of Change, the Downtown

Eastside monument to the 14 women murdered in the Montréal Massacre.[18] And

ghosts have also been captured in another recent documentary film about the

Downtown Eastside.

      Nettie Wild's documentary, <u>Fix: The Story of an Addicted City</u>, is haunted

by absent presences and by a presence now made absent – a presence now

disappeared from the Downtown Eastside. The first haunting is intentional, the

other accidental; both draw attention to contemporary injustices and together

show how hauntings are multi-layered, how "even those who haunt our dominant

institutions and their systems of value are haunted too …" (Gordon 5). Released

in 2002, <u>Fix</u> documents the struggles of the Vancouver Area Network of Drug

Users (VANDU) to secure funding for a safe injection site in the Downtown

Eastside. Filming of <u>Fix</u> began just after the release of <u>Through a Blue Lens</u>;

VANDU, though, was formed in 1998, while <u>Through a Blue Lens</u> was still being

shot, yet the organization is not mentioned in this documentary about drug use in

the Downtown Eastside. This oversight contradicts the filmmakers' professed

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[18] I go on to discuss both of these memorials in much more detail in chapter five. For a vivid and
compelling description of how the women disappeared from this neighbourhood continue to haunt
Marker of Change in particular, see Rosenberg's "Distances and Proximities."

desire to make Through a Blue Lens an "apolitical" film: by drawing attention to the social and historical causes of poverty and addiction, the work of VANDU undermines the desire of Through a Blue Lens' makers to paint a picture of addiction as simply a matter of individualized "bad choices," and so they are not given representation in the film. By contrast, through its focus on the social activism of VANDU, Fix draws out the social dimensions of addiction, providing an opening for contemplating the relationship between past and present injustices that might work to evoke in viewers a sense of implication in the suffering depicted on screen.

The members of VANDU seem aware of the power of hauntings to provoke recognition of injustice. They attempt to deliberately animate hauntings in their protests against funding cuts to Downtown Eastside services or refusals to fund social housing and harm reduction programs, programs that might reduce some of the vulnerability to unjust, untimely death that many people from the Downtown Eastside contend with daily. Repeatedly, they establish rows of wooden crosses in parks, in front of city hall, and on the grounds of the provincial legislature. They also take coffins to city council meetings, cloaked in spectre-masks. In doing so, they insist that public officials reckon with the dead of the Downtown Eastside, drawing important connections between public policy, the uneven distribution of social resources, and the untimely deaths of many of the people who share their neighbourhood. A laudable effort to animate hauntings for the purposes of creating change, there is nonetheless something about the intentionality of VANDU's work here, about their strategic deployment of the

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dead, that cannot quite hail us into the sort of unsettling reflections that I have in mind, despite its importance as a form of political activism.

But for me, Fix provoked an encounter with another, less obvious haunting presence, one captured on film entirely by accident. The second time I watched the film, after I had begun work on this dissertation, I was suddenly struck by a face I thought I recognized among those filmed in Oppenheimer park installing rows and rows of crosses for a demonstration. I puzzled over where I knew this face from, backed up the DVD, and suddenly felt stunned and disoriented as I realized why I recognized the woman: she is Sereena Abotsway, and I recognized her from her photograph on the Missing Women's Task Force poster and others I have seen of her on websites and in the press. In life, Abotsway was, among other things, an activist in the Downtown Eastside. She participated in VANDU protests as well as in the Valentine's Day march, where she once remembered murdered and missing women and is now one of the women who marchers remember and mourn. Now, marchers pause to remember Abotsway and perform a smudge to honour and release her spirit in front of the Portland Hotel on Hastings Street, where she was last seen.[19]

It is of course not surprising that a documentary made in this neighbourhood at this time would capture the images of some of the women who have since been disappeared – Wild began filming Fix in 2000 and Abotsway was disappeared in 2001. Yet Abotsway's presence in the film, because it is

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[19] In his coverage of the 2007 Valentine's Day march, published on February 15, 2007, Doug Ward from The Vancouver Sun documents Abotsway's participation in the Valentine's Day march in 2000, a year and a half before she was disappeared. It is quite likely that Abotsway participated in the march in many other years as well.

unexpected, is unsettling, all the more so because it is a moving image of a woman whom I have only ever seen in still photographs. In the film Abotsway is alive, and, in the few seconds in which she appears, she pounds a wooden cross into the ground, her hammer hitting the top of the cross four times before the camera pans away to other activists doing the same thing. Here, Abotsway is protesting the social conditions that make her and others from the Downtown Eastside more vulnerable to unjust, untimely death. Her presence here among those whose deaths she protests and mourns indicates a double haunting: Abotsway, haunted by the deaths of friends and neighbours, possibly also enemies, or lovers, or acquaintances or strangers, has herself come to haunt, her presence (now made absent from the Downtown Eastside) a warning to pay attention to hauntings, to heed what they can tell us about the complicated enmeshments of past and present.

After I recognized Abotsway's presence in Fix I could not watch the rest of the film in the same way. Recognizing Abotsway in the film and knowing of her (coming) death is disorienting because it collapses time: here in the film one sees the living presence of a woman now murdered, whose death is now considered to be in the past, yet in the present captured by the film it is still in the future, still to come. Knowing of her (coming) death and seeing her alive in this film seems to implicate me, the viewer, in her murder, particularly when considered alongside the other hauntings that the film intentionally animates. I start to watch for other faces I might recognize, start to wonder whether others who appear in the film are still alive or have been disappeared, killed, or suffered

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another form of unjust, untimely death. Abotsway's haunting presence, now made absent from the Downtown Eastside, thus provokes a sense of urgency about the ways that injustice and vulnerability are unevenly distributed and lived.

When I visited Vancouver recently I sat for a long time across the street from the Portland Hotel, where Abotsway was last seen. Although I have walked, biked, taken the bus, or driven past this spot hundreds of times in my life, and have at times participated in neighbourhood rallies, forums, festivals and marches, I have seldom stopped and just sat here, on Hastings Street in the heart of the Downtown Eastside. It is not always a particularly comfortable spot for me to sit – everything from my MEC rain jacket to my designer glasses to the hue of my skin marks me as a likely "outsider" in this neighbourhood, even though this demarcation of "inside" and "outside" is shifting, fluid, more porous than usually represented. But on this day I sat for a while and contemplated Abotsway's absent presence from where she was disappeared. For me, what lives on from her death is the necessity of maintaining a continuous awareness that everything about who I believe myself to be and how I live my life is indelibly bound up in the myriad injustices that are everywhere evident in this neighbourhood. This does not mean that I can, or want to, collapse the vast differences between myself and Abotsway or myself and many of the people who today call this neighbourhood home, even though those differences, rather than reflecting some inherent or biological truth, are instead a complicated legacy of history. But to collapse them would be to erase the evidence of colonialism in the present, the evidence of the many ways that the past's presence in the present left Abotsway so much more vulnerable to

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the violence she experienced and found her living with so much more exposure to precarity in her daily life.[20] Unravelling the complicated binding of our existence is what I inherit from Abotsway and others from the Downtown Eastside whose untimely, unjust deaths continue to haunt our social world. An attention to the haunting presences of Abotsway and others like her provokes me to begin to imagine a present that might be otherwise – or, to return once again to this chapter's epigraph from Van Alphen, to stage "interventions" instead of "repetitions," in the interests of a present in which the presence of the past is a provocation for reckonings instead of disavowals.

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[20] I use "precarity" rather than "precariousness" intentionally here, for while Butler's work in <u>Precarious Life</u> draws our attention to the ways that precariousness is unevenly distributed and lived, her focus is primarily discursive, while precarity has been used in compelling ways recently to explore how vulnerabilities to poverty and suffering are made material through market-based economic systems and the specifically neoliberal polices and practices of the governments that uphold them (see, for example, Renzi and Turpin's "Nothing Fails Like Prayer," and the subsequent "Statements on Precarity" collected by Gita Hashemi for <u>Fuse</u> magazine). Any further uses of "precarity" instead of "precariousness" throughout this dissertation are intentional and are intended to signal this difference.

FOUR

Representation, Humanization, Recognition:
Frameworks for grievable lives

[G]iven how contested the visual representation of the 'human' is, it would appear that our capacity to respond to a face as a human face is conditioned and mediated by frames of reference that are variably humanizing and dehumanizing. (Butler <u>Giving an Account</u> 29)

A later version of the police poster mentioned in the previous chapter contains 69 women's photographs instead of the original 31. This 2004 version of the poster is headlined simply, "Missing Women Task Force." Organized into a nine-by-seven image grid with a remaining six images occupying the bottom row, the women's photographs are followed by a single statement: IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ON ANY OF THE ABOVE WOMEN AND HAVE NOT YET SPOKEN TO POLICE, PLEASE CALL: 1 877 687 3377.[1] As mentioned, the poster was first issued in 1999, and it has since been updated twice. Each photograph in the two later versions of the poster is accompanied by a name and a "last seen" date; some of the "last seen" dates are followed by dates that signal "charges laid," and in these images the text is covered over with blue highlighting. In the 2004 version there are photographs that *ought* to have this blue highlighting, but the highlighting and dates for "charges laid" are still conspicuously absent, a circumstance arising from the fact that the poster was released after the arrest of Robert Pickton in 2002 but before the Crown finished laying all the charges against him in 2005. In this version, 15 photographs are marked by the blue highlighting, while in the 2007 version that number rises to

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[1] This version of the poster can also be viewed online at
<http://www.missingpeople.net/missing_women_poster.htm> Accessed 26 Dec 2008.

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26.[2] The highlighting and text on these posters that merely reads "charges laid" communicates next to nothing about the fate of each individual woman in these photographs, suggesting that the charges are perhaps themselves of greater consequence than whatever might have happened to her.

The photographs that make up this poster have been replicated so exhaustively now, in media reportage connected to the transformation of the individual disappearances of women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside into the "case" of "Vancouver's Missing Women," that they have come to stand in for the entire series of events surrounding the women's disappearances and murders as well as for the lives of the women pictured. They have become all too familiar to readers of newspapers or viewers of television news; frequently, the photographs are even reproduced in these media in grid patterns similar to that found on the poster.[3] Seldom are they reprinted alone. More recently, these photographs have been re-imag(in)ed by a number of artists who have used them as models for collections of painted or sketched portraits. Projects such as these have further disseminated the images of the women framed as they are in the poster's photographs, albeit in somewhat different form. How are these images and re-imaginings of the women enmeshed with particular frameworks for viewing a face that are "variably humanizing and dehumanizing," to borrow from

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[2] As mentioned, Pickton was originally also charged with the murder of an unidentified woman known only as "Jane Doe," which at one time brought the total number of charges against him to 27. But Jane Doe (whose identity and therefore potential photograph are, of course, missing) is not pictured in the poster, explaining why only 26 photographs have this blue highlighting. By 2007, the charge for the murder of Jane Doe had also already been dismissed by the court.

[3] I am indebted to Anne Stone for first drawing my attention to the importance of contemplating the repetition of the poster's grid pattern during conversations we had while editing a special issue of West Coast Line 53 (41.1) on representations of murdered and missing women.

Butler's assertion in the epigraph to this chapter, and what does this suggest about the frames of reference that underpin how and why some lives are widely understood as more "grievable" than others? In this chapter, I explore what these images communicate, what frames of reference are available for viewing them, and how these frames might shape their various meanings and interpretations. I have selected the particular representations I examine (or, perhaps more accurately, they have selected me) because of the questions they provoke about the relations between self and other, and also because of the possibilities they raise for imagining otherwise.

The poster photographs

The newest version of the Missing Women Task Force poster was released in 2007, this time composed of 65 photographs arranged in a grid alphabetically (in contrast to their ordering by "last seen" date in the 2004 version).[4] The drop in the number of women pictured reflects the fact that four women came forward or were located by police between the release of the 2004 and 2007 versions. While in the 2004 version most of the images with the blue highlighting indicating "charges laid" are clustered around the bottom of the poster, in the newer version the blue highlighting is more evenly spread across the page due to the reorganization of the photographs by last name. This rearrangement makes it less obvious that many of the women now known to have been murdered were disappeared within the timeframe and scope of the Missing Women Task Force's

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[4] The 2007 version of the poster can also be viewed online at
<http://www.missingpeople.net/task_force_releases_updated_post.htm> Accessed 26 Dec 2008.

official investigation. The reorganization also diminishes the importance of the disappearances of women in favour of a new emphasis on the charges laid, since the alphabetical rearrangement draws our focus away from the chronology of the disappearances, making it much more difficult to recognize that women have been disappeared from this neighbourhood for decades.

The newest version of the poster also reaffirms the offer of a $100, 000 reward, first issued in 1999, for "information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for the unlawful confinement, kidnapping, or murder of any or all of the listed women, missing from the streets of Vancouver." The insertion of the phrase "the streets" (which is repeated from the 1999 poster) not-so-subtly evokes images of criminality, street-level sex work, and homelessness, conjuring quite a different understanding of who these women might be (or why they might be missing) than if the statement simply read "missing from Vancouver." I am interested in contemplating how this text and the poster photographs frame the women's lives and disappearances for viewers; how might this framing encourage us to make certain assumptions about the women's lives (and disappearances)? An analysis of the poster-as-text tells us much about how certain lives get cast as "ungrievable," and as such I want to consider how the poster's framing might influence "our capacity to respond to a face as a human face" by examining how this framing is "conditioned and mediated by frames of reference that are variably humanizing and dehumanizing," to return again to my epigraph from Butler (Giving an Account 29).

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The individual photographs used in the different versions of the poster have changed little over the years: only one or two women are represented by a different photograph in a later version. A handful of the women are photographed smiling in images that look like they were taken from conventional family snapshots or school portraits. Many of the photographs, though, resemble or are obvious reprints of police mug shots, marking the women pictured with criminality and deviance.[5] This functional use of mug shot photographs makes the poster seem more like one seeking "wanted" rather than missing persons, at least at a first glance. In fact, the inclusion of text that merely reads "Charges Laid" and a date could easily imply that some form of charge has been laid *against the woman pictured herself*, since nowhere on either the 2004 or 2007 versions of the poster is there any indication of *who* has been charged or *what* they have been charged with.

The most obvious of the mug shot photographs are those of Cindy Beck, Andrea Borhaven, and Inga Hall, in which the top portion of the board held up by suspects when being photographed by police is evident, but several others are similar enough to these to suggest that this board might be just below the frame. A mug shot, after all, "typically uses – to disclose an individual's unique and distinguishing features – even and consistent lighting, a neutral background, and a fixed distance between camera and sitter" (Duganne 71; see also Sekula 30).

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[5] I am certainly not the first person to advance this argument. Jennifer England makes a similar argument about the criminalizing effect of the poster photographs in her article, "Disciplining Subjectivity and Space," while Geraldine Pratt argues that the cropping of the photographs and their arrangement in a grid "report[s] on the state's administration of already deviant bodies, and not on individual lives lost" (1060). Several of the women's friends and family members have also publicly expressed concern over the use of photographs that are or appear to be mug shots in the police posters.

Given this description, it seems likely that about one third of the photographs in the poster are mug shots. The inclusion of these photographs risks constituting a hierarchy of grievability among the women as pictured in the poster, such that viewers are invited to imagine that some came from "good families" who were willing or able to supply recent and in many instances happy, smiling photographs of their missing loved ones, while others could be represented only through their prior contact with police (thus implying that they might be lacking, or cut-off from, these conventional family ties). This hint of a hierarchy is itself challenged, though, by how the arrangement of the photographs into a grid invites the mug shots to spill out of their frames to the other, more familial photographs, linking them with visible markers of poverty, of criminality, of addiction (already broadly associated in many imaginings with the neighborhood of the Downtown Eastside or with "the streets") – in essence, with the sorts of markings that contribute to rendering certain lives ungrievable to many, particularly to those whose only encounter with the women is through these photographs.

Using photography to document people presumed to be "deviant" is a practice that has a long history, almost as long as the history of photography itself. As Allan Sekula explains in his groundbreaking work on photography, "The Body and the Archive:"

> the potential for new juridical photographic realism was widely
> recognized in the 1840s, in the general context of … systematic efforts to
> regulate the growing urban presence of the 'dangerous classes,' of a
> chronically unemployed sub-proletariat." (5)

The practice of using photography to document prisoners was commonplace by the 1860s, and Sekula argues that, in part through the proliferation of this practice, "a new object is defined – the criminal body" (6), against which a new framework for what would qualify as a normative body was invoked and, over time, naturalized: "photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the *other*, to define both the *generalized look* – the typology – and the *contingent instance* of deviance and social pathology" (7). Interpretations of the police posters today are inseparable from this lengthy, entrenched pattern of using particular visual signifiers to identify a "criminal body" and thus cement its "otherness." Indeed, this is one of the common techniques, as Sekula argues, by which one might thus re-affirm that one's own body is normative, which may signal that the proliferation and widespread interest in viewing these particular images of the disappeared women involves a complex process of (dis)identification that is not fully explained by mere curiosity.

Sekula documents the development in the nineteenth century of the notion that there exists a "criminal type" whom the trained eye can identify strictly by his or her appearance. This notion was also applied in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to a number of other "social types" considered deviant, which, Sander Gilman suggests, included the "prostitute" (94-101). Both Sekula and Gilman reproduce selections of nineteenth century images that attempt to catalogue and thus "prove" the standard appearance of "the criminal" or "the prostitute" as social types. These images show photographs organized into grid patterns alarmingly similar to the one offered in the police "missing" posters

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being analyzed here.[6] Arranging the photographs into a grid, as is done in each version of the poster and in many media stories about the women, thus enhances the sense that one is looking at a list of wanted, rather than missing, women – at people who have been criminalized rather than subjected to violence, since this arrangement has long been used in efforts to catalogue "deviants." Although each woman is pictured alone, this arrangement groups the women such that they are barely separable: individual identities are wiped away as the images are swept up into a figuration of "Vancouver's Missing Women." Further, the similarity of many of the photographs lends credence to those historical assumptions, still very much present, that deviance has a particular "look." As such, it is easy to mistake the uniformity of style and arrangement as communicating a "truth" about the inherent criminality or deviance of the women *themselves*. By unpacking the framing of the images and the lengthy history of such framing in photographic documentation of presumed "deviance," it becomes clear that the images are indeed *framed* and, through that framing, communicate much more about the lives of the women represented than one might initially think.

As cultural theorist Shawna Ferris argues in her article, "'The Lone Streetwalker,'" the repeated grouping of the women into a grid also risks implying that "their disappearances only become remarkable when grouped together" (20). And yet, Ferris elaborates, because each woman is contained alone within the frame of her photograph, captured in a reductive headshot that allows

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[6] The juxtaposition of the police poster with a grid reproduced in Gilman's book that purports to document "the physiognomy of the Russian prostitute" (from <u>Archivio di psichiatria, scienze penali ed antropologia criminale</u> 14 [1893]) is particularly jarring. See Gilman 96-97.

no possibility of a backdrop or wider context for her life, the grid also has the effect of suggesting isolation and vulnerability, an effect that reinforces the trope of "the lone streetwalker" that Ferris is concerned with. In her article, Ferris suggests that this trope, common in mainstream media reportage on sex work, heightens the vulnerability of street-level sex workers by implying that they live and work in total isolation from each other, despite the fact that many women have reported that they seldom, if ever, work alone. Grouped together and yet entirely framed off from each other, the grid has the effect both of erasing the women as individuals through its grouping of their photographs, and at the same time of heightening a sense of each woman's isolation and vulnerability through its use of reductive, individually-framed headshots.

