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**TRAUMATIC POSSESSIONS:
THE BODY AND MEMORY
IN MULTIETHNIC WOMEN'S WRITING AND PERFORMANCE**

by

JENNIFER L. GRIFFITHS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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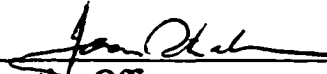
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Abstract**TRAUMATIC POSSESSIONS:
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by

Jennifer L. Griffiths**Advisor: Professor Meena Alexander**

This dissertation uses contemporary trauma theory to examine the intersubjective dynamic involved in testimony and witnessing after trauma in multiethnic narrative and performance by women. Trauma fractures the symbolic order and testimony restores a sense of connection for the survivor. In the performance and literary texts I examine, the reconstitution of the self through testimony provides an opportunity to challenge the dominant symbolic order and the cultural inscription that silences the voices of survivors. Part of the task of moving away from the false projection of cultural anxiety onto survivors entails acknowledging the actual bodily experience of trauma, or telling the body's story, instead of inscribing a story onto the body. The writers included in this dissertation linger in the struggle for the subject to re-define herself within a symbolic order that accommodates traumatic experience even as that experience always forces a recognition of the limits of representation. It is this struggle to listen to the body's voice, to process its information, and to move beyond the isolation of trauma that renders the body mute that emerges in the texts examined in this dissertation. The work includes four

chapters focusing on questions about testimony and traumatic memory, both in body and language. The first chapter introduces issues of cross-racial witnessing and relationship between history and individual memory in Sherley Anne Williams' Dessa Rose. In Chapter Two, which examines Anna Deavere Smith's Twilight Los Angeles, city pavement and police tasers replace Dessa's sweatbox as the site of torture, but the site of testimony and official interpretations remains the courtroom. The third chapter focuses more thoroughly on issues related to the female body and cultural response to historical crisis, specifically in transgenerational trauma, in Maxine Hong Kingston's Woman Warrior and Gayl Jones's Corregidora. Finally, Chapter Four uses Robbie McCauley's Sally's Rape to look at rape as a traumatic event that both separates and divides women across racial boundaries. "Pain is full of information," according to Robbie McCauley, who uses her own naked body to evoke the painful legacy of interracial rape.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One: ‘The Quick Gasp of Sympathy’: Scenes of Witnessing in Sherley Anne Williams’ <u>Dessa Rose</u>	14
Chapter Two: Negotiating History and Memory in Anna Deavere Smith’s <u>Twilight Los Angeles</u>	46
Chapter Three: Uncanny Spaces: Trauma, Collective Memory, and Female Body in Gayl Jones’s <u>Corregidora</u> and Maxine Hong Kingston’s <u>Woman Warrior</u>	102
Chapter Four: Between Women: The Body, Memory, and the Legacy of Interracial Rape in Robbie McCauley’s <u>Sally’s Rape</u>	155
Works Cited	203

Introduction

In Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History,

Dori Laub describes a videotaped archive of a Holocaust survivor recounting a Jewish rebellion at Auschwitz. "She was," Laub writes, "relating her memories as an eyewitness of the Auschwitz uprising; a sudden intensity, passion and color were infused into the narrative. She was fully there" (59). In the tape, which Laub presents to an interdisciplinary conference, the woman remembers four chimneys exploding. After the conference screening, the historians in the audience protest the accuracy of her testimony because, in fact, only one chimney had been destroyed. For Laub, this factual discrepancy does not discredit the testimony. In their judgement, the historians fail to recognize the emotional and psychological dimensions of testimony. The event had happened in several ways simultaneously. The survivor's perspective offers insight into the magnitude of the event in the lives and memories of the individuals most intimately affected by it.

The Laub anecdote raises crucial questions about the body, witnessing, and the creation of testimony, which this dissertation will explore. Since trauma evades conscious understanding, memory becomes encoded on a bodily level and resurfaces as possession.¹

According to trauma experts such as Judith Herman and Bessel Van der Kolk, the

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Cathy Caruth describes this phenomenon: "The event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Trauma 4).

survivor relives the original experience through a body memory yet struggles to find words for an experience that exceeds representation. A kind of break between body and language occurs that, as Laub suggests, only a connection to another body can bridge.