The poster's purported intent is to elicit information about the women's disappearances, which of course is much more likely to be forthcoming if viewers can visually recognize the women. Yet I suspect that a poster for missing persons has at least a double task: not only must it offer a venue for viewers to try to identify and recognize those whose disappearances it advertises, but it must also try to get viewers to care, to feel a sense of compassion about (or at least interest in) the victimization or disappearance of its subjects. Only by invoking the latter response (and thereby getting viewers to sustain an attention to the disappearances) is the former response likely to be forthcoming – in other words, I suspect that people need to care something about a missing person in order to keep an eye out for her or be motivated to come forward with information they might have about her disappearance. I would argue that these particularly

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reductive photographs are very unlikely to produce the latter response. For, as Roland Barthes insists in his seminal work on photography, "[a] photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see" (6). Instead, what we "see" is often what we imagine to be beyond the photograph's frame – the context or narrative that we imagine to have occasioned the photograph, which we in turn imagine tells us something about the life of the person in the image.

The individual photographs that make up these posters, whether mug shots or not, appear to have been chosen and arranged to imply very little variation: each one pictures a woman alone, without so much as a hint of someone else in the frame, someone (or even something) that would have been cropped to focus our attention on the missing woman but whose elusive presence might nonetheless have signaled a wider context for the individually-pictured woman. I wonder whether what has been cropped from some of the photographs, to allow this narrow focus on individual faces, might have functioned like one of Barthes' *punctums,* an "element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me" (26). Although, as Barthes insists, the perception of a *punctum* in any photograph is radically subjective, it seems likely to me that the photographs that make up the police poster lack a *punctum* for most viewers: they belong to the realm of the *studium,* composed of those photographs in which we might "take a kind of general interest," but for which anything we might feel arrives "almost from a certain training" (26).

The "training" Barthes writes of in his description of how the *studium* works relates to the "frames of reference" described by Butler in the epigraph to

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this chapter. Both are speaking to those ephemeral understandings with which we view an image and make meaning from it. Often we cannot pinpoint directly what form this training has taken or when it has occurred. I could not tell you with much specificity, for example, where I picked up my understanding of what it means to be from "the streets," or where I learned to identify a photograph as a mug shot. Nonetheless, we are imbued in frames of reference that produce such understandings and recognitions. For many people such frameworks tend to appear not as frames but as "realities" or taken-for-granted assumptions about the way things "are." It helps that such frameworks are frequently represented as such "realities" in many of the representations (visual and textual) one is likely to encounter in the course of a day, whether they be in the morning newspaper, prime-time television, billboard advertisements, or broadcast or internet news (and here I've only begun to touch on the many ways our sense of reality is mediated). We are "trained" to recognize chains of signification that, for the photographs in the missing poster, might for many viewers signify something like mug shot = criminal = inherently bad or deviant person = unworthy of concern (with those images that are not mug shots presumed "guilty by association"). Unless this prior "training" is disrupted, challenging us to consider other frameworks for interpreting the poster, then it seems likely that one's reading of the photographs will remain within the realm of what Barthes calls the *studium*.

Barthes argues that most photographs fall into the category of the *studium*, particularly news photographs: "In these images," he writes, "no *punctum*:"

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a certain shock – the literal can traumatize – but no disturbance; the

photograph can 'shout,' not wound. These journalistic photographs are

received (all at once), perceived. I glance through them, I don't recall

them; no detail (in some corner) ever interrupts my reading …. (41)

I am suggesting that the photographs reproduced on the poster (and then over and

over again in the news-media) function much as Barthes has described here: they

may shock, but are unlikely to "puncture" us; they may seem to "shout" the

suffering of some of the women pictured, but they fail to "wound" most viewers

in the way that Barthes describes, and are therefore unlikely to evoke a sense of

implication in the suffering or loss that they gesture towards. The "detail (in some

corner)" that might have shaken an onlooker's complacency by functioning as a

punctum has been cut from the frame, eliminated in the interests of the poster's

purported functional purpose of helping viewers to recognize and identify the

women pictured.

Let me make this argument more vivid through an examination of one

particular image. When Helen Hallmark's poster photograph is compared with a

handful of images of her easily located online, one can more easily see how the

use of mug shots and other reductive headshots ensures that any sort of *punctum*

that might have existed in the poster photographs has been cut from the frame.

Hallmark's poster photograph looks like a mug shot, and although I cannot say for

certain that it *is* a mug shot I think it is quite safe to say it could easily be read as

one; it fits the framework for a mug shot. The mug shot photographs, being

already reductive and taken before an empty, neutral background, are in fact

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designed in a way that makes observation of a *punctum* virtually impossible. The photograph of Hallmark is entirely composed of her face and a bit of her upper torso, while the backdrop is a whitish-grey, similar in many of the images that look like they could be mug shots, and in the photograph Hallmark faces the camera squarely. Her hair would be described by many as "unkempt" (although I am already in some trouble here, for such a description is itself reductive and thus establishes a particular framework for interpreting the image. But bear with me). She appears to me to be staring out with something of a smirk on her face, and her eyes are ringed with dark circles. Her clothes, from what we can see of them, do not appear to be particularly "stylish" or "feminine," although each of those terms carries the same problems of subjectiveness and (potentially reiterative) assumption. At the risk of perpetuating the troubling notion that there is one "stylish" way to dress, though, taking note of Hallmark's hair and clothes is important because they potentially point to the way that many viewers may categorize her as "of" a particular class (one that cannot afford to purchase clothes or have one's hair cut in the latest styles, and is subsequently judged by some to be of a "lower" class, possibly even of "the streets," as the police state in the poster's text). I'll return to this issue of markers of class before long, but first let me finish my reading of Hallmark's photographs.

So, in Hallmark's poster photograph I see no *punctum*; because it is so generic, it bears the characteristics of the *studium*. I want to consider this photograph now alongside one that accompanies another "missing" poster of

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Hallmark that I found online, this one quite likely created by Hallmark's family.[7]

In this photograph, Hallmark appears more conventionally "stylish" and she is smiling openly, directly facing the camera. For me, the *punctum* in the photograph is not Hallmark's face or appearance, though, but a can of Pepsi and two white china teacups and saucers visible in the background. The backdrop of this photograph is clearly some form of social gathering, possibly at a banquet hall (perhaps a wedding, or family reunion?), and the everydayness of the can of Pepsi in particular invites me to imagine how Hallmark, at times, lived a life that many of us might describe as "ordinary," one composed of the usual (often familial) relationships which find one at an event like the one pictured.

Another picture of Hallmark posing with her siblings at what appears to be a wedding, quite possibly Hallmark's own given the white dress that she wears, has a similar effect on me: the *punctum* is found in the ordinariness of the family snapshot, in which I can observe what might be a slight tension in the face and stance of her sister, inviting me to imagine that perhaps some everyday family disagreement has just taken place.[8] The presence of *punctums* in these photographs invites me to imagine Hallmark and the narrative of her life on remarkably different terms than the photograph from the police poster. In contrast to the one-dimensional representation in the mug-shot photograph, these images communicate a different aspect of Hallmark's life and a sense of her relationships to others. They also illustrate how much a *punctum* is both subjective and

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[7] This poster and the photograph I write about can be viewed online at
<http://www.missingpeople.net/helenh.htm> Accessed 26 Dec 2008.
[8] This photograph can also be viewed online at
<http://www.missingpeople.net/missing_lives_helen_hallmark.htm> Accessed 26 Dec 2008.

contextual: it is because I know of Hallmark from this other context, the one in which she is repeatedly framed very narrowly as a woman from "the streets," involved in sex work and addicted to drugs, that these signifiers of everyday ordinariness leap out from these other photographs as *punctums* and "wound" me. My ability to see *punctums* in these more conventional family photographs of Hallmark and not in the mug shot-like one says as much about me, the viewer, as it does about the photographs: it is because the family snapshots seem so *familiar* to me, so ordinary, that they speak to me in this way. It is thus important to ask: why do I need *these* images in order to feel the woundedness of the *punctum* that Barthes describes? Why does the mug shot-like image of Hallmark's face not evoke a similar reaction? And what might this signal about the frames of reference that are the backdrop for my ability to recognize a face as a human face, as Butler asks after in the epigraph to this chapter?

These other images of Hallmark both humanize and familiarize her, and it is necessary to reflect on why such images of the women seem desirable to many of us (an issue I will return to in the next section). But it is not the fact that Hallmark herself looks more conventionally "stylish" or less like what I imagine someone from "the streets" to look like in the online photographs that wounds me; it is instead what the background context of these photographs, what those seemingly inconsequential "detail[s] (in some corner)" (Barthes 41) are able to communicate about the broader *context* of Hallmark's life that matters, given how she has been framed in that other narrative of her life as someone whose life is primarily marked by addiction, sex work, violence, "the streets," isolation, and

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criminality. As a result, I find it compelling to imagine what the police poster might look like if it were not one poster at all but a book of posters, made from different photographs for each of the women; to think about how such photographs, ones that each captured a unique "detail (in some corner)" that communicates a broader context for the life of each woman pictured might get us thinking differently not only about the women's lives but also about how we imagine ourselves in relation to them.

Some time ago I attended a conference presentation during which the presenter projected the 2004 version of the poster onto the screen for us to examine as she spoke. After the presentation an audience member suggested that what she found most notable about the poster was the obvious signs of urban poverty and neglect made evident in so many of the women's faces. The presenter followed this comment by saying that as a result of these markings she believed the photographs made a claim upon viewers, one which would prevent us from turning away from the suffering (caused by poverty and addiction) that they represent. I disagreed (and still do) with this interpretation of the claiming power of the poster photographs – certainly the photographs may evoke a response of compassion, sympathy, or pity, but I remain doubtful about their ability to evoke "a sense of the precariousness of *life itself,*" as Butler insists they must (Precarious 134, emphasis added), because in their reductiveness they cannot communicate anything about the broader contexts of the women's lives beyond that narrow framework we have for imagining a life lived on "the streets." For some viewers this might lead to sustained attention or compassion of a charitable

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sort, but this reductiveness seems more likely to reaffirm those conventional frameworks that position the women's "poor choices" or "lifestyle" as the root of their precariousness, rather than the whole of how our sociality is organized and lived. What the photographs cannot communicate, then, is how the relative freedom from precarity of some viewers is in fact bound up in the increased vulnerability to suffering that the images document.

It is frequently assumed that to be lacking in or refused representation is dehumanizing, and that those who "gain representation … have a better chance of being humanized," as Butler reminds us (<u>Precarious</u> 141). We might therefore read the circulation of the poster photographs in the media as a positive, humanizing project, for certainly the refusal to represent the disappeared women in the media or official parlance early on effected a dehumanization that contributed greatly to an understanding of the women as "ungrievable" subjects. It may be true that some representation is always preferable to no representation at all, and certainly the publication of the poster drew an attention to the disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside that was sparse prior to its release. But it is also true that "personification does not *always* humanize," as Butler reminds us (<u>Precarious</u> 141, emphasis added); that it can repeat dehumanization just as a lack of representation does. When images such as the poster photographs are framed to imply criminality (that ultimate category of human deviance); are cast as belonging to "the streets" (but not to homes or communities); or are frequently surrounded in the media by headlines and text that label the women pictured as "hookers," "prostitutes," "sex workers," or "drug

addicts," as though these are categories of identity or essential conditions of being rather than the unsurprising results of a sociality organized on the basis of colonization, injustice and exploitation, then it is perhaps *not* surprising that this framing undoes the potentially humanizing effects arising from the fact of gaining representation where previously there had been little or none.

Haunting images

Although the poster photographs individually seem to lack the sort of *punctum* Barthes first articulated, that detail or "unexpected flash" (96) that has the potential to "wound" us, in the most recent versions of the poster the presence of the photographs with blue highlighting might have the potential to act as the second form of *punctum* that Barthes describes near the end of his investigation of photography. This second version of a *punctum,* "which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme ('that-has-been')*, its pure representation" (Barthes 96, emphasis in original). Looking at a photograph of a young man who is about to be hanged, Barthes tells us that "the *punctum* is: *he is going to die.* I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake" (96, emphasis in original). So when considered as a whole, as its own text, Barthes' insight offers us another possible reading of the later versions of the poster. Looking at the images of the 26 women pictured with blue highlighting over their names in the 2007 version, the highlighting indicating that they have been murdered and that charges have been laid in connection with these murders, one might get this

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sense of observing, in the same instance, something that *will be* and yet *has been.*

For at the moment the photographs were taken, the women were not yet

murdered; they may even have had no inkling that they would die violently in the

future, although some of them certainly did.[9] They were not yet linked with each

other, either – although they had some things in common, they were not, in life,

routinely produced as figures of "Vancouver's Missing Women."

When we look at these photographs now, most viewers (at least here in

Canada) are aware that these 26 women, at least, have been murdered. In the last

while, as a result of the massive media coverage of the trial of the man accused of

their murders, we have even come to know some of the terrible details of how

they were likely killed. Looking at the photographs, now, these deaths are in the

past; most likely at different points in the past for each individual woman

pictured. Yet in the moment of each photograph's taking, their deaths were still

ahead, an unknown future. This realization has the haunting potential to implicate

the viewer in these deaths in much the same way as my sighting of Sereena

Abotsway in a documentary prior to her death (discussed in the last chapter):

viewing the images of the women (taken when they were still alive) and knowing

of their (coming) deaths might just provoke a sense of urgency about the

injustices that heightened the women's vulnerability to disappearance. I offer this

insight hesitantly because I am far from certain that this sense of implication is

likely to be forthcoming in all viewers of the poster. Whether or not we feel this

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[9] In the journal writing and poetry of Sarah de Vries, for example, we get a clear sense that De Vries anticipated her own violent death and understood only too well how women doing street-level sex work in the Downtown Eastside are routinely cast as "ungrievable" subjects. I explore this interpretation of De Vries' writing further in my epilogue.

sense of implication might have much to do with our frames of reference for understanding and interpreting the images, and possibly even with how we conceive of ourselves in relation to the women pictured (a point to which I'll return in the next chapter when I talk more about relations of inheritance). Frames of reference, and in this instance frameworks for thinking and identifying "the human," have an enormous impact on how or whether we understand some lives as grievable and others as less so, such that if one is influenced by a frame of reference that suggests that the women pictured in the poster lived ungrievable lives, then one is perhaps less likely to feel the poster's haunting potential.

Still, the collapse of time invoked by the juxtaposition of the photographs (representing life) with the blue highlighting (representing death) does seem indicative of a haunting; the poster-as-text is haunted by what its frames cannot contain, or by its own implication in the disappearances and murders it advertises. For certainly one framework for interpreting the poster positions it as a straightforward law enforcement document, the purpose of which is solely to solicit information about the women's disappearances. In this framework the mug shot photographs, while perhaps out of place in a poster for "missing" persons, nonetheless serve a functional purpose. But there are other frameworks for interpreting the purpose of such photographs, and here I am particularly interested in a framework advanced by cultural critic Susan Sontag in her book On Photography, in which she describes photography as "an act of non-intervention" (11). Sontag argues that taking a photograph can be:

a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on

to keep on happening. To take a picture is to have an interest in things as

they are, in the status quo remaining unchanged (at least for as long as it

takes to get a "good" picture), to be in complicity with whatever makes a

subject interesting, worth photographing – including, when that is the

interest, another person's pain or misfortune. (12)

Although she is referring to the photographic practices of war journalists and not

to the specifically bureaucratic uses of photography like the collection of mug

shots, this still seems an apt description of the practice of photographing women

arrested for acts deemed criminal but often performed in the interests of survival,

such as street-level sex work or drug use. If we can see suffering or heightened

vulnerability in the faces of the women as captured in the poster photographs,

then it seems important to reflect on the fact that *someone took those photographs*

– and in the case of the mug shot photographs, they were taken by agents of the

state in the name and supposed best interests of those of us routinely categorized

as "ordinary citizens."

Such a re-framing of the function of photography, as an act of non-

intervention rather than as merely a method for classifying criminals (or

advertising awards for missing persons) is useful for how it encourages reflection

on how we are all implicated, albeit differently, in the disappearance of women

from the Downtown Eastside, because this particular act of "non-intervention" is

performed by state actors in each of our names. Re-framing the purpose of the

poster photographs in this way also helps to explain the haunting potential of the

poster-as-text, since it gets us thinking about the time and space in which the poster photographs were taken, the time and space in which intervention in the vulnerability that led to so many violent, untimely deaths was still possible.

The poster-as-text has further potential to haunt, I believe, when juxtaposed with other efforts to photograph or document women from the Downtown Eastside. These juxtapositions have the potential to haunt by provoking a recognition in viewers of our own implication in the practice of merely documenting vulnerability and suffering (rather than intervening in it). Such a recognition, however, offers only a very initial starting place for contemplating relations of responsibility and inheritance; it indicates an opening, or an opportunity to push us beyond sympathy or compassion as adequate responses to the suffering and loss that the poster documents. This is important because, as Susan Sontag offers in her more recent treatise on photography, Regarding the Pain of Others:

> [s]o far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence …. To set aside the sympathy we extend to others … for a reflection on how our privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may – in ways we might prefer not to imagine – be linked to their suffering, as the wealth of some may imply the destitution of others, is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark. (102-103)

Taking my cue from Sontag here, I want to try to map this relationship between privilege and suffering through a juxtaposition of the poster with two other efforts to document women from the Downtown Eastside.

The first of those efforts is the contemporary law enforcement practice of photographing and/or collecting DNA samples from women involved in street-level sex work in the interests of speeding up the process of identification after the bodies of murdered women (presumed to have been involved in sex work) are discovered. Police in Vancouver attempted such an initiative when they began seriously investigating the disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside, but because many women doing sex work and some of their advocates were concerned about the purposes their DNA would be used for, the project was largely unsuccessful. Other similar projects exist in Edmonton and Halifax, though, and have met with much more cooperation and support.[10] Such initiatives have been lauded by some sex worker support organizations, family members of murdered or missing women, and even some women doing sex work themselves, and as such I do not want to dismiss the practical purpose such initiatives might serve. Such a registry could reduce the amount of time loved ones of disappeared women have to spend in that agonizing state of not knowing what happened that I describe in my introduction, which could certainly reduce the anguish and suffering of those waiting for information about their loved one's whereabouts.

Still, it seems important to consider the symbolic dimensions and ramifications of such an initiative. The collection of such data and images is a

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[10] See Graeme Smith's article, "Prostitutes wary of police DNA database," published in <u>The Globe & Mail</u> on May 10, 2004.

practice that, with its symbolic abdication of even a hope of intervening in the vulnerability that perpetuates the disappearances and murders of women involved in sex work, further entrenches that vulnerability by naturalizing it. The practice suggests that the murder of women involved in sex work is inevitable, and in doing so it invokes Barthes' "anterior future" in which violent death becomes the apparently unavoidable outcome. It is a haunting practice because it collapses time – it invokes violence and suffering that are yet to be, and in doing so anticipates its outcome rather too well. Such practices contribute to entrenching a symbolic conflation between sex work and violent death, and haunt the present through their very inattention *to the present*, or to present possibilities for intervening in the deaths that they predict.

The other effort to document women in the Downtown Eastside that I want to examine briefly here is Lincoln Clarkes' Heroines photography project. Clarkes, a fashion and portraiture photographer, started to take pictures of women addicted to heroin in the Downtown Eastside in 1996, beginning with an acquaintance, Leah, whom he photographed injecting herself with heroin inside a bus shelter. His decision to create a series of such images, according to journalist John Glionna, "pulled Clarkes into a bewildering five year project …. In all, he produced more than 400 black and white portraits of women."[11] The photographs were first exhibited in Vancouver's Helen Pitt Gallery in 1998, and have since been displayed in numerous international galleries and appear frequently in the

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[11] See John M. Glionna's "Light and Darkness in Canada," published in The L.A. Times on June 1, 2003. Available online at <http://www.missingpeople.net/light_and_darkness_in_canada.htm> Accessed 9 Nov 2004.

press. They have also been published in book form (Clarkes). Clarkes' work has been broadly praised for "humanizing" the women of the Downtown Eastside and drawing attention to their plight.

Yet Clarkes' photographs, while they may humanize, do not automatically implicate their viewers in the suffering they at times document. In fact they have the potential to invoke quite the opposite response. Critic Melora Koepke, for example, argues that the gallery exhibit of Clarkes' photographs allowed viewers their "first opportunity to look at and imaginatively engage the women of the [Downtown Eastside] *without fear*" (n.page, emphasis added). By imagining that an encounter with a woman from the Downtown Eastside unmediated by photography creates a circumstance where *fear* is the expected emotional response, Koepke repeats the othering and distancing so common in representations of this neighbourhood and its residents. If she is correct in her assessment, then it seems likely that the Heroines photographs, at least in this context, offer little more than an opportunity for viewers to look, to feel some sadness or perhaps even compassion, to label the women and their circumstances a shame or a tragedy, and then to move on. This certainly seems one possible, perhaps even likely, outcome of looking at Clarkes' photographs.

Several critics have analyzed the Heroines project from a multitude of perspectives.[12] What I want to focus on here is what haunts me about Clarkes' project – namely, those photographs that I find have the potential, to echo Sontag,

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[12] See in particular Margot Leigh Butler's "Hero;" Dara Culhane's "Representing the Downtown Eastside;" Koepke's "Corpus Delicti;" Janet Smith's "Education or Exploitation;" and Paul Ugor's "Imaging the Invisible."

to put my privilege on the same map as the suffering that so many of Clarkes'

photographs capture. And I confess that several of Clarkes' photographs do

continue to haunt me. I have looked at the images for so long that I can conjure

them now in my mind, even when the photograph is not open on the page in front

of me. They haunt me in part because of something that Clarkes himself once said

about why so many women were willing to pose for his portraits: "If anything,

they want to be recorded for the record. Because they know they might not be

here tomorrow" (Koepke, n.page). Indeed, at least three of the women that

Clarkes photographed are on the police list of "missing" women, and two of his

photographs, of Sheila Egan and Patricia Johnson, are used to represent the

women on the poster. Seeing those images on the poster and hearing Clarkes'

words about why some of the women were so willing to pose for him pushes me

to consider the many ways in which my life is removed from such precarity, and

yet remains bound to it.

One of Clarkes' photographs that I find particularly haunting, number 81

in the book, is a headshot of a woman crying. She is crying, according to Clarkes,

because he has just shown her a photograph of Sheila Egan, who was her friend,

and explained to her that Egan has gone missing (see Butler, Margot Leigh

"Hero" 283).[13] Each of Clarkes' photographs is captioned not by a name but by a

date and location, and the photograph of the crying woman is dated August 30,

1998. Thus it is an image of a woman weeping for her disappeared friend, taken

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[13] This particular photograph can be viewed by visiting the website of "Portrait V2K: The City of Vancouver Millennium Project" and performing an advanced search for EntryID V2K05831. The portrait is titled "From the 'Heroines' Series." <http://vancouver.ca/portraitv2k_wa/portrait.htm> Accessed 26 Dec 2008.

not long after that friend was disappeared but a good seven months before the Vancouver police department released the first poster or first offered a reward for information about the disappearances. Egan, who was disappeared in July 1998, remains unaccounted for at the time of this writing. Thus her friend's tears haunt me largely because they remain as relevant today as they were at the time the photograph was taken – the image could have been taken yesterday, for so long as Egan remains unaccounted for it remains a *timeless* photograph.

It would be easy, I think, to argue that the photographers who captured all of these images should have done more to intervene in the suffering that so many of the photographs document – that the police should have *done something* instead of merely documenting the women for their bureaucratic purposes; that Clarkes could have done more than offer his subjects a few dollars and some cigarettes. Yet such admonishments, while at times important or necessary, are but another method for suturing over the haunting potential of these practices, by deflecting the necessity of considering how we are *all* implicated in the suffering the photographs document, albeit in differing ways. Barthes' second form of *punctum,* time, is enacted by each of these photographic or documentary projects through their *collapse* of time, through how each captures an "anterior future of which death is the stake" (96). Such a collapse has the potential to invoke a sense of implication in viewers by provoking a sense of urgency about how vulnerability and precariousness are so unevenly distributed and lived, although, as mentioned, such a response is certainly not the only one possible. Still, I suspect it may be at least in part through their enactment of this second form of

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punctum that the poster photographs have inspired several artists to use them as models for their own projects that respond to the disappearance of women from the Downtown Eastside.

Re-imag(in)ing the photographs

      At least five artistic projects thus far have been created in response to the repetitive publication of the poster photographs in the media, producing five different collections of individual sketches or portraits of some of the disappeared women that were for the most part modeled from those photographs. It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a thorough analysis of each of these projects individually, and my desire to do so has been limited by not having seen most of the projects installed or exhibited in galleries; mainly, what I am working with for my analysis is drawn from newspaper or online reportage, and it is entirely possible that any reading I might offer of them would differ were I able to experience them as installations or exhibits. While these projects vary in medium, size, scope, and arrangement, they hold at least one thing in common: each artist has either stated or implied a strong desire to individualize and thereby humanize the disappeared women through creating a portrait or sketch of her photograph.[14] In this section, I will focus my analysis on the work of a group of

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[14] While media coverage has "grouped the women together," artist Zoe Pawlak reports that she "set out to distinguish each victim and humanize her memory by painting individual portraits," according to an article by Globe & Mail reporter Alexandra Gill. Pawlak created oil portraits of the 26 women Pickton is accused of murdering and titled the collection The Profession of Hurt. Artist Betty Kovacic painted portraits of the 50 women listed as missing by police in 2002, titling her collection Roomful of Missing Women. "People tend to talk about [the missing women] as a collective," she told The Prince George Free Press for an article titled "Portraits Inspired by Pain," "I wanted people to see them as individuals." Painting the women's faces in portraits as large as

artists from Project EDAN (Everybody Deserves a Name), an organization of

forensic sketch artists whose usual work involves volunteering to sketch

unidentified murder victims for police forces that lack the budget to keep such

artists on staff. In 2005, artists from EDAN created individual portraits of the 26

women Pickton is accused of having murdered plus two others whose DNA was

found on his property (but apparently not in sufficient quantities to warrant

additional charges). I will focus on the Project EDAN collection because it is here

that I find the goal of humanization to be most explicitly rendered, and most

troubling. What do EDAN's reimag(in)ings of the women's photographs

communicate, and what might they signal about the relationship between

aestheticization and humanization?

The portraits of the women created by the EDAN team were first

published in the Vancouver Sun under the headline: "Sketches express softer side

of missing women."[15] Todd Matthews, founder of EDAN and initiator of the

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eight feet by ten feet, Pamela Masik's The Forgotten project aims, according to Mia Johnson, to "make us see [the women's] faces and hear their voices," to "illustrate something personal about each woman." And an artist known simply as Dorette was drawn to create portraits in oil and pencil of 64 of the women after being "struck by the graceful long neck of Mona Wilson" in national media reports. Her paintings, she tells us, aim to "capture the essence of each woman." In this section, I go on to discuss in more detail the fifth portrait project, created by artists belonging to Project EDAN, but I hope at a later date to be able to offer a more in-depth analysis of some of these other portrait projects. See Alexandra Gill's "'What would it feel like if 50 people in a room just suddenly disappeared?'" in The Globe & Mail, published January 11, 2007, and "Portraits Inspired by Pain" in The Prince George Free Press, published October 27, 2006. For the quotation about Pamela Masik's work, see "About the Exhibition" by Mia Johnson, available on Masik's website at <http://www.masik.ca/features/theforgotten/about_exhibition.html> Accessed 10 Apr 2007. The quotation about Dorette's work can be found on her website: <http://www.dorette.ca/galleries/html_pages/dorett_missing_oil.html> Accessed 10 Apr 2007.
[15] See Lori Culbert's "Sketches Express Softer Side of Missing Women," published in The Vancouver Sun on December 17, 2005. The Sun published all of the sketches, coupled with the photographs from the police poster, over a four-page spread in the "Observer" section on this date (with the exception of the portrait of Angela Jardine, whose mother reportedly objected to its inclusion). All quotations in my discussion of the Project EDAN portraits are from Culbert's article unless otherwise indicated.

portrait project, claimed that it was the mug shot-like photographs of the women in the media which compelled him to gather together a group of artists to create the individual portraits: "'I think people were seeing a criminal rather than a victim,'" Matthews told Vancouver Sun reporter Lori Culbert. To counter this negative image and allow the women to "be viewed in a more positive light," Culbert reports, Matthews "wanted [the women's] hair styled nicely and a 'Mona Lisa' smile on their lips -- to reflect a happier time." Another artist who worked on the project, Wesley Neville, reported to Culbert that his technique involved "imagin[ing] how the women would have looked when they were happy, healthy and safe." As Neville elaborates:

> I saw through the damage that had been done physically to them. It's obvious their diets were bad, and drugs had taken their toll on some of them. I pretty much take that out – it's like an age-regression … I wanted to try to make them look as lifelike as possible, in a more innocent time.

EDAN artist Charlaine Michaelis reported a similar approach: she tried to imagine how Georgina Papin's photograph would be different if she were smiling, then sketched Papin according to that imagining. Michaelis told Culbert she hoped Papin's family would see the sketch and "think, 'Yeah that's the girl we remember before she got into her situation.'" The efforts of the EDAN team resulted in a series of sketched portraits which do indeed represent the women very differently than the police photographs.

It is revealing that artist Wesley Neville compares his work creating these portraits to the creation of age-enhancement sketches. In a detailed reading of an

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age-progression, one created from an image of a missing girl "from Point St-Charles, a working class neighbourhood in Montreal," Anne Stone argues in her essay "Objective Hazard" that the changes evident in the age progression are "telling of what qualities define the ideal child victim and what class markers need correction in order for this ideal to be met" (81). Stone notes that in this girl's age-progressed photograph her head is angled slightly away from the camera rather than gazing at it directly as it is in the original picture, and her clothes and hairstyle are more typical of a "middle-class suburb" than of her urban, working-class neighbourhood (80). The age-progression is edited, Stone writes, "with an eye to satisfying ideals of the feminine, of the ideal victim" (81). We can certainly hear echoes of such an approach to "editing" in the language that the Project EDAN team uses to describe their work, as discussed above. And similar kinds of changes, changes that are very much about what markers "need correction" in order for the disappeared women to be more readily identifiable to a broader audience as victims who lived "grievable" lives, are abundantly evident in the EDAN portraits.

I will again enhance this argument through a close reading of just one of the portraits sketched by the EDAN team. The portrait of Mona Wilson is particularly instructive, I find, and, as the first and one of the largest sketches published in the Vancouver Sun article, it is also made to stand in as representative of the EDAN project. In Wilson's poster photograph, I see an Indigenous woman (Wilson was from the O'Chiese First Nation in Alberta) who faces the camera squarely, maybe somewhat defiantly I think, chin raised and

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head cocked just slightly to the right.[16] Wilson's mouth is slightly downturned and seems to me to be rather determinedly set or locked in place, enhancing the effect of defiance. She has what appears to be an amblyopia (more conventionally known as a "lazy eye"), and her eyes appear shadowed by what is likely dark make-up. Her hair is shorn roughly around the bangs and a few strands stand up from her head. She wears a red knit sweater that could have been designed for men, although it is impossible to say for sure, but it certainly does not resemble clothing that is conventionally rendered as "feminine." Although the backdrop of the photograph is a different colour than many of the photographs that appear to be mug shots (it is blue, while many of the others have a grayish-white background), the emptiness of the background, focus on Wilson's face and torso, and similar distance between herself and the camera are at minimum evocative of the mug shot photographs, even if hers may not be one of them.

At a first glance, the EDAN sketch of Wilson seems quite similar to her poster photograph. Wilson's head faces the same way, and it is still tipped slightly to the right. It is no longer what I would call "cocked" to the right though, and her chin is decidedly lower in the portrait; her mouth is also slightly upturned, erasing the hint of defiance I saw in the poster photograph with the hint of a smile. The effect of these changes does indeed present what might conventionally be called a "softer" version of Wilson. The amblyopia is corrected and Wilson's gaze points downward, no longer squared directly at the viewer as it is in the photograph. Her

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[16] I note that the photograph published alongside Wilson's portrait in the <u>Sun</u> article on the EDAN sketches is actually not her poster photograph but another that nevertheless looks quite similar. I am opting to describe her poster photograph here, though, because it seems likely to me, given the similarities between the two, that the EDAN portrait was in fact modeled primarily on the poster photograph, rather than on the one published in the <u>Sun</u>.

hair has been smoothed and she now has neatly-cut bangs; there are no disorderly wisps here. The collar-line of her sweater also seems to me to have been softened by enlarging the ridges around the neck and erasing the texture of the sweater, such that the appearance seems much more conventionally "feminine." A lone earring in her left ear in the photograph, which could signal a rebelliousness or perhaps just an inattentiveness to achieving a "polished" look, has disappeared from the portrait. When I look at the EDAN portrait of Wilson, I also no longer necessarily see an Indigenous woman. I hesitate to make this point because I do not want to seem to be suggesting that there is one essentialized way to appear Indigenous, one way that an Indigenous woman *looks*. Certainly that is not the case. Yet it does seem important that Wilson's racialization appears much more ambiguous in the portrait, as this may imply the existence of a framework through which it would be considered advantageous (or necessary) for those racial markers frequently associated with Indigeneity to be downplayed in order for some viewers to recognize a "victim" instead of a "criminal."

Wilson's image is therefore edited, I believe, in the interests of making her appear more normatively human, more consistent with what many people assume a person who lives a "grievable" life should look like. With a few subtle changes her image has been transformed to fit a conventional framework for an idealized, innocent victim (and I note the similarity that exists between a framework for the idealized victim and for the idealized feminine subject). Several of the other portraits offer very similar transformations. One could certainly read the EDAN portraits as succeeding at their goal of humanizing the women, then, since the re-

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imagining of the women enacted by the portraits presents versions (or visions) of them that are indeed much more likely to be read as "grievable" by a wider audience, particularly an audience influenced by predominant frameworks for what it means to be normatively human. The "softer" versions of the women represented in the EDAN sketches much more closely resemble the "20-something soccer moms" (presumed white, middle-class, and conventionally feminine, although these markers are usually not explicitly mentioned) whose disappearances Matthews, among others, insists would have elicited a much stronger and swifter public response.

Through such a reading, one could certainly also argue that the EDAN sketches perform a valuable and important public service, one that might even be necessary for swelling the ranks of people who understand the women as having lived "grievable" lives. The EDAN sketches also offer a remembrance of the disappeared women in the sense that novelist Toni Morrison makes of re-membrance, which is literally an act of re-membering something that has been torn apart (8). Re-membrance here can be read in stark contrast to dismemberment, as an attempt to strategically, visually re-member women who have been both literally and symbolically dismembered. Against graphic descriptions of what really happened to the women, the EDAN sketches (and other portrait projects, or even the photographs themselves) invite us to imagine the women as re-membered in the present. Such a re-membering can only ever be

achieved through representation, but it invites a very different sort of

remembrance practice than the widespread reportage of dismemberment.[17]

All of these readings are certainly possible, and yet there is something

very troubling about the EDAN sketches. Through their efforts to "humanize" the

women through aesthetic changes to their appearances, they seem to risk further

entrenching a *de*humanization of the women as represented in the photographs

(and, by extension, of women who continue to live under similar social

conditions, women similarly physically marked as living outside of a

conventional framework for thinking the normatively human or "grievable" life).

The drive to aestheticize the women's appearances in the interests of making them

appear more conventionally "grievable" for a wider audience risks reinforcing the

notion that there *is* indeed a universal framework for what makes a life

"grievable," after all, and that the women as pictured in the photographs simply

do not fall within that framework. Aestheticization in this instance implies that

there is something wrong with the women *themselves* which must be altered in

order to justify grief in response to their loss – in order to *make them fit the frame*

for a "grievable" life. This notion that the problem lies with the women

themselves is reinforced by the accompanying text of the Vancouver Sun article:

for example, by artist Michaelis' hope that her sketch would remind Georgina

Papin's family of what she looked like "before she got into her situation." The

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[17] In her endorsement of Betty Kovacic's Roomful of Missing Women portrait project, for
example, Maggie de Vries, sister to Sarah de Vries, writes that she hopes Kovacic's project will be
supported "so that these missing women can be celebrated and remembered in art at the same time
that a lengthy trial will be dismembering them." See "Portraits Inspired by Pain," published in The
Prince George Free Press on October 27, 2006.

women are thus imagined as the agents of their own suffering, the sole authors of a situation that is "theirs," not ours, collectively.

The transformation of the individual women's faces in the EDAN sketches thus works to downplay any consideration of whether there is instead something the matter with a social order that prioritizes such a narrow frame of reference for a "grievable" life, such that hundreds of women could disappear without much widespread public outcry. The sketches not only rely on but vehemently reiterate the assumption that normative humanness maps on to markers that signal middle-class, conventional (and quite possibly white) femininity (through the focus on creating "stylish," well-kept hair, "Mona Lisa" smiles, and "innocent," "softer" appearances), and that one must conform to these norms in order to matter, in order to fit inside the frame through which someone's life is intelligible as "grievable." Thus even though the artists were inspired to create the sketches because they object to a social prioritizing of "20-something soccer moms" over their chosen subjects, their recuperative renderings of the women's faces nonetheless both rely on and reiterate a belief that those who *look like* what many people think a "20-something soccer mom" *should* look like are more worthy of our care and concern than those who might be physically marked as having lived what, through this framework anyway, might be understood as a less "grievable" life, a life marked by poverty, sex work, criminalization, addiction and in many instances, extraordinary violence.

I recognize that my argument might seem somewhat contradictory, since earlier in this chapter I myself advocated for the replacement of the poster

photographs with different, more humanizing images of the women. Yet I would argue that to simply replace the mug shot-like images with more conventionally flattering images *still narrowly focused on the individual women themselves* repeats the mistake: such images in their reductiveness still fail to either signal a wider context for the lives of the women pictured or redirect our attention to the social conditions and normative frames of reference that facilitated their disappearances and greatly delayed an official response. Particularly when they are organized into a grid similar to the one deployed in the poster (as the EDAN sketches are in their online incarnation), the reductive effect of these "softer" images remains much the same.[18] And it is only that wider context for the women's lives, I believe, that might have the potential to invoke some sense of implication in viewers about the precariousness not just of an individual's life, but of life itself, and of how that precariousness is so unevenly distributed and lived.

It is important to keep in mind that the EDAN artists are ultimately well-intentioned and are working within a framework for the normatively human that is certainly not of their making. But by attempting to make the women's images conform to this framework rather than unsettling it, their portraits keep us focused on the individual women themselves rather than on the broader contexts of their lives and the social conditions and arrangements which supported, even facilitated, their disappearances and deaths. Further, these portraits imply that humanization is only possible by re-imagining the women as compliant with a

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[18] The portraits are available for viewing online at <http://www.missingpeople.net/sketches_express_softer_side.htm> Accessed 11 Aug 2008. The artists may well not have been involved in the decision to arrange them in a grid-like pattern.

number of gendered, racialized, and class-based norms – with a series of *normalized* ways of being human. Yet, as Judith Butler explains in her text Precarious Life: "It is not a matter of a simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology, but an insurrection at the level of ontology" that is necessary (33). Those of us compelled to incite such an insurrection may well need to be critical of the drive to humanize via aestheticization, then, even as we recognize the laudable intentions behind it.

The limits of recognition

I suspect that the compulsion among these artists to confront viewers with such re-imagined faces of the individual women relies on an assumption that if we could only *recognize* the women as "like us" then we might feel badly about, or at least pay more attention to, their deaths or disappearances. Here the deployment of the pronouns "us" and "we" starts to reveal some of its most troubling aspects, for their use in this instance signals much about the insidiousness of those assumptions that underpin a framework for understanding *who* it is that presumably needs to recognize the women as "like us" in order to generate broader public concern about their disappearances. Those who knew the women in life, for example, do not tend to require "softer," "nicer" versions of the women in order to care about or take note of the violence they experienced. Nor do many of the residents who share their former neighbourhood, who were already advocating for changes that would reduce the women's vulnerability to disappearance and violence long before a broader public was paying any attention

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to these circumstances. The recognition sought by the EDAN portraits is from

individuals assumed to be members of that broader public who live lives that are

frequently categorized as "normal" or "ordinary:" that group of persons for whom

frames of reference for the normatively human are frequently taken to be "just the

way things are."

If the EDAN portraits aim to have an "us" recognize the women, then they

must work by producing an identification that gets (some) viewers to see

something of ourselves or our loved ones in the women's faces. In her book

Witnessing: Beyond Recognition, social theorist Kelly Oliver insists that this is an

inherent problem with recognition itself: "Recognition seeks only itself and not

the other. Recognition is not open to otherness, but only to confirmations of

itself" (206). And in this instance, there is a presumption that the people for whom

it would be most beneficial to evoke such a sense of recognition are those whose

lives already fit more-or-less comfortably within conventional frameworks for the

normatively human.

If one must recognize something of him or herself in another in order to

care something about her or feel a sense of responsibility towards her, then it

makes sense to try to produce such a recognition in members of a broader public.

But several scholars have questioned the value of recognition as a tool for

provoking relations of responsibility, or social justice (see, for example, the

essays in the collection Recognition and Difference, edited by Lash and

Featherstone, as well as Oliver's work). Oliver writes that trying to reverse

dehumanization through securing recognition "reinforces the dominance of the

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oppressor and the subordination of the oppressed. For it is the dominant culture

and its representatives who have the power to confer or withhold recognition"

(26). So, although it is "[d]ehumanization [which] creates the desire and need for

recognition from the dominant culture" (26), the act of recognition necessarily

reiterates relations of dominance and subordination. While I disagree with

Oliver's description of power as a possession that it is wielded only by a single,

unitary "dominant culture," I think she is nevertheless onto something important

here. Reacting against the dehumanization they observe in the poster photographs

(and in that initial lack of attention to the women's disappearances among a

broader public), the EDAN portraits, for example, attempt to provoke in viewers a

recognition of a shared humanness that the women, now murdered, are unable to

do themselves. But in the act of doing so, the portraits reconfirm the validity of a

framework through which there *is* a dominant (i.e. normative) culture that

maintains its power very much through its willingness to "confer" recognition on

the women as imagined in the portraits and, by extension, to continue to withhold

a similar recognition of a shared humanity from the women as imaged in the

poster photographs, or from women who continue to be visually marked by the

precarity with which they routinely contend.

Recognition demands identification with another: I see another as on some

level "like me" and therefore as worthy of my care, attention, or concern – as

someone human to whom I feel a sense of responsibility. But why should

identification be the grounds for compassion or a sense of responsibility for

another's wellbeing? In contemplating why she is moved by the murder of

journalist Daniel Pearl, for example, Butler notes his familiarity: "he could be my brother or my cousin; he is so easily humanized; he fits the frame, his name has my father's name in it" (Precarious Life 37). She continues:

> In relation to him, I am not disturbed by the proximity of the unfamiliar, the proximity of difference that makes me work to forge new ties of identification and to reimagine what it is to belong to a human community in which common epistemological and cultural grounds cannot always be assumed. His story takes me home and tempts me to stay there. But at what cost do I establish the familiar as the criterion by which a human life is grievable? (38)

It may well be that moments of *dis*identification thereby offer a more provocative ground from which to contemplate my responsibility for another; that it is another's difference from myself, rather than her familiarity, which places me in a relation of responsibility – not because that difference is an inherent, stable, unchangeable fact, but because in its social embeddedness it constitutes the ground on which vulnerability and precariousness get so unevenly distributed. Perhaps it is at the limits of recognition, then, that relations based on responsibility and (in examples of others who have been killed) inheritance can begin to be developed.

The repetitive re-presentation and re-imagining of images of the disappeared women might signal, as noted earlier, that there exists a desire to re-member the women, whose absences we are not (yet) able to face or fully grapple with. If this is so, then quite possibly what is needed is widespread public

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mourning. But this mourning cannot be performed in the interests of setting aside

loss, or putting it securely behind us, as is so often mourning's intent. Instead,

such mourning must be designed and performed along the lines that Judith Butler

imagines when she writes:

> [O]ne mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be
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> changed, possibly for ever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to
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> undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a
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> transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance.
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> (Precarious 21, emphasis in original)

Such a radical transformation, at the level of the individual and the social, seems

imperative not only to mourn the losses of the women who have been

disappeared, thus challenging those frameworks which posit their loss as

"ungrievable," but also to work towards ensuring that such losses will not take

place again. But how might such mourning be initiated, enacted, and supported?

To address this question, I turn in the next chapter to a consideration of various

efforts to publicly memorialize Vancouver's disappeared women, and to questions

about what it means to inherit what lives on from the dead as a relation of

responsibility.

Grief, Mourning, Memorialization:
Inheriting what lives on

As a difficult return, remembrance attempts to meet the challenge of what it might mean to live, not in *the past but* in relation with *the past, acknowledging the claim the past has on the present. (Simon, Rosenberg and Eppert 4, emphasis in original)*

As argued in the previous two chapters, Vancouver's disappeared women

have been cast as "losses [that are] unthinkable and ungrievable" (Butler

Precarious xiv) in numerous ways, including by how they are bounded to the

space of the Downtown Eastside; by how they are fixed as figures of

"Vancouver's missing women" in police documents and media representations;

and by an initial hesitance to act on, or perhaps in some cases a disinterest

concerning, their disappearances or deaths among members of the police,

government, and a wider public. In this chapter I focus primarily on memorials

that have been created for the disappeared women. These memorials challenge

those frameworks that facilitate representation of the women's lives as un- or less

grievable, as their very existence attests to the necessity and importance of

remembering the women and mourning their loss. Yet the process by which losses

that have been widely cast as ungrievable are reframed *as* grievable through

memorials, while an important undertaking, also requires careful reflection, I will

argue, due to the inherent risks of reconstituting a binary of grievable/ungrievable

lives through such memorializing. How might the memorialization of losses

widely framed as ungrievable avoid inadvertently re-invoking those frameworks

that position certain lives as more grievable, when lost, than others? I will argue

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that the kind of memorial that contributes most powerfully to the project of imagining otherwise is one that is capable of enacting memory as a "difficult return" (Simon, Rosenberg and Eppert 4-5).

In the final section of this chapter I will also consider in more detail what it might mean to inherit "what lives on" from the disappeared women, to return again to that passage from Wendy Brown (Politics 150) cited as this dissertation's epigraph. While in the first part of the chapter I analyze a handful of examples of memorials to the disappeared women, in the final section I turn to an example drawn from other materials that testify about their loss to consider how this example might also call us into relation with the women who have been disappeared, a relation that involves the inheritance of what social theorist Roger Simon describes as "a terrible gift" ("The Terrible Gift" 187). Such a gift is "terrible" because it is difficult. It makes claims on us that are frequently "onerous," that may "initiat[e] a psychic wound with no obvious resolution" (197). If one is open to such a gift, one may "begin to define oneself within and through the very experience of loss" (197), thus opening oneself to an everyday awareness of the precariousness of *life itself*, as Butler repeatedly insists we must. It is my argument that there are forms of memorials and testament that are more likely to invoke such relations of inheritance than others, an argument I will develop through my analysis of several examples of such forms throughout this chapter. Before I get there, I will also discuss the similarities and differences between concepts of grief and mourning, to further clarify my use of these terms in this chapter (and throughout the dissertation). But as discussed in chapter two,

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the practice of critiquing memorials has a way of seeming particularly fraught, given that they are so often created by those in close proximity to the losses they mark. Thus before I move on to an analysis of the memorials themselves I will wade into a debate circulating in the feminist academic community at present about the ethics of critiquing such markers of loss and mourning.

Memorials and the ethics of critique

In their text Remembering Women Murdered by Men: Memorials Across Canada, the members of the Cultural Memory Group make a number of provocative claims about the ethics of critiquing memorials or submitting them to academic analysis.[1] In the introduction to their book, the authors outline the importance they have come to stake on a practice of "remembering responsibly" as academics (23). Initially, this sounds like a concept with great potential for eking out an ethical approach to scholarship on this topic and for exploring this idea in all of its complexity. But for the Cultural Memory Group, remembering responsibly primarily means remaining "true to those who have given us access to [their memorial] processes, not betraying their trust by an unrealistically purist, overly critical or unrelentingly interrogative analysis" (23). While they are certainly not suggesting that all forms of critique or analysis automatically equate to betrayal, this assertion invites what I would argue is a too-easy slippage

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[1] The Cultural Memory Group is a research collaborative that includes Christine Bold, Professor of English at the University of Guelph; Sly Castaldi, Executive Director of Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis; Ric Knowles, Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph; Jodie McConnell, Human Rights and Equality Advisor; and Lisa Schincariol, PhD candidate in Communications and Culture at York University.

between critique and betrayal, one intended to advance the political aims the Group desires to support, but which nonetheless requires further scrutiny.

"Remembering responsibly" seems, in the pages of the Cultural Memory Group's text, to apply primarily to those memorials created by family members of the murdered women or by grassroots collaborations among feminists, for the Group does succinctly critique how some institutionalized memorials (such as those found at universities across the country to commemorate the women killed at L'Ecole Polytechnique in Montréal in 1989) serve as a "palliative instead of a provocation" (see page 64 and especially pages 111-13). This willingness to critique certain memorials but not others posits what for me seems like a false (and overly simplified) dichotomy between institutionalized versus grassroots (family or feminist) memorializing. Hence several of the institutionalized memorials are treated with a thoughtful, critical analysis that is not in turn applied to the other memorials, which are more likely to be carefully described and celebrated even when they seem to cry out for more critical reflection. Several of the memorials that the Group writes about, for example, collapse many of the vast differences (of racialization, of class) between women who die violently, differences that are important markers of the many ways that precariousness and vulnerability to violence are, as Butler insists, so unevenly distributed and lived (Precarious xiv). Yet this text seems to frequently gloss over the problematic ways that many of these memorials eclipse or diminish these markers of difference.

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Perhaps in anticipation of this line of criticism, the authors acknowledge in their introduction that the "bottom line" of their analysis "is support for feminist memorial-makers" (18). This is an important political stance, one that I take seriously, and one that is on many levels highly commendable given the lack of support generally proffered to such groups. It might in fact be read as a strategic deployment of certainty in the face of widespread opposition to the work of feminist memorial-makers.[2] Hence it is not so much the fact that the Cultural Memory Group has set this particular "bottom line" that concerns me; it is more the conflation between critique and betrayal that they repeatedly invoke. As I argued in chapter one, support and critique need not be positioned as antithetical, and thus critique can be offered in the interests of enhancing and inviting further reflection on memorial practices. Again, I suspect the *form* critique takes has much more to do with whether or not it is ethical than its capacity to be critical.

I empathize with the Cultural Memory Group's concerns about critiquing memorials, particularly those memorials commissioned or created by individuals with whom we may want to show political allegiance. And yet, I cannot help but wonder whether a refusal to critically interrogate the possible meanings or effects of a memorial might not also risk a form of silencing, because such a refusal makes it impossible for the Group (or presumably others equally persuaded that critique is a form of betrayal) to consider or attempt to account for the *many* possible effects of memorials, including the potentially counter-productive ones.

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[2] Consider for example the national furor over the creation of "Marker of Change," a monument to the women murdered at L'Ecole Polytechnique on December 6, 1989, documented both in the Cultural Memory Group's book and in Moira Simpson's documentary, Marker of Change.

The Group expresses concern that they "might feel the need to critique practices which were genuinely well intentioned and that perhaps represented the best possible outcome within the local circumstances," and one member writes that she "'was always conscious of the fact that we were going to be critiquing this memorial, and there was a possibility that we would betray their memory'" (27). The connection between critique and betrayal is made explicit here, but instead of examining or interrogating this assumption it is taken for granted as foundational, as a truth.

My concern is that such an equation of critique with betrayal and such a prioritizing of support for memorial-makers, while politically laudable, might risk unwittingly keeping the claims of the dead at bay by staking political allegiance on a resistance to thinking deeply and critically about how we might best remember disappeared or murdered women in ways that invite us to consider how their unjust pasts, pasts which remain unsettled, continue to operate in the arrangements and conditions of the present. In other words, I contend that the decision *not* to pose difficult or challenging questions about a memorial's form or effects might limit our ability to develop a deeper understanding about what exactly it *is* about certain memorials that makes them more effective at evoking a sense of implication in a broader public, or holds greater potential for calling us into relations of responsibility and inheritance with the women whose losses they mark.

By tying their bottom line to the political claims of the feminist memorial makers whose work they document, the Cultural Memory Group misses an

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opportunity to enrich this work through an intellectual inquiry which would interrogate the broad range of potential effects and readings of the memorials they take up. Instead, as a result of the necessity of closing down meaning in the interests of maintaining and supporting political entailments, this text seems hardly able to imagine a future different from the present in which women are regularly murdered by men. As such, the "war on women" is evoked throughout as though it were a naturalized inevitability, perhaps troublingly re-inscribing this circumstance *as* reality even as there is a desire to counter it. Too much certainty about the necessary good of feminist memorializing leads the Cultural Memory Group away from a practice of criticality built on uncertainty (Rogoff), while their fears about 'betrayal by analysis' risk silencing opportunities for critique. Although I admire their political stance, it seems to me that an ethical critical practice requires more from us. In the remainder of this chapter I work to develop a practice of criticality that offers one approach to blending critique and analysis with a willingness, to recall Rogoff again, to "operat[e] from an uncertain ground" ("Looking Away" 119) when writing about the possible effects or meanings of particular memorial practices. Through this approach I aim to take seriously the Cultural Memory Group's assertion that critique can be experienced as a kind of betrayal, but also to address the limitations of what I have argued (building on the epigraph from Brown in chapter one) is a too-easy equation of betrayal with critical thought.

<u>Grief, mourning, and the relation between them</u>

I have thus far used grief and mourning as though they are basically interchangeable terms, although I have more often borrowed Butler's language of "grievability" than I have the language of mourning (which she also deploys in places; see, for example, <u>Precarious</u> 21). It is not clear to me why Butler settled on the language of "grievability" as opposed to what seems, at least initially, to be an equally plausible "mournability." But it seems important here to tease out some of the differences between these terms to advance a clearer sense of how I am using them, in this chapter and elsewhere.

For assistance in determining some of the similarities and differences between these two terms, I turn to the <u>Oxford English Dictionary</u> (<u>OED</u>) and am surprised to find that while the word "grief" figures repeatedly in the definitions and etymology of "mourn" and "mourning," the words mourn and mourning do not figure at all in how grief is defined. Grief, according to the <u>OED</u>, is "a kind, or cause, of hardship or suffering;" it conveys "hurt, harm, mischief or injury done or caused by another." It can refer to "[d]eep or violent sorrow, caused by loss or trouble; a keen or bitter feeling of regret for something lost, remorse for something done, or sorrow for mishap to oneself or others." As an adjective, it takes on the meanings "troublesome, oppressive." When something is grievable, according to the <u>OED</u>, it is "causing grief or pain; distressing, hurtful, injurious."

It seems likely that this discrepancy signals something of the differences between grief and mourning. For example, many (perhaps most) people would assume that the individual losses of the women who were disappeared from the

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Downtown Eastside can and should be mourned by those who knew and loved them (particularly once alerted to the existence of the women's friends and families). Mourning, after all, is conventionally thought of as something one undertakes for a loss that is personal, that is felt as a loss because of the prior presence of the lost person (or object, or ideal) in one's own life. We may be less likely to recognize the women's deaths or disappearances as grievable, however, as Butler has rightly and repeatedly insisted, because many of us who did not know them in life may not recognize their losses as "distressing, hurtful, [or] injurious" to *us.* Their losses may not initially appear "troublesome" to us either, may not seem to be "a kind, or cause, of hardship or suffering." In other words, their losses may not appear to be our burden to bear, for at least two reasons: because we did not know them in life, and thus fail to see their losses as requiring anything from us; and because we tend to locate the conditions of those lives now lost as outside of those of our own, and thus do not experience the circumstances *of* their losses as "distressing" or "troublesome" for our own existences.

Perhaps, then, we must understand the deaths or disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside as grievable before we can recognize that their losses require something from us, too; something that resembles mourning, although it is not the same kind of mourning as that undertaken by those who knew the women in life. This mourning is instead a social mourning; it is, to return to the passage from Butler I first cited at the end of the previous chapter, a process that involves "agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in

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advance" (<u>Precarious</u> 21, emphasis in original). This is the kind of transformation I will go on to argue is evoked when one engages with what lives on from the disappeared women as a relation of inheritance. But it remains necessary, first, to recognize the losses of so many women as something grievable; something that causes "distress" or "hardship" for us, even when we did not know them in life. Likely out of a desire to evoke just this sort of recognition, friends and family of several of the disappeared women have initiated practices of strategic memorializing, and it is to an analysis of some of those practices that I now turn.

<u>Strategic memorializing</u>

In thinking about the memorialization of disappeared women I am indebted to the distinctions between remembrance as a strategic practice and remembrance as a difficult return made by Roger Simon, Sharon Rosenberg and Claudia Eppert in their introduction to the anthology <u>Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma</u>. Remembrance as a strategic practice, according to these authors, involves "efforts to mobilize attachments and knowledge that serve specific social and political interests within particular spatiotemporal frameworks," while remembrance as a difficult return involves "a psychic and social responsibility to bring the dead into presence." Such a return "unsettle[s] and put[s] into question the very terms of the redemptive promise of a strategic remembrance: that the future will be better if one remembers" (3-4). As such, "remembrance as a difficult return then becomes a series of propositions of how to live with what cannot be redeemed, what must

remain a psychic and social wound that bleeds" (5). So both of these types of remembrance practices point us to a "something to be done" (Gordon 190), but strategic remembrance tends to point us towards strategic, concrete things we can do to address an injustice in the present, usually on behalf of less fortunate "others," in the interests of a brighter future, while remembrance as a difficult return tends to expose how we are ourselves implicated in the events being remembered, by evoking the social and psychic legacies of the past in the present.

Given the temporal proximity of the particular losses I am concerned with here, given that many disappeared women remain unaccounted for, and given that the losses of the women who concern me have been so broadly cast as ungrievable, I will argue that *both* remembrance practices serve a purpose in this instance. Like Simon, Rosenberg and Eppert, I believe that practices of strategic remembrance have a limited ability to call us into relations of inheritance. But these authors also signal that "these two approaches to 'the project' of remembrance are not as disaggregated as this distinction suggests" (3). Building on their insight, I will argue that despite their limitations, memorial practices that evoke strategic memory are nonetheless a necessary part of what it means to remember women who have been disappeared in the present, now, while women continue to *be* disappeared and killed and while so many people continue to disavow or remain indifferent to the unjust circumstances contributing to their disappearances or deaths. Such practices have been mobilized by family, friends and community in an effort to counter a prevailing understanding of the disappeared women as ungrievable losses. I will examine some examples of such

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practices both for their political strengths and for the limitations posed by their form or mode of address – limitations that I suspect make them unlikely to be evocative of memory as a difficult return.

Recently I was reminded that I actually first visited the Downtown Eastside in the winter of 1998, although I did not know that was where I was at the time. I was not *from* Vancouver at that time – I found myself there by chance, and one rainy day during that winter visit nearly ten years ago I did what I had done on December 6th every year since I became an undergraduate student at a Canadian university and experienced an awakening of sorts: I gathered with other feminists to commemorate the massacre of 14 women in Montréal on this same day in 1989. We met at Vancouver's Science World, near the intersection of Main and Terminal streets at the southern edge of what I now know as the Downtown Eastside. The organizers were showing Moira Simpson's new documentary about the process of building Marker of Change, a permanent monument to the women murdered in Montréal that is installed in Vancouver's nearby Thornton Park.

Having somehow missed the national media coverage of the controversy surrounding the dedication of Marker of Change to those 14 women murdered on December 6th and to "all women murdered by men," I remember being moved by the courageousness and dedication of the group of feminist college students who came together in 1990 and persevered over six years to see this circle of 14 stone benches laid permanently in the Vancouver park soil. After the film we moved to the monument itself, a short distance away, formed a circle of linked hands inside

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the wide circle of stone benches, lit candles, and someone spoke the names of those 14 young women, whose markers of identity – their whiteness, their status as undergraduate students at a university, the presumption of their feminism – were so similar to my own. Later, when people had dispersed, I recall that I sat on one of the benches in the light rain and ran my hand through a pool of water formed in the gash-like indentation on top, reflecting on the terrible weight of this loss of women whom I had never known but who could so easily, it seemed, have been me, a friend, or a woman that I loved.

I marvel now, in hindsight, that I was able to spend that day in the Downtown Eastside without realizing (or being asked to consider) where I was or why the place where I came to remember the Montréal Massacre on that December 6th was significant. I do remember that in Simpson's documentary a few Downtown Eastside activists protest the decision to memorialize these 14 relatively privileged women from nearly 4, 000 kilometres away in a neighbourhood where the murders and disappearances of local women were going largely unnoticed by those outside the community or those who lacked a connection to local women in our own lives. Yet at the time, I recall I felt a tad irritated by these local activists' lack of support for the monument – could they not see what an important issue this was? Did they not know, or care, that the monument was not just for these 14 women who died so terribly but for "*all women murdered by men,*" as its inscription insists? I remember my surprise at what I took to be their lack of understanding about the significance of the murders at the Polytechnique for *all women*. I was, I see now, quite oblivious to

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my *own* lack of understanding about the losses being suffered right there in the Downtown Eastside, about *their* significance for all women, too. Perhaps more importantly (and more troublingly), I was oblivious to how the losses of local women were being constituted as *not* mattering for all women, or for all Canadians, so very unlike the deaths of those 14 women from Montréal.

A few short months after I attended that December 6th ceremony, a permanent monument to the women being disappeared in increasing numbers from the Downtown Eastside was dedicated by several family members in another park nearby. This memorial consists of a park bench in CRAB Park, also in the Downtown Eastside, and a memorial stone which had been placed and dedicated in the same park two years earlier.[3] Some of the women disappeared from the neighbourhood are named on a plaque that graces the bench, which is also dedicated to "all other women who are missing." CRAB Park was chosen as the location for the bench because of the presence of the nearby memorial stone. According to Don Larsen, the Downtown Eastside activist largely responsible for the stone's appearance, its epigraph was intended to function as a "short newspaper article" at a time when women's disappearances from this neighbourhood were garnering scarcely any widespread public or media attention.[4]

Taken together, the stone and the bench exemplify remembrance as a strategic practice: they call on visitors to take note of the disappearances of

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[3] CRAB park was created in the 1980s as a result of lobbying from a group of Downtown Eastside activists calling themselves "Create a Real, Accessible Beach," or CRAB. See Jack Christie's article, "Crab Park well off the city's beaten path," published in <u>The Georgia Straight</u>, a Vancouver-based alternative weekly, on March 3, 2005.

[4] See Jack Christie, "Crab Park well off the city's beaten path."

women from the neighbourhood, an important and politically necessary task at a time when those disappearances remained widely unacknowledged. They also remain important today because they offer a physical place to visit and remember the women, particularly significant for those who knew the women named personally, and they remain the only permanent, physical memorial available to the general public that exists thus far in the Downtown Eastside (or for that matter in Vancouver). Yet, in the present (and with the benefit of hindsight not available to those who commissioned these memorials in the late 1990s), they also raise several questions about their ongoing ability to provoke a remembrance that will prove strategic, thus highlighting the limitations of this form of remembrance.

In 1999, when the memorial bench was dedicated, the women named were still considered missing, so it is questionable whether a more fitting descriptor could have been rendered. Yet today, the phrase "women who are missing" does not tell an uninformed passerby much about the circumstances surrounding these disappearances (although one could certainly argue that few Vancouverites remain uninformed about the "missing women" case and are thus likely to make some meaning from the dedication and link it to the disappearance of women from the neighbourhood). As discussed in my introduction, the word "missing" has proved to be problematic when applied to the women who have been disappeared from the Downtown Eastside. Although there is no perfect language that can neatly and unproblematically sum up the events leading to the disappearances or murders of so many women, many of the women named on this bench are now not "missing" but known to have been murdered or to have died

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another form of unjust death. "Missing," although an important signifier of absence, cannot communicate much about the circumstances surrounding the disappearances of so many women and, over time, loses some of its significance.

Listing some women's names on the plaque that graces the memorial bench but not others, while certainly understandable from a practical point of view given the significant constraints of space and time, might nonetheless risk reinscribing a hierarchy of grievability, implying that those listed can in some way stand in for those who remain anonymous. It is also true that even if all of the names were listed, an uninformed passerby would still not be able to make much meaning from this form of memorial. Judith Butler, for example, has questioned philosopher Edith Wyschogrod's assertion that naming the dead is an effective memorial practice, asking: "Do these names really signify for us the fullness of the lives that were lost, or are they so many tokens of what we cannot know, enigmas, inscrutable and silent?" ("Spirit in Ashes [Review]" 69).[5] To those of us who did not know the women personally in life, their names communicate little about them – they don't conjure images, stories, or memories in the way that they will for those who knew them. And how would one decide when all of the names *had* been listed – where would the list start and stop? Naming the dead as a memorial strategy has a long history of controversy for this very reason, for it is often difficult to always be sure that all names are included, that no name is overlooked. And yet, as I wrote in my introduction, this practice of naming

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[5] I first encountered this passage from Butler in an important critique of the limits of naming as a memorial strategy offered by Sharon Rosenberg in her essay "Violence, Identity and Public History." In this essay, Rosenberg argues that when one did not have a personal connection to those named while they were alive, a list of names as a memorial strategy risks being read on similar terms as those statistics that calculate the numbers of dead.

remains important, perhaps especially so in instances where the name of the person responsible for the deaths becomes a form of common knowledge, for so often in these instances many in the general public can recall the name of that individual but not of those who have been murdered.

There are many different uses and evocations of memory possible from this memorial bench, and I do not mean to seem dismissive of its likely importance to some, perhaps particularly to those who knew and cared for the women that it individually names. But I nonetheless find it important to also consider this bench's perhaps more limited ability to evoke other kinds of memorial practices, or to address others with less proximity to these losses – others who might nonetheless be hailed into a recognition of the significance of the losses for one's own life, too. But the fact that this bench may well hold special significance for those who knew and cared for the women named is more than reason enough for its existence, and it is not my intention to downplay that significance. There is no simple, certain, or "one" reading of this, or any, memorial.

The text of the memorial stone located near the bench avoids the word "missing" entirely, perhaps because it was dedicated before the "case" of "Vancouver's Missing Women" had gained a kind of solidity in public discourse. Instead, it offers its dedication to "people" who were "murdered," many of whom, it states, were "women," and more specifically, "native aboriginal women." This adds some nuance to the text of the bench's dedication, and the two were intended to be read together. The line "many of these cases remain unsolved" on the

memorial stone suggests that action is indeed needed to "solve" the disappearances, an important political statement at a time when adequate police attention appears to have been grossly lacking. Yet such language implies that the source of the problem is the lack of investigation rather than the circumstances contributing to why women in the neighbourhood might be so vulnerable to disappearance in the first place. Someone passing by the stone today might therefore breathe a sigh of relief that "these cases" have now been "solved" by the arrest of Pickton and feel satisfied that no further action is required. So although the bench and stone undoubtedly served an important, strategic function at the time they were dedicated, their ongoing effectiveness is, I would argue, limited by the spatiotemporal bounds of strategic memory.

The brief list of names on the lone bench in CRAB Park is also tempered by the presence, about ten city blocks away, of the Thornton Park memorial for the women murdered at the Polytechnique in 1989. This monument, as mentioned, takes up the bulk of an entire park site with its circle of 14 stone benches, each one dedicated to *one* of the women murdered in that instance. It was of course never the intention of those commissioning any of these memorials to invite someone passing by these two parks during a walk through the Downtown Eastside today to consider the relative grievability implied by one memorial bench for dozens of women versus one bench each for 14 women, each

individually named, their names carved in large letters directly into the stone, but

nonetheless the disparity is striking.[6]

Only a small tile in the circle of an estimated hundred or more "donor

tiles" surrounding the stone benches in Thornton park makes mention of the

women who have been disappeared from the neighbourhood the monument rests

in. "In loving memory of the women killed on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside,"

the tile reads. "So many women lost to us" (Cultural Memory Group 42-43). Its

obscurity, buried among so many other tiles, is significant, for although I have

visited the Marker of Change memorial in Thornton Park many times I was

unaware of the existence of this tile until I read about it in the Cultural Memory

Group's text. Set against the vast circle of benches dedicated to the memory of 14

individually named women, it is questionable whether this tile, in this place and at

this time, does more than reinscribe the "differential allocation of grievability"

that Butler challenges us to question (Precarious xiv). As Caffyn Kelley has

asserted, despite its dedication to "all women murdered by men," this monument

does not individually name any of the local women, disproportionately

Indigenous women, who have been murdered – instead:

> [i]n this neighbourhood where women are six times more likely to be
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> killed than in the city overall – 10 to 20 times more likely if they are
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> between the ages of 20 and 45 – the monument will be inscribed with the

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[6] For another reading of the CRAB park memorial stone as it relates to "Marker of Change," one
offered through an analysis quite different from my own, see geographer Adrienne Burk's "Private
Griefs, Public Places," and her more recent essays, "In Sight, Out of View: A tale of three
monuments," and "Beneath and Before: Continuums of publicness in public art."

names of fourteen white, middle-class women from four thousand miles away.[7]

This limitation of Marker of Change has also been questioned by Rosenberg, who argues that the memorial "cannot make explicit the presence – in name – of those women whose slain bodies mark the grounds (the context) of Thornton Park" ("Standing in a Circle" 82). While the women murdered in Montréal have come to be read as emblematic of violence against women in Canada (see Rosenberg "Standing in a Circle;" and Rosenberg & Simon) and we now mark a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women annually on the day of their murders, to date there has been no widespread national acknowledgement of the significant loss entailed by the disappearances and deaths of the women from Vancouver, nor has any form of state-sponsored memorial been organized.[8]

Yet there would be a danger, too, in making these deaths emblematic of violence against women in Canada, just as there is a danger in not doing so – a danger that adheres to the very practice of emblemization itself, which is explored

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[7] Caffyn Kelley, "Creating Memory, Contesting History: Inside the Monstrous Fact of Whiteness." Kelley's essay was originally published in Matriart 5, 3 (1995): 6-11. When I was unable to obtain a copy of this published version of the essay, though, I contacted Kelley and she was kind enough to send me a longer, unpublished version. In the unpublished version of the essay that I have, this quotation is on page 6.

[8] It could be argued that a formal, state-sponsored memorial for disappeared and murdered women while an accused killer is still on trial would be inappropriate and/or might even risk undermining the trial itself. Such a consideration did not weigh in to the killings in Montréal because the murderer concluded his massacre by killing himself. Still, the state could certainly find a way to acknowledge the disappearances and deaths of so many women and the significant loss to Canadian society that this entails without necessitating any sort of statement about Pickton's guilt. Although not described explicitly as a memorial, the federal government has recently funded a national campaign commissioned to research and develop strategies to address the estimation that upwards of 500 Indigenous women have "gone missing" across the country in the last 20 years. This campaign, organized by the Native Women's Association of Canada, is called the "Sisters in Spirit" campaign. More information is available online at <http://www.nwac-hq.org/en/background.html> Accessed 18 Nov 2008.

at length by Sharon Rosenberg in her essay "Standing in a Circle of Stone." In that essay, Rosenberg argues that when particular deaths are made to stand in for all deaths among individuals who share a marker of identity (i.e. "women"), then a host of differences between such individuals are necessarily and troublingly downplayed or erased. The danger in arguing that the women disappeared from the Downtown Eastside should also be rendered as emblematic of violence against women, then, lies in the potential erasure of the differences that contributed to the heightened vulnerability to violence of these particular women in the first place.

Differences of racialization, class, and place make *all* the difference between the deaths of women from the Downtown Eastside and those of the women from Montréal. To suggest that only the latter group is emblematic of violence against women in Canada is obviously based on a narrow understanding of who qualifies as normatively human, one that needs to be challenged (for more on this line of critique as it relates to the Montréal Massacre, see Bociurkiw; Kelley; Kohli; and Rosenberg). To suggest that these deaths are all emblematic seems perhaps better, but it remains essential nonetheless that the differences between these events not be erased through efforts to draw connections or gesture to similarities. Likely we would do better to interrogate the logic of emblemization itself, as Rosenberg suggests, and instead focus on "what it might mean to *re*figure these bindings between remembrance and change, and, more broadly, between the living and the dead" ("Standing in a Circle" 83; see also Rosenberg & Simon).

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Aside from creating these permanent memorial markers, family members, friends and activists have responded (and many continue to respond) to representations of the women that mark them as having lived un- or less grievable lives with efforts to humanize the women for a broader public through the use of various rhetorical strategies, some of which also rely on the logic of emblemization. One such strategy involves repeatedly publicly proclaiming the women as mothers, sisters, and daughters. On memorial websites, in media stories and profiles, and through proclamations at memorial events, these three roles – mother, sister, daughter – are attached to disappeared and murdered women over and over again. In fact, I have noticed that the assertion that the women were someone's mother, sister or daughter has become a trope, a kind of standard or even expected approach for those speaking about the women in any kind of public forum. In the next section I examine this strategy, raising questions about its complicated necessity, on the one hand, as a political assertion, and on the other about the limitations it poses for hailing us into relations of inheritance and responsibility.

"Mothers, sisters, daughters"

The repeated public claiming of disappeared women as mothers, sisters and daughters strikes me as a politically necessary practice of strategic remembrance: in order to counter how their lives have at times been cast as ungrievable, the women are universalized via their attachment to normative gendered identities and conventional narratives of family through this claiming.

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There is also an important claim to kinship being made here: those making this claim are working to reiterate that the women, often stereotyped as completely unattached to conventional notions of family in any way, did in fact possess these familiar, human attachments. In light of the widespread constitution of the women as ungrievable losses, accomplished in part through representations that emphasize their isolation, attempts to recuperate their humanity in this way are perhaps unavoidable or even a *necessary* step in generating greater public concern for the women in the immediate present. Yet while such strategies might be necessary in the interests of, for example, provoking an investigation into "what really happened" to the women, I will argue that they offer little that will help us to contend with what lives on from that happening, to return again to that important distinction made by Brown in the epigraph to this dissertation.

This rhetorical strategy is unlikely to help us contend with what lives on from the disappeared women because a professed desire to "humanize" also reinforces, even as it attempts to respond to, a presupposition that the subject of this humanization is actually *not*-quite-human, since effort is required to make her seem so. Through this re-claiming of the women as mothers, daughters, and sisters, I worry that the specific factors contributing to their heightened vulnerability – their involvement in, and social renderings of, their sex work, their addictions, their othering via racialization and association with the Downtown Eastside – are re-stigmatized, re-cast as the constitutive outside of some narrow, conventional notion of normative humanness. The strategy relies on an assumption that "the public" will and should care more about the fate of these

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women because they were someone's mother, sister or daughter, which reproduces (even as it attempts to challenge) the belief that being someone involved in sex work, someone with a drug addiction, someone racially marked as Indigenous, or someone from the Downtown Eastside is not enough to warrant such caring or such recognition. As Geraldine Pratt has so insightfully explained:

> Empathy through normalized family loss humanizes the murdered women by locating them within narratives of the middle-class family. Not only is this a gendered and heteronormative narrative, it privatizes, individualizes, and potentially depoliticizes aboriginal women's and sex workers' specific marginality in the Downtown Eastside. (1064)

Thus although mourners' and activists' efforts to engage the empathy and concern of a broader public through their evocation of normative gendered identities is an understandable practice of strategic remembrance, it risks re-centering the very sorts of norms that contributed to rendering the disappeared women ungrievable to many in the first place.

The media has been quick to take up these memorial claimings and further entrench a "grievable mothers / ungrievable prostitutes" dichotomy. For example, one well-intentioned journalist trying to draw attention to the disappearances of women early on writes that "when she disappeared, the onetime wife, mother and hairdresser was a prostitute, an alcoholic and a drug addict."[9] One could certainly read this as an attempt by this journalist to humanize the woman to whom she refers for what she perceives to be a potentially indifferent audience, and yet, at

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[9] From Jane Armstrong's "Missing prostitutes: 23; arrests: 0," published in The Globe & Mail on April 5, 1999.

the same time, her language implies that one cannot possibly be all of these things at once – that once a woman becomes a prostitute, alcoholic, or drug addict, she ceases to have any attachment, or right-of-claim, to her identities as wife, as mother, or as anything as mundane and everyday as a hairdresser (another widely accepted and acceptable gendered identity), which are securely located in her "onetime" past.

Another compassionate editorial writer relies on similar assumptions when he writes "they have all been termed prostitutes or sex-trade workers. But each one was someone's daughter, granddaughter, niece or sister. Some were mothers, even grandmothers."[10] It is the phrasing "but each one" (as opposed to "each was also") that I want to question here. For while such phrasings might aim to recuperate the humanity of the women being remembered for a wider public, they at the same time work against bringing the fact that those women still doing sex work are *also* mothers, sisters, and daughters to the consciousness of that public. As academic and former sex worker Susan Strega insists, "We really appreciate this attempt to humanize us, but you know what? We were mothers, daughters, and sisters *before* we were murdered and missing, too," and she asks that the same respectful, dignified representations that have now, at times, been granted to those women who have been disappeared now also be deployed to represent women presently involved in sex work.[11] What troubles is that in efforts to recuperate the

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[10] From "The Lives Behind the Faces [Editorial]," published in Victoria's <u>Times-Colonist</u> on January 31, 2006.

[11] Strega, a professor of Social Work at the University of Victoria, made this comment during a presentation on media representations of sex workers during an annual meeting of the Canadian National Coalition of Experiential Women (CNCEW) in Edmonton, Alberta on April 3, 2006. She was actually addressing several members of the press when she made this statement, for the panel

humanity of these lives cast so often as ungrievable, few seem capable of expressing that women could, and do, embody all of these facets of identity at once, and that none of them ought to diminish our capacity to recognize the women as having lived grievable lives.

Efforts to attach the women to normative gendered identities also might potentially generate a broader acceptance of the women's status as victims, and particularly encourage a broader public to recognize them as *innocent* victims, in order to counter the widespread tendency to see prostitutes as women who "ask for it," or "get what's coming to them." These memorial practices seem ensnared by the ongoing cultural currency of madonna / whore, "good girl / bad girl" dichotomies. Because the disappeared women have been so widely associated with the whore-"bad girl" half of this dichotomy, a counter-discourse that works to recuperate the women by publicly associating them with the madonna-"good girl" side serves a number of strategic purposes. While I suspect this remembrance strategy is a necessary one given the pervasive hold these dichotomies continue to claim on the imaginations of so many, I nonetheless think it is important to consider how efforts to reclaim the women as madonna-"good girl" types reproduce both the dichotomy itself and the narrative of the "fallen woman" with which it is enmeshed.

It also seems important to consider that this strategy is likely counterproductive, because in the act of reclaiming the women as mothers, sisters

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was tasked with discussing some of the problems with media representations of women involved in sex work. Despite her clear, simple suggestions for how such dignified representations of women who continue to be actively involved in sex work could be created, coverage of the CNCEW meeting in the local press the next day repeated several representational practices that Strega suggested were harmful or problematic.

and daughters, that conventional narrative of the "bad girl" who fell from innocence is reinvoked. As feminist theorist Lynn Chancer argues:

> Whether or not intended, the [madonna / whore] split has the effect of creating a "nice girl" persona (the mother, the wife, the girlfriend) perpetually haunted by the specter of the "bad" as its shadow (the prostitute, the mistress, the "other woman"). (159)

Thus an invocation of the 'nice girl' persona may well perpetually bring to mind the "shadow" of the 'bad girl' persona that is inescapably bound to the "fallen woman" narrative. Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young argue this slightly differently:

> The description of the missing women as mothers, daughters, and sisters serves a twofold function. On the one hand …. [i]t rescues them from a place of degeneracy to a zone of normality. On the other hand, it conforms to the dominant hegemonic values, in that the only women who can be rescued or are worth saving are mothers, daughters, and sisters …. (904)

So although the assertion to kinship and a broader context for the lives of the disappeared women, one in which their relations to others mattered greatly, is one important outcome of this form of memorial claiming, it is unfortunately also ensnared by the cultural currency of this problematic narrative of normative gendered identities.

Aside from attempting to assert this claim to innocence, this remembrance strategy also relies on several assumptions about identification and recognition, much like the art project I examined in the previous chapter. One such assumption

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suggests that if those who did not know the women can come to recognize them as "like us," then we might care more about their fate (see also Jiwani and Young 904). It is assumed that we cannot relate to (or identify with) the supposedly unsympathetic character of the prostitute, the drug addict, or the racialized "other," but everyone has a mother, sister or daughter and will therefore identify more strongly with the women when they are represented by these categories of identity. Thus we might come to feel included in this story of loss by being invited to imagine that the disappeared women could have been *our* mother, sister or daughter, or could have been us, could have been 'anywoman.' Presumably, we might, through this form of sympathetic identification, be moved to compassion or perhaps even action as a result of recognizing that this story could be *our* story.

This kind of sympathetic identification is a "treacherous mistake," according to Avery Gordon, for not only does it require holding or 'fixing' the disappeared women to those aspects of their identities that are presumed to be more innocent, it also secures a repudiation of how we might each be in this story quite differently (187). For some, our role in the story might have much more to do with precisely how we are in fact quite protected from the forms of vulnerability that precipitated these losses in the first place. As Pratt has argued (above), when we accept such a reframing of the women's lives within a narrative of middle-class familial normativity, we wipe away facets of difference such as racialization, class, and all of the "historical and social effects" (Gordon 190) that underpin these losses. In doing so, it is as though we imagine we can secure a "dream of innocence and clean slates" (Gordon 187), clearing away unjust

histories and the building evidence of their legacies in the arrangements of our present-day social world. By claiming this story as "our story" through an identification with the women as mothers, sisters and daughters, we keep at bay the many ways that it *matters* that they are not, for most of us, "ours" in this way. To experience their loss as our loss through an identificatory logic of "it could have been me" is precisely *not* to be haunted by this loss, not to notice how the weight of the past presses on this terrible present. It allows us to avoid experiencing "the glue of the 'If you were me and I were you' logic come undone," which, Gordon suggests, is exactly what it means to be haunted (190). Instead, this identification secures us in a belief in our goodness and compassion and a sense of sharing in the loss, all the while allowing us to escape "our responsibility to recognize just where we are in this story, even if we do not want to be there" (Gordon 188).

These considerations leave me grappling with a complicated paradox here: I am dissatisfied with memorials that seem to downplay the differences that rendered the women more vulnerable to untimely, unjust deaths in the interests of humanizing them, and yet I would also most certainly be dissatisfied with memorials that focused *only* on these aspects of their lives and eclipsed the many other important facets of their identities, often based on kinship, that were a part of so many of the disappeared women's lives (and not just before they became involved in sex work and/or developed addictions to drugs). What is *most* dissatisfying about the repetitive claiming of the women as mothers, sisters, and daughters, then, is not the claiming itself, which remains an important and likely

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necessary evocation of strategic remembrance. The most problematic aspect of this claiming is instead how it can produce forms of sympathetic identification that actually invite most of us to escape fully examining the many ways that we are all in this story differently.

This paradox points to the particular difficulties of memorializing losses that have long been cast as ungrievable: it may be politically or strategically necessary to recuperate the lost ones' grievability through efforts at humanization in order to garner more immediate or more widespread public attention or support (however short-lived), and yet to do so may involve erasing those differences which left them vulnerable to such violence (and contributed to rendering them as ungrievable) in the first place. It also points to the limits of strategic remembrance strategies. While memorial practices that rely on or cultivate remembrance as a strategic practice often serve important political purposes in particular times and spaces, they also, through their arrest of meaning and binding to those particular times and places, are limited in their ability to call us into relations of inheritance, and they may evoke forms of identification that stave off remembrance as a difficult return. How might evocations of remembrance as a difficult return encourage us to recognize the complex and sometimes even contradictory ways that we are all in this story?

Evoking memory as a difficult return

As an initial example of a memorial with the potential to evoke memory as a difficult return, a mural for Vancouver's disappeared women located in

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downtown Montréal seems to me to invite quite a different sort of remembrance of the women than the memorial practices and forms discussed thus far. It is striking that this memorial is located in Montréal, the site of those murders at the Polytechnique that are commemorated so boldly in Downtown Eastside Vancouver. The mural itself is painted on the side of the building that houses the Native Friendship Centre of Montréal and was created in the summer of 2003 by a group called the Living Monument Mural Collective, composed of various people including volunteers from the Friendship Centre, the Aboriginal women's shelter, the Coalition for the Rights of Sex Workers, and women involved with Stella, a Montréal-based organization of and for women doing sex work (see Cultural Memory Group 171-173).

The skylines of both Vancouver and Montréal are visible in the mural, so although there is no explicit mention of the massacre of women at the Polytechnique, a sense of the inter-implication of these two cities is nonetheless woven into the specifically-Vancouver-based deaths being memorialized here. In the sky above the two skylines, Ojibwa spirit boats carry souls and a star twinkles with a piece of glass for every missing or murdered woman from the Downtown Eastside.[12] These stars bring the dead into presence, while the representation of the spirit boat moving between the two worlds of living and dead functions to rupture this divide, to suggest the untenable nature of a staunch living/dead binary, disrupting conventional understandings of living/dead and self/other as

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[12] The number of stars is reflective only of the number of women on the official list of missing women at the time the Mural was created, which is a limitation of this memorial's form. But because the stars are not named, I don't find that they operate in the same overly-determined representative way as the listing of some names but not others, which I've argued risks contributing to a hierarchy of grievability.

always already entirely separable: the self standing in front of the mural and the women represented by the twinkling stars are bridged by the spirit boats, which might perhaps invite reflection on the fragility of these distinctions.

Yet at the same time the mural does not allow an easy lapsing into identification, or "it could have been me or someone I love," with the erasure of the circumstances contributing to these particular deaths that such a move might entail, because its text poses a challenge to any such slippage. In the foreground of the mural, figures representing the artists hold a banner that reads: "In honor of the more than 60 sex workers, most of them Indigenous, who were killed or disappeared in Vancouver, BC," and below: "We pay homage to these women, victims of the comfort and indifference of a society that would sometimes rather see them as something to be eliminated. This mural is also dedicated to their friends, their children and families, to their lovers and loved ones. YOU WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN."

There are several claims here that shatter any over-simplified assumptions one might make about the women being memorialized: the mural tells us that "sex workers," mostly "Indigenous," are also "women" worthy of "honor" who can be "victims," not of their own poor choices, or even of individual perpetrators, but of an indifferent society that views them as disposable.[13] Instead of re-claiming the women as mothers, sisters and daughters, the text of the mural shifts its address to the kin left to mourn these losses, and in doing so reminds us that the women

[13] Claims about individual perpetrators are also made, through the inclusion of the words "were killed or disappeared," with their suggestion of action by others, but this action on the part of an unnamed person or persons is not located as the sole or even primary cause of the women's deaths or disappearances.

were *always* people with relationships to others that mattered greatly, that their loss was always grievable to those who knew and loved them. The YOU in the next line encompasses these mourners as well as the disappeared women, and it may be significant that "friends" are mentioned first in the list of those left behind who remember (and are to be remembered), a reminder that a commitment to never forget the dead must also be a commitment to addressing the circumstances contributing to their deaths, which many of their friends continue to contend with daily. Distinctions between grief and activism thus begin to slip away, such that both become part of an everyday practice of remembering the women who were disappeared.

This mural strikes me as remarkable, then, for how it seems to embody both remembrance as strategic practice and remembrance as a difficult return at once: it is simultaneously an invocation to strategic remembrance, an indictment of a society that would dare to cast these women as "something to be eliminated," and at the same time through its form and mode of address it disrupts over-simplified divisions between self/other, living/dead, past/present, and grieving/activism without allowing these divisions to be dissolved entirely. Some of the differences that contributed to the women's vulnerability, social renderings of their sex work and markings of their Indigeneity, are addressed directly, and their conventional representation as signs of ungrievability is challenged by the mural's text. At the same time, the blending of the two skylines situates the women's disappearances as an issue of concern for others beyond the Downtown Eastside and also beyond Vancouver. The text of the mural is written in several

languages: Ojibway, Inuit, French and English, with a spattering of Mohawk, and it is significant that it blends Indigenous languages (frequently associated with the past) with languages imported by European colonizers (associated with the present). The acknowledgement of the women's families, friends and lovers also asserts the women's claims, throughout their lives as well as after their deaths, to conventional forms of kinship and familial attachments. Hence the mural succeeds at disrupting many of the ways the women have been cast as ungrievable losses without disavowing or re-stigmatizing the particular circumstances contributing to their vulnerability.

Although not made explicit in the mural itself, I believe that through its form, text and mode of address, this memorial directs our attention to "an 'unworked-through past,'" and in doing so may succeed at evoking remembrance as a difficult return (Simon, Rosenberg and Eppert 4). The Ojibway spirit boats may represent the fragility of distinctions between living and dead, but they also reference a past in which significant efforts were made to extinguish such spiritual beliefs. The blending of Indigenous and European languages also calls that past into presence, both signifying and, by representing the languages on equal footing, resisting those massive efforts to also eliminate Indigenous languages and cultures. This history is not spoken in the mural but is powerfully evoked through reference to a contemporary tendency or willingness to see Indigenous women in particular as "something to be eliminated." This phrasing, coupled with the visual representation of the spirit boats and the presence of the different languages, provides an opening, a rupture that makes it psychically difficult to hold that past

outside of or separate from this present in which Indigenous women are murdered not because of who they are or what they do, but because of "the mass and force of the past in the present" (Brown 139). Such an opening invites us to position ourselves in this story quite differently from the terms presented by the kinds of sympathetic identifications usually invoked when remembrance is deployed strategically.

Another example of a memorial that enacts remembrance as a difficult return is found in the form of a gathering and march that takes place in the Downtown Eastside on February 14th each year. Initially organized in 1991 as a march of protest to draw attention to the significant number of murders or other forms of untimely death among women from this neighbourhood, the annual Valentine's Day memorial march continues to combine elements of memorial and protest. I have been fortunate to participate in a few of these marches while living in or visiting Vancouver. Because this event takes place in the heart of the Downtown Eastside, women (and men) who contend daily with circumstances similar to those experienced by the women who have been disappeared form a significant contingent of the mourners present, so although we are here to remember the dead and the women who remain unaccounted for, the circumstances contributing to their deaths or disappearances are pressing, making an easy separation between the past in which the women were lost and the present in which others continue to suffer untenable.

Caffyn Kelley describes this event as an enactment of "a different kind of memory – capable of spontaneous combustion, of furious and uncontrollable

grief," and she's right – the ever-present signs of injustice and unrest charge the

memories brought to this march through the streets with the surging force of

memory as a difficult return.[14] Over the years, this event has provided

opportunities for expressions of grief and mourning that have been dismissed by

some as unnecessary. It has simultaneously and strategically drawn attention to

the disappearances and deaths of women from the neighbourhood and demanded

an official response. But beyond its strategic function, the event continues to

rupture bindings of past/present, grief/activism, and self/other, making way for

the spectres of women who have been disappeared to return and to linger in the

streets well after the marching bodies have dispersed.

"Their spirits live within us" has become the march's theme, a theme that

charges those in attendance with a responsibility to bring the dead into presence,

to "hold a place for their absent presence in one's contemporary life" (Simon,

Rosenberg and Eppert 4). The march itself, led by Indigenous elders, Indigenous

women organizers, and family members of disappeared women, winds through

the streets of the Downtown Eastside, pausing to smudge sage and leave offerings

of things like roses, cedar and tobacco at the many spots along the way where

women were either murdered or last seen. Often prior to the march and as it winds

to an end, political speeches are made that highlight the injustices and inequities

so visible in the Downtown Eastside. These speeches are an important, strategic

aspect of the event, but for me what is so very haunting about this event is the

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[14] In the unpublished version of Kelley's essay that I have, this quotation is on page 9. Many
thanks to Kelley for pushing me to further consider the significance of the Valentine's Day
marches.

opening offered by how the theme and numerous pauses along the way draw

attention to the presence of the dead and to the ongoing responsibility of those

present to try to create some form of hospitable memory for them.[15] This is no

small charge. For, as my friend Lora McElhinney has written, the women's spirits

don't always live within us easily (73). Thus the annual repetition of the

Valentine's Day march is perhaps more than anything an opportunity, an opening

to learn about and reflect on what it might mean to inherit what lives on from the

women who have been disappeared from the neighbourhood where the march

takes place.

Inheriting what lives on

Memorials that evoke memory as a difficult return both address us and

challenge us in ways quite different from those that primarily deploy memory for

strategic purposes. When memory as a difficult return is at stake, our relation to

the losses being memorialized is called into question and potentially refashioned

as one substantiated not on our being bystanders to those losses, but on our

becoming inheritors, not of the losses themselves but of what lives on from them.

What might it mean to inherit what lives on from the disappeared women from

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[15] Anthropologist Dara Culhane documents how at these stops during the march, organizers "read the names of women who had died, told how they died, and listed their relations: mother of _____, sister of _____, daughter of _____, friend of _____" ("Their Spirits Live" 602). This particular use of the "mothers, sisters, daughters" trope works quite differently than the generalized strategy discussed above. Because of the specificity of its use here (i.e. not just "mother" but "mother of _____," this claiming works more like the dedication in the Montreal mural, through which our attention is drawn not just to the woman who died but to those left behind to mourn her loss. Thus, because of the specificity used here, this evocation of the "mothers, sisters, daughters" trope potentially avoids evoking the kind of sympathetic identifications I critique in the previous section.

Vancouver, and how is it that those of us who did not know the women in life must claim such a relation of inheritance? I have offered some tentative responses to these questions throughout this dissertation but in this section, I address them directly. As discussed in chapter two, relations of inheritance have to do with the problem of witnessing and in particular with what it might mean to bear witness to the loss of another that one did not know in life. In this section, I will work through this problem by considering the mode of address in the poetry of Sarah de Vries, a woman who, as mentioned, was disappeared from the Downtown Eastside in 1998. De Vries' poem, as discussed in my introduction and in chapter two, is addressed to a "you," and the particular character of this address calls on us to form a kind of relation with De Vries and other women who died similarly, a relation of inheritance that one may accept or refuse but that is binding regardless of how one might choose to respond.

Sarah de Vries herself bore witness, during her life, to the unjust, violent deaths of many women from her neighbourhood. One of her poems bears witness not only to the terrible murder of a woman who had touched De Vries' life (see Maggie de Vries 233-234), but also to a sentiment of disinterest in the woman's death among some whose lives are less susceptible to such precarity: "*You and your soft, sheltered life / Just go on and on / For nobody special from your world is gone*" (in Maggie de Vries 233). It is clear in this poem that De Vries was well acquainted with the consequences of living a life that is frequently cast as ungrievable. In her own reading of De Vries' poem, one which draws on

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Shoshana Felman's work on witnessing and testament, Geraldine Pratt makes the following compelling argument:

> The terrible burden of Sarah de Vries' poem comes from the fact that she is testifying (before the fact) about an event (murder) that she cannot witness. She speaks in proxy for herself, and her authority undoubtedly comes from her very own death. (1072)

De Vries' poem is thus at once both an indictment of how another woman's death has been cast as ungrievable and a testament to the grievability of the life of the murdered woman (and thus, to that of her own). But the indictment De Vries makes is not of a generalized or anonymous "society;" it is directed to a "you," and it is my argument that this form of address is important because it challenges readers to themselves take up the role of witness that De Vries enacts in the poem. If readers accept her mode of address as a challenge directed towards us personally, then it seems likely that the poem is an example of what Roger Simon calls the "terrible gift" (187) of those materials that testify to historical traumas or atrocities.

"If we are open to recognizing this text [of testamentary material] as intended for and sent to us as a bequest," writes Simon, "it is likely that many of us will regard it as a terrible gift" ("Terrible Gift" 297). As discussed previously, such bequests are "terrible gifts" because they are difficult and onerous, and because what they ask of us is no small task. The testimony found in materials like De Vries' poem "arrive[s] in the public realm making an unanticipated claim that may interrupt one's self-sufficiency, demanding attentiveness to another's life

without reducing that life to a version of one's own stories" (188). We may well be tempted to turn away from the challenge posed by the poem, and it is likely that many will understandably attempt to do so, for the challenge demands nothing less than "a reconsideration of the terms of our lives now as well as in the future" (189). Yet despite whatever individual decisions we might make about how to respond to such testaments, their challenge persists. Gordon would likely refer to the kinds of materials Simon designates a "terrible gift" as a "ghostly matter," and a "ghostly matter," Gordon writes, "will not go away":

> It is waiting for you and it will shadow you and it will outwit all your smart moves as that jungle grows thicker and deeper. Until you too stage a shared word, a something to be done in time and for another worlding.
>
> (190)

Thus our best efforts to shirk or forget the challenge posed by the poem's mode of address, although "it must be said that they can be sustained for quite some time" (Gordon 190), will nonetheless continue to haunt us until such time as we are ready to take up the difficult gift of its inheritance.

What, then, does a relation of inheritance require of us? First, and perhaps most importantly, it requires that we identify "how we are in this story, even now, even if we do not want to be" (Gordon 190). So even if the stories of the disappeared women from Vancouver are not "our" story because we did not know the women in life, and even though it remains necessary to *acknowledge* that these are not our stories and that proximity to the women in life does change our relationship to the stories, it is nonetheless still important to come to see that we

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are in this story, too. This does not mean that we are responsible for the disappearances of women in the same way that those who directly committed violence against them are responsible, a point to which I'll return in the following chapter. But it does mean that we are all *in* this story, in differing ways, and it is part of our inheritance to figure out just how.

To enter into a relation of inheritance with De Vries and other disappeared women, many of whom left testamentary traces similar to De Vries' poem, requires nothing more and nothing less than "altering one's ways of being with others" (Simon "Terrible Gift," 198). This seems at once a tiny and an overwhelming request; tiny in that it is impossible to know how such a small and personal shift could contribute much of anything; overwhelming in the enormous overhaul of one's everyday life that such a shift potentially demands. Accepting the challenge of De Vries' address means relinquishing the hold that the common narrative of the rational, freely-choosing self has on our relation to others, or giving up the idea that what "I" am is possible independently of "you." It means realizing and accepting that what we are left with, then, is "*the tie* by which those terms ["I" and "you"] are differentiated and related" (Butler Precarious 22, emphasis in original). Thus, altering one's ways of being with others involves realizing that what I thought "I" was may in fact be a very significant factor in why some lives are left so much more exposed to precariousness than others.

Altering one's ways of being with others in the interests of forming relations of inheritance also requires a reconceptualization of past and present, for if we imagine that the lives of disappeared women are rooted solely in the past

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then it is difficult to conceive of how they might make claims on us today. Being

open to inheriting what lives on from the women means beginning to account for

how past injustices are everywhere evident in the present and are therefore not

"past" in the way this term is conventionally thought. Still, crucially, this does not

mean that we can or ought to try to live *in* the past, which is where a

preoccupation with righting past wrongs could lead. Instead, as Simon, Rosenberg

and Eppert urge in the epigraph to this chapter, we need to learn to "live *in*

relation with the past" (4), which involves continually asking how the past

matters now. Instead of attempting to measure how past wrongs might best be

repaired, then, which secures those wrongs squarely in that past, how might we

instead attempt to measure "the mass and force of the past in the present," as

Brown (139) urges us to? How might the reparations required for *this* sort of

measurement be radically different?

Of course, Simon describes the inheritance of testamentary materials as a

"terrible *gift*" for a reason. Aside from binding us to an onerous combination of

"thoughts and actions" (198), challenges like that posed by De Vries' poem can

also be read as a form of gift, not in the sense that they offer some sort of

consolation for what has been lost, but because in their claiming of us they offer

the possibility of hope. Gifts like these are addressed to whoever might take on

the responsibilities involved with their acceptance, and as such, although they are

accepted or not by individuals, they possess a social dimension. That De Vries'

poem is addressed to a "you" suggests that it could be a terrible gift for any one of

"us," and thus a "we" who might accept her bequest is constituted. The "we" in

this instance becomes those of us inclined to dedicate "an attentiveness and shared reference" (Simon "Terrible Gift" 195) to the testimony offered in the poem. The creation of this "we" is important, for "no single beneficiary can be said to be capable of rendering the full meaning and significance of this testament" (195). Instead, *we* must accept this gift, taking it up in different ways, in order for its hopeful potential to be realized.

That hopeful potential cannot be wrought by just one who is open to inheriting what lives on. Nor can its meaning or definition of "hope" be predicted or deciphered in advance. What such gifts and the relations of inheritance they provoke gesture hopefully towards is a future, for while we are frequently encouraged through conventional conceptions of a linear relationship between past, present and future to imagine that the future is always ahead, always open, always just over the horizon, what a reconceptualization of the relations between present and past teaches is that there actually *is* no future without a reckoning with the past-as-present. Instead, without such a reckoning, we are left with what Ernst Van Alphen, in the epigraph to chapter three, described as "repetitions" (279), and what Simon describes as "the endless repetition of a violent past" ("Terrible Gift" 203). Thus the "hope" offered by such terrible gifts exists precisely in and through the relations of inheritance they hail us into. Such relations require us to begin to imagine our connections to others otherwise, to begin to contemplate "something to be done in time and for another worlding" (Gordon 190). Thus by imagining us – indeed, by calling an "us" into being as witnesses to the myriad injustices that culminated in her disappearance and

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murder – Sarah de Vries' address challenges us to consider how these injustices continue to inflect all of our lives, differently, daily, and to find ways to live, differently, with difficulty, based on this knowing, in the aftermath of her murder and in a present still consumed by the disappearances and deaths of those who continue to live and die under similar circumstances.

Uncertain Futures

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Judgment, Responsibility, Justice:
Towards a future

[T]here is no futurity (no break from the endless repetition of a violent past) without memories that are not your own but nevertheless claim you to a responsible memorial kinship and the corresponding thought such a problematic inheritance provokes. (Simon "Terrible Gift" 203)

Once an individual was arrested and charged with the murders of several of the women disappeared from the Downtown Eastside, their disappearances began to garner the kind of national and even international attention that had until that point been severely lacking. One wonders why such interest in their disappearances seemed to emerge in tandem with the arrest of a purported "serial killer." We could dismiss this as a North American fascination with violent crime, but I am hesitant to do so. Instead, I suspect it became easier for many of us to recognize the women's status as victims and to (re)frame their lives as grievable once responsibility for their deaths could be relegated elsewhere, to the lone man on trial. Writing about an American fascination with the figure of Osama bin Laden after September 11, 2001, Judith Butler suggests that our interest grows in a story once someone's culpability is established:

> [This] works as a plausible and engaging narrative in part because it resituates agency in terms of the subject, something we can understand, something that accords with our idea of personal responsibility ….. Isolating the individuals involved absolves us of the necessity of coming up with a broader explanation for events. (Precarious 5)

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It is precisely this broader explanation for all those ""historical and social effects"

(Gordon 190) implicated in the myriad ways that these particular women came to

be increasingly vulnerable to such violence that is made absent through such a

focus on (and fascination with) the culpability of the individual man on trial.

Although a spattering of media reports and editorials have connected the

fact that the women lived in the Downtown Eastside, were involved in sex work,

or were disproportionately Indigenous with the lack of early attention to their

disappearances, the tone of these pieces is righteous, the authors passing judgment

on police, the government, or a generalized "society."[1] Butler asks us to consider

how such forms of "moralistic denunciation" might:

> provid[e] immediate gratification, and even ha[ve] the effect of
>
> temporarily cleansing the speaker of all proximity to guilt through the act
>
> of self-righteous denunciation itself. But is this the same as responsibility,
>
> understood as taking stock of our world, and participating in its social
>
> transformation …?" (Precarious 16-17)

In this chapter, I will attempt a tentative answer to this question through an

examination of how Robert Pickton has been produced as a social figure and,

through that figuring, as a kind of vessel of responsibility, making broader

questions about responsibility for the disappeared women extremely difficult to

ask, a foreclosure that I will argue may greatly hinder any more just future we

may care to imagine.

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[1] For example, see Paul Willcocks' article, "A Disturbing Moral Judgment on Who's Equal,"
published in The Vancouver Sun on August 30, 2002; see also Gary Mason's "Instead of
Collective Shrug, Pickton Case Should Inspire Outrage," published in The Globe & Mail on June
2, 2005.

I will also, in this chapter, contemplate the notion of the future and its relationship to the present and past that have so preoccupied me throughout this dissertation. When the linearity of past, present and future is disrupted, what can futurity mean? What possibilities might it continue to hold? Is it possible to speak of a future at all? The epigraph from Simon (above) suggests perhaps not, or at least that there is a certain kind of work involved, that an acceptance of the responsibilities associated with relations of inheritance must occur for futurity to remain a possibility. I will argue that the future is far more constrained and determined than we are generally encouraged to believe, given how it is conventionally described. But I will also insist that futurity is a notion heavily bound to what it means to imagine otherwise, and that its possibilities are achievable by reckoning with our present pasts, a practice I go on to articulate more fully in the epilogue that follows this chapter.

Judgment and the question of individual responsibility

In many ways it is too early to reflect on Pickton's first trial and its various meanings and significance, since it appears this lengthy legal proceeding is far from over.[2] Yet it also seems impossible to conclude this dissertation without some reflection on what several commentators have proclaimed a "trial of

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[2] An appeal of Pickton's convictions for the second degree murder of Sereena Abotsway, Marnie Frey, Angela Joesbury, Georgina Papin, Mona Wilson, and Brenda Wolfe began on March 30, 2009. According to The Vancouver Sun, 15, 000 pages of documents have been filed with the courts in relation to this appeal. The Crown is also appealing to have Pickton tried on all 26 charges of murder at once, arguing that the original trial judge was wrong to separate some of the charges from the others. So the only thing that seems clear is that it is extremely unlikely that any definitive legal outcome will be available in the near future. See Neil Hall's article, "Lawyers file more than 15, 000 pages of documents for Robert Pickton appeal," published in The Vancouver Sun on October 2, 2008.

the century."[3] It was during the first day of this trial, as I sat in shocked silence in the overflow courtroom in New Westminster, B.C., that I began to more deeply contemplate Wendy Brown's assertion, from the epigraph to this dissertation I have returned to so often, that knowing "what really happened" in events like these does little to help us struggle with the stunning complexity of "what lives on from that happening" (Politics 150). I thought I was prepared that day for what I was about to hear, as I was no stranger to the circumstances surrounding the trial and had been present in the courtroom a year earlier for a day or two of the voir dire. But as I listened to Crown council describe, in the cold, matter-of-fact language of legal-eze, "what really happened" to Sereena Abotsway, Marnie Frey, Angela Joesbury, Georgina Papin, Mona Wilson, and Brenda Wolfe, I knew that I was not prepared, not at all. And I wondered how knowing this information could make any difference to the injustices the women experienced, injustices that began long before Pickton entered their lives and that continue to so narrowly shape the present and constrain possibilities for a different future. Due to the horrific nature of the violence involved there was certainly a moment, that day, when I was quite prepared to endorse those representations that fix Pickton as a figure of pure "evil." My willingness to jump to this position – my quickness to judge – is reflective of how such a narrow focus on "what really happened," brought about in part by our legal system's emphasis on judgment, encourages the fixing of those on trial for such heinous acts as precisely this sort of figure.

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[3] See Ian Mulgrew's article, "Canada's trial of the century," published in TheVancouver Sun on January 31, 2006; Alan Kellogg's "Shining a light on a dark, dark corner," published in The Edmonton Journal on June 15, 2007; and Jamie Lee Hamilton's blog entry, "Trial of the century begins," posted on January 22, 2007. These are but a few examples.

I want to reiterate that my desire to contemplate the ways that Pickton has been produced as a social figure in no way implies a desire to exonerate him for the violence he engaged in. But it is my contention that producing Pickton as a figure of sole culpability or of "evil," as he has so often been represented, does a certain kind of work that we may want to question. First, as already stated, it allows us to escape deep reflection on any "broader explanations" for the disappearance of so many women from our social world. Second, it allows us to escape consideration of how Pickton, although not without agency, has also been *socially formed.* Butler, among others, urges this kind of reflection upon the production of figures such as Pickton when she writes:

> If we forget that we are related to those we condemn, even those we *must* condemn, then we lose the chance to be ethically educated or 'addressed' by a consideration of who they are and what their personhood says about the range of human possibility that exists, even to prepare ourselves for or against such possibilities. (Butler <u>Giving</u> 45)

The actions of an individual like Robert Pickton say something quite terrible and quite alarming about "the range of human possibilities that exists," but when he is cast merely as a figure of "evil" we can learn next to nothing about this range of possibilities, or do little to prepare ourselves against them. I do not believe that nothing can be done to prepare against the heinous acts of violence that Pickton engaged in. Nor do I think that the women who are most vulnerable to such violence are the only ones, or even the primary ones, who should prepare themselves against such acts (they already do, on a regular basis). Instead, I think

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if we take the way that Pickton has been figured in this story seriously, as a matter worthy of our concern and attention, there are indeed important things that can be learned about the ways that we are all in this story, too, and about how responsibility is perhaps more diffuse than the spectacular trial of an individual man encourages us to believe.

In Giving an Account of Oneself, Judith Butler writes about what she calls the "limits of judgment" (44-49). Butler's overall argument in this text is that while we must continue to attempt to give accounts of ourselves as individuals, any such account requires us to acknowledge that we are always somewhat opaque to ourselves:

> [T]here is no 'I' that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no 'I' that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning. (7)

Such a realization necessarily disrupts conventional notions of individual responsibility and accountability, although Butler insists that such a shift in how we understand what it means to tell the story of an "I" does not imply that there is "no concept of the subject that can serve as the ground for moral agency and moral accountability" (8). While she argues that there are thus instances when judgments are "urgently necessary for political, legal, and personal life," she nonetheless asks us to consider that perhaps "only through an experience of the other under conditions of suspended judgment do we finally become capable of an

ethical reflection on the humanity of the other, even when that other has sought to annihilate humanity" (45).

Why would we want to reflect on the humanity of an individual like Robert Pickton? No doubt this is an exceedingly onerous task, and one that it would perhaps be overly difficult to ask those who knew the women in life, especially, to take on – this may well be too much to ask in those circumstances. Yet, although we must condemn Pickton's actions, to explain them only in terms of the acts of a representative of "evil" is to again refuse to interrogate how we are all in this story, too. "Condemnation, denunciation, and excoriation," writes Butler, "work as quick ways to posit an ontological difference between judge and judged, even to purge oneself of another" (Giving an Account 46). By purging ourselves in this way, conventional understandings of human subjectivity and responsibility remain unchallenged, as does that familiar narrative of individual culpability. And while, as mentioned, some commentators have pushed beyond this narrative and levelled accusations at the police, the government, or society, they are all still quick to excoriate Pickton. My concern is not that we judge Pickton, as individuals or through our legal system – we must do this. Instead, my concern lies with the costly *way* that we judge him, and with how that judgment has, again and again, encouraged us to deflect much contemplation on any broader explanations for the events and circumstances surrounding the women's disappearances.

It has been the project of this dissertation to begin to contemplate what some of these broader explanations might be, and I have throughout developed an

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argument that such explanations can be found in some of our most conventional ways of understanding the world, including how we understand the relationship between past, present and future; in how we reiterate narrow assumptions about what it is to be normatively human, even when we do not intend to; and in how we understand ourselves in relation to each other. Before I move on to discuss how these insights bear on possibilities for the future, I will hesitantly describe how I see these broader explanations as factors in the social formation of the violence Pickton stands accused of. Again, this explanation is not intended as an exoneration of his acts or a deflection of his responsibility, for as Butler insists, "*[w]e do not take responsibility for the Other's acts as if we authored those acts*" (Giving an Account 91, emphasis in original). But if we are all in this story, too, then it seems likely that we each have some responsibility to bear, a responsibility that I have argued necessitates being open to inheriting what lives on from the disappeared women. Such an openness requires us to seek opportunities for staging what Ernst Van Alphen, to recall that epigraph from chapter three, calls "interventions" in the relationship between past and present, in the interests of avoiding "repetitions" (279). My desire to stage one such intervention motivates the following insights.

In early December 2001, while a jury contemplated the evidence against Pickton from his first trial, Lori Culbert, an investigative journalist for the Vancouver Sun, published a recap of the trial in a special section of the

newspaper, divided into six chapters.[4] Chapter one is titled "The Beginning" and the remaining chapters wade through stages of the trial, concluding with a chapter on the awaited outcome, titled "Guilty or Innocent." Although useful as a summary of a lengthy and complicated legal process, this special report also neatly resituates the story of the disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside as a narrative of individual culpability. "The Beginning" of this narrative, in this journalist's recounting, is the birth of the joint Vancouver Police / RCMP Missing Women Task Force and its developing interest in Pickton and his property. Even the narrative summaries of the lives of the six women included in this feature begin at the moment of their disappearances; moments in time that are important to this sort of narrative recounting, but that also constitute the women's lives as mattering to the story only because of when and how they were disappeared.

To be fair, Culbert included these brief synopses of the women's lives to counteract their lack of representation during the trial itself (the <u>Sun</u> found that only seven of the Crown's ninety-eight witnesses and only one of the Defence's thirty were called to testify about the lives of the women). The <u>Sun</u> and other news sources have also published different profiles of the women that focus much more on their lives before they were disappeared. But in this special report, Culbert frames the details she includes about the women's lives to fit with the narrative of individual culpability that is the trial's focus, which has the effect of adding them to the story without challenging the way the story is being told. Thus

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[4] See Lori Culbert's special report, "Pickton," published in <u>The Vancouver Sun</u> on December 1, 2007.

these very narrow and recent "beginnings" seem logical in this recounting, and possibilities for contemplating other, less linear ways of understanding the progression of this story are eclipsed.

I suspect that a fuller, more complex telling of this story, one that aims to provoke reflection on those "broader explanation[s] for events" (Butler <u>Precarious</u> 5) that extend the narrative beyond the one that situates responsibility only in terms of individual agency, terms that many of us perhaps more readily understand or embrace, would have to search for its beginnings much, much earlier. For example, I found it fascinating to learn that, according to CBC reports, the Picktons were "pioneers in Port Coquitlam, with roots going back to the late 1800s."[5] Pickton's mother was reportedly so reluctant to give up the family's original homestead house when their land was expropriated by the government to build the Lougheed highway in 1967 that she had it moved, by barge, to the location of the new farm on Dominion Avenue in Port Coquitlam, where it stood until it was demolished with the property's other structures after the police concluded their forensic investigation there. Pickton's defence lawyers represented him during his trial as a simple, hard-working farmer; the media was quick to reiterate this representation, which Pickton himself perhaps sparked when he described himself thus during his videotaped interrogation by police. If it is merely a coincidence that frontier mythology surfaces again here in these re-tellings of the story of Robert Pickton, then it is certainly a bizarre one. How does

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[5] See Yvette Brend's radio story, "The Pickton Family," available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/bc/features/pickton/programming.html> Accessed 1 Sept 2007. Originally broadcast January 2, 2007 on CBC (British Columbia) Radio One's "The Early Edition."

the proclamation of Pickton's "pioneer roots" situate him in this story? A colonial past, one that clearly held significant importance for the Pickton family, is, it seems to me, re-enacted through this contemporary violence, belying its past-ness and indicating that it is thoroughly ingrained in our present.

Let me be perfectly clear here: I am not at all suggesting that Pickton, the individual man, is consciously re-enacting a violent encounter between white settlers and Indigenous women. Rather, as I have already explained, I am interested in Pickton as a social figure, and in the present-day social and psychic legacies of a history of colonial conquest that is far from settled. I am concerned with how this history continues to naturalize the commission of particular forms of violence by certain subjects against certain others, to make certain forms of violence (and certain disappearances or deaths) unsurprising (such that they warrant little official or widespread attention until the force of their loved ones' insistence and pressure builds to a point that can no longer be ignored). My concern is a concern for *social* justice, not a search for a definitive explanation for the actions of an individual man. But if we identify how this past is fully present in the violence at question here, might this lead us not only to questions of individual accountability, which remain important, but also to broader understandings of the complicated 'beginnings' of this story? Is it possible that Pickton's actions signal not just individual acts of heinous violence but also something of how the past remains unsettled, of how it continues in present arrangements and representations of our social world, of how colonization is a

far-from-finished project and must be continuously re-enacted in an effort to secure its permanence?

Given how Pickton has repeatedly been figured as a vessel or flashpoint for questions about responsibility and accountability for the women who have been disappeared, it seems important to recall that the majority of the women on the current police list remain unaccounted for. And while some might jump to the conclusion that Pickton is responsible for the disappearances of those women, too, but there was simply insufficient evidence to charge him, certainly he cannot be held responsible for the violence that has taken place since his arrest. Further, long before Pickton was in the public eye, the Vancouver Sun reported that at least twenty-five different men had been charged with murdering sex workers in British Columbia over the past seventeen years.[6] And, as previously mentioned, women doing sex work (disproportionately Indigenous women) have been murdered in similar patterns in almost every major city in western Canada. This information alone conveys how the focus on Pickton is far too narrow, since it seems that what he suggests about "the range of human possibilities that exist" (Butler Giving 45) was suggested by others long before our attention was turned to him, and continues to be suggested by others still, today.

If I am right about the degree to which histories of colonization are implicated in this present-day violence, then all of us who find ourselves living on this land now known as Canada share some responsibility for what has taken place. Such an understanding has the potential to problematize what Susanne

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[6] See Lindsay Kines' "Missing on the Mean Streets: 'Who we will not see tomorrow,'" published in the Vancouver Sun on March 13, 1999.

Luhmann has described as the "common distinction between national and personal trauma, private and public memory and state and family histories" (93). Luhmann argues that events of historical trauma "also affect the collaborators or bystanders of these events and *their* descendents" (92, emphasis in original). She compellingly argues that we might describe circumstances like this as "geograph[ies] of trauma," through which "memories are emblazoned in the land" (99). Those of us who find ourselves on this particular land today are thus subject to what Luhmann has coined "transgenerational haunting" (104). The social and psychic legacies of colonialism place all of us in this story of present-day violence, and, to repeat Gordon, it is therefore "our responsibility to recognize just where we are in this story, even if we do not want to be there" (188). I would argue that such a broad diffusion of responsibility is therefore a necessary aspect of any more just future.

Of justice and possible futures

What is the relationship of this fully-present past to the future? Although we are conventionally encouraged to see the future as full of possibility, as open, as yet to be determined, a reconceptualization of the relationship between past, present and future suggests otherwise. My arguments throughout this dissertation lead to the conclusion that unless we reckon with "the mass and force of the past in the present" (Brown <u>Politics</u> 139), a future, when we imagine this as something different from our present past, is an impossibility. Without such reckonings, present pasts are what we are left with, a collection of those "endless repetitions

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of a violent past" that Simon insists, in the epigraph to this chapter, stand in the way of futurity (203). This warning from Simon (and the similar one made by Van Alphen in the epigraph to chapter three) works quite differently from the clichéd admonishment that those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it. Instead, it seems true that we can learn from the past and *still* be doomed to repeat it, because learning from the past is not the same thing as grappling with how the past is everywhere evident in the present-day making of our social world.

For Wendy Brown (and for Derrida, one of her interlocutors), "the future is always already populated with certain possibilities derived from the past," such that it is "haunted before we make and enter it" (Politics 150). This is a very different way of understanding the future, one that significantly changes our responsibilities in the present. Instead of being responsible for autonomously creating (or failing to create) our own bright futures, for example, this reconceptualization of the future might suggest that we are instead responsible for collaborating in the present to tease out the presence of the past, such that we might better know what future possibilities it allows for and, if we are unhappy with those possibilities, to change how we recognize and respond to the past in the present, thereby opening other possible futures.

Both Brown and Avery Gordon suggest the goal of such interventions is greater justice: a "more just … future order" for Brown (140); for Gordon (also working with thoughts from Derrida), "a concern for justice would be the only reason one would bother" (64). The kind of justice these theorists have in mind is certainly not that which is wrought from current forms of legal proceedings (in

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fact, Brown speaks explicitly against such understandings of justice).[7] Knowing

exactly what justice is or how we might recognize it is complicated and always to

be determined – it is not the sort of thing that I can neatly outline here. But it

involves taking stock of the past's presence in the present, of how it continues to

matter now, not in the interests of provoking some one-time acknowledgement or

lump-sum reparation for past injustices, which secure the past squarely in the past,

but instead in the interests of taking stock of how the past lives on in the present,

all the while constraining and delimiting possibilities for the future.

What justice might look like given such circumstances is hard to

determine, but one thing is clear: justice is bound up with a notion of futurity that

is different from a present overrun with the injustices of the past that in turn make

injustice anew. I am reminded of a passage from Gordon that I cited in the

introduction to this dissertation; in it, she writes: "[w]e need to imagine living

elsewhere before we can live there" (5). I can imagine a time in which tracing

what lives on from the disappeared women (and others who have suffered unjust,

untimely deaths) is made central to social and political life; where we look for

evidence of unsettled pasts in their disappearances and deaths, not assuming that

personal failings are at play or that our conventional narratives of individual

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[7] I do not mean here to dismiss the sense of justice that some loved ones of the disappeared
women might find in the conviction of Pickton. Although I am arguing that the form of justice
wrought from legal proceedings is somewhat limited, this is not meant to imply that it will or
should have no meaning for those who knew the women who were murdered in life. In fact, the
meaning or significance that it might hold for those loved ones is reason enough to support the
ongoing necessity of such proceedings. But several people who knew and loved the women who
have been disappeared have also publicly expressed their concern about how the conditions of life
for women presently living and working in the Downtown Eastside have changed little if at all,
and thus I suspect that for many of them, too, any justice that comes from the conviction of
Pickton, while it may be important, is certainly not enough.

tragedy or accountability are adequate for recounting these stories. A time when we become aware of how "their spirits live within us," not just one day of the year but on all the days of the year, uneasily; when we become aware of and attentive to the hauntings that claim us.

In this time, we learn that our lives are bound up with each other's in messy, complicated, unshakeable ways. We begin to see others, living and dead, that we have often learned how to avoid seeing. We learn to become responsible for circumstances that are not of our making, but that we inherit anyway, and that the formation of such "responsible memorial kinship[s]" (Simon 203) requires our urgent attention. We stop dreaming about bright futures and begin to imagine a different present, and in that present women are no longer being vanished from the Downtown Eastside because we have come to recognize how their lives are not all their own making, how responsibility for their disappearances cannot be found in the perpetrators or the police or government alone, although they all must be held accountable. But responsibility is a larger matter: it is yours and it is mine, and we find it because we are committed to figuring out just where we are in this story and what that means for how we go about our lives today. And of course, this is necessarily just one partial, incomplete imagining for a possible future – imagining otherwise must become a collective project in the interests of a futurity that might truly become possible.

What all this suggests is that our future will not just arrive tomorrow. It is only achievable when we begin to reckon with how the past remains present and continues to matter, now. Reckoning is a very particular sort of process. It perhaps

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stakes some value in a practice of mourning that remains at least partially

unresolved, a mourning that is preoccupied with "that which we have lost, but

never had" (Gordon 183). Before concluding, then, I offer some further thoughts

on my own reckonings with the events that have been my focus in this

dissertation, for the present and in the interests of a social or collective reckoning

yet to come.

EPILOGUE

Reckonings (for the present)

Th[e] 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. (Gordon 183)

Since I have been advocating throughout this dissertation that the kinds of change needed to provoke something like justice in response to the disappearance of so many women from the Downtown Eastside are necessarily, thoroughly, social or collective, it seems a bit odd to end with a reckoning. Reckoning, as a practice, has a character that is somewhat introspective and individual, even if it can also have much broader social implications. As Gordon describes it:

Reckoning is about knowing what kind of effort is required to change ourselves and the conditions that make us who we are, that set limits on what is acceptable and unacceptable, on what is possible and impossible. (202)

Thus reckoning is about figuring out how we can contribute to changing those forces that condition us (often in ways that we are not even fully aware of). One cannot change those forces on one's own, but reckoning with how we are conditioned by them can help us to see opportunities for intervening in them. The kind of change Gordon seems to think can be achieved through a practice of reckoning "is not individualistic, but it does acknowledge, indeed it demands, that change cannot occur without the encounter, without the *something you have to try for yourself*" (203, emphasis in original). I have written about several of my own

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haunting encounters throughout this dissertation, but there is one encounter that I have managed to hold off reckoning with.

In my introduction I wrote briefly about my lover whose addiction to drugs was the source of some of my first experiences of and knowledge about Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. I said that she had not been disappeared in a permanent way, and this remains true to the best of my knowledge. I cannot say it for certain, though, because I have not had any contact with her in quite some time. Like so many of the friends, lovers and family members of the women who have been disappeared or murdered, I was devastated by the many ways that my lover's addiction routinely exposed her to great suffering, violence and harm, and I tried everything I could to help her. Everything *I* could do, it turned out, was not nearly enough. So, after two and a half years of living with the daily chaos brought about by the need to constantly appease an addiction, I found that I could no longer live my life in that way. Despite my ability to access resources and to provide a loving, drug- and turmoil-free home, I could not seem to address or even fully understand all of those abstruse and extraordinarily complex things that made using drugs – with all the challenges this poses for one's life – an apparent necessity for my lover.

Eventually, with great difficulty, I made the decision to leave. This decision was brought about in no small part through how our time together had allowed me to glimpse something of what it must be like to contend daily with the knowledge that one's life is routinely cast as ungrievable – that one is sometimes, maybe often, perceived by others to be less than fully human. An awareness of

how her life was often cast in this way may not have been what brought my lover to her addiction, but it is surely what kept her there. And over time, I came to realize how difficult, if not impossible, it would be for one or even two individuals to counteract the effects of that knowing. To believe that one lives a life that, if lost, would be considered ungrievable by many, and to find evidence for that belief almost daily, through one's interactions with others and through encounters with social renderings of one's identities (so frequently presumed inherent), is surely a terrible way to live. I began to see that this is not something that can be fixed by better treatment programs, more detox beds, or better access to housing or shelter, although I do not want to downplay the importance of these services – they are absolutely essential and we definitely need to invest so much more in them, but at the same time they are not, on their own, enough.

To reckon with this part of my past is really to come to terms with the limits of the "I," and in so doing to face one of those things that "we have lost, but never had" (Gordon 183), which must surely include, among other things, that cherished modernist tenet of the autonomous, self-contained and self-knowing individual. So long as this conventional notion of an "I" remains untroubled we cannot hope to transform the effects of living a life that is frequently rendered less grievable, because it will remain virtually impossible to undo that casting, even if we recognize it, even if we want to do something about it. I do not mean to imply here that individual actions or changes are insignificant or meaningless; they remain important and we must continue to pursue them. But without a concomitant recognition of the limits of the "I," of its ultimate precariousness and

subsequent openness and responsibility to others (see also Judith Butler's

Precarious Life and Giving an Account), we will remain hard-pressed to challenge

those narrow frameworks for grievable lives that continue to have such an impact

on the arrangements and conditions of our social world, as well as on the psyches

of those who are 'fixed' by them daily.

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Sarah de Vries also appears to have keenly felt the effects of living a life

that she knew, if lost, would be viewed by many as ungrievable. This awareness

caused her to anticipate her own disappearance and murder and the subsequent

delays in an official response or public outcry far too well. Her insights are

evident in a series of startling reflections posed in her journal in December, 1995:

> *Am I next? Is he watching me now? Stalking me like a predator and its prey.*
>
> *Waiting, waiting for some perfect spot, time or my stupid mistake. How does*
>
> *one choose a victim? Good question, isn't it? If I knew that, I would never*
>
> *get snuffed.*
>
> *So many women, so many that I never even knew about, are missing in*
>
> *action. It's getting to be a daily part of life. That's sad. Somebody dies and*
>
> *it's like somebody just did something normal. I can't find the right words.*
>
> *It's strange. A woman who works the Hastings street area gets murdered,*
>
> *and nothing.*
>
> *Yet if she were some square john's little girl, shit would hit the goddamn*
>
> *fan. Front page news for weeks, people protesting in the streets. Everybody*
>
> *makes a stink. While the happy hooker just starts to decay, like she didn't*

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matter, expendable, dishonourable. It's a shame that society is that

unfeeling. She was some woman's baby girl, gone astray, lost from the right

path.

She was a person. (in Maggie de Vries 159)[1]

De Vries' explicit assertion of the personhood of the women who are being

disappeared or murdered communicates her awareness that such women, women

not unlike herself, are so routinely cast outside this category of "person" through

how little attention their deaths receive, through how their murders are framed as

"normal," expected, "a daily part of life."

Similarly, in the poem that I first mention in my introduction, De Vries

reflects on the lack of attention paid to the murder of another woman from the

Downtown Eastside. At the end of the poem she again reasserts this woman's

personhood, and it also seems likely from her description that the woman's death

haunted De Vries:

She was somebody fighting for life

Trying to survive

A lonely lost child who died

In the night, all alone, scared

Gasping for air (in Maggie de Vries 234)

I too am haunted by the necessity of trying to imagine what it must have been like

to have such insight into how one's death might be cast as somehow less worthy

of widespread grief, and then to have to face that insight at the moment of one's

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[1] Sarah de Vries' journal entry © Maggie de Vries. Reprinted with permission.

own murder – *in the night, all alone, scared. Gasping for air.* But De Vries is drawing our attention to more than just the terribleness of this woman's death (and, inadvertently, her own), for the lines of her poem suggest that the woman's struggles to survive began long before the moment of her murder. We get the impression that the woman was "trying to survive" and "fighting for life" for some time prior to the violent encounter in which she was killed. So, although De Vries succeeds at conveying the horror of the woman's murder, she also draws our attention back to that key issue of how we *see* the woman, not just after her death but also *in life*, and by doing so she points us to "a something to be done in time and for another worlding" (Gordon 190).

In the meantime, as we struggle over the something to be done, how do we live with the ghosts who continue to haunt us? The conclusion to Gordon's text offers me counsel here. In the last few sentences of Ghostly Matters, she reflects on the responsibilities we have to those ghosts that continue to claim us:

> Offer it a hospitable reception we must, but the victorious reckoning with the ghost always requires a partiality to the living. Because ultimately haunting is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of a peaceful reconciliation. In this necessarily collective undertaking, the end, which is not an ending at all, belongs to everyone. (208)

An "undiminished life" is what I suspect my lover sought (and perhaps is seeking still). For the women who have been disappeared or murdered, transforming "a shadow of a life into an undiminished life" has everything to do with provoking

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hospitable memories, with how we remember and make space for what lives on

from the women in our daily lives. But for those still living with the effects of

having one's life so routinely and casually cast as ungrievable, to whom Gordon

suggests we may owe a "partiality," securing an "undiminished life" demands that

we challenge the myriad ways that certain lives come to be understood as more

grievable than others. And that is a task that is, as Gordon insists, a "necessarily

collective undertaking." It is a task that requires us to begin to reckon collectively

with the limits of an "I" and with our present pasts in the interests of beginning to

imagine otherwise, making futurity, that other old idea that we have lost but never

had, possible.

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