Laub explains:

Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction. The victim's narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not come into existence While historical evidence to the event which constitutes the trauma may be abundant and documents in vast supply, the trauma—as a known event and not simply as overwhelming shock—has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of. (57)

The event becomes known through the process of telling the story to listener, “who is . . . the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.” Testimony, therefore, depends on a relationship and a process between the survivor and listener, as memory emerges and reunites a body and voice severed in trauma. These fractured pieces of the survivor's self come together in the reflection of the listener, and memory comes into meaning through this bodily transaction, rather than simply by creating a narrative in language. Laub asserts that “the absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story” (68). The listener becomes an integral part of this awareness and the process of creating meaning from the

chaos of trauma.

Testimony, therefore, exposes the vulnerability of the listener as well. She must face her limitations, her mortality, through the story of another's trauma. According to Laub:

The listener . . . has to be at the same time a witness to the trauma witness and a witness to himself. It is only in this way , through his simultaneous awareness of the continuous flow of those inner hazards both in the trauma witness and in himself, that he can become the enabler of testimony--the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum. (58)

The testimonial encounter happens when the listener comprehends the bodily response accompanying the struggle for a language to express the chaos of trauma, such as in Laub's example when he reads the body of the Holocaust survivor while she tells her story.

This dissertation focuses on the intersubjective dynamic involved in the creation of testimony after trauma, including the alterations and complications of this relationship as it crosses generations, genders, and race or ethnicity and as it emerges within specific cultural contexts shaping its meaning. According to Lawrence Kirmayer:

the distinctive qualities of trauma narratives can also be understood as differences in the culturally constructed *landscapes of memory*, the metaphoric terrain that shapes the distance and effort required to remember affectively charged and socially defined events that initially may be vague,

impressionistic, or simply absent from memory. (175)

The shifting terrains or landscapes of memory provide the ground on which the witnessing encounter, as described by Laub, occurs. This work focuses on the survivor's body within these shifting and varied landscapes and specifically on the interactions between the body as a site of inscription for cultural values and the body as a source for memories in the production of testimony.

Testimony is the public enactment of memory, and context, the space in which the testimony emerges, becomes as important or revealing as the content of the testimony. When looking at the reception of testimony within specific contexts, one must also consider cultural inscriptions of identity onto the body. How we mark different bodies is linked to the transmission and reception of memory and testimony. In attempting to place her experience into words, the survivor must confront language itself and her position within dominant sign system. Discussions of the testimonial encounter, however, seldom reflect on the ideological pull of image and text, the inscription of identity through language, and the marking of bodies within a racial and gender schema. In the case of Laub's story one might ask, how does gender affect the audience's perception of the survivor? Would her agitation have been read differently if she did not express it through a female body? Would the audience have paused a moment more before discrediting her? What happens when testimony occurs in a public space through the body of a woman? Or the racialized body? How does the spectacle of these "othered" bodies interfere with the transmission of testimony?

In a often-quoted scene from Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon describes the

painful dichotomy between his body as he experiences it and as it functions within white colonialist perception, which he refers to as the “historico-racial schema.” In the scene, when a young white child points to Fanon and yells, “Look, a Negro!,” he sets in motion a dynamic that reproduces racist ideologies denying black subjectivity. Fanon writes:

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it’s cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother’s arms: Mamma, the nigger’s going to eat me up. (113-4)

Racism succeeds based on the ability to distort the experience of individuals dehumanized and traumatized under its logic, as the scene above attests. Fanon’s body, his “corporal schema,” is replaced in this scene by the “historico-racial schema” or the mark of colonial history inscribed on his body and reproduced through these interactions with white perception. Fanon reveals a reflexive and violent reading of the black body that silences and distorts his experience. How then would this reading preclude the possibility of testimony, in which the survivor’s body requires a listener, a “blank screen” on which to inscribe its struggling speech? How can the subjectivity of “othered” survivors emerge in a public space that aligns them with corporeality and denies what Bibi Bakare-Yusuf refers

to as “the possession of a voice” in public space. According to Bakare-Yusuf:

The possession of voice becomes significant for both torturer and tortured. For the torturer, the awareness of voice confirms his power, his existence, the presence of a world; for the sufferer, the absence of a world, the awareness of his/her corporeality, the limits of his/her extension in the world. This has been precisely the claim of feminist and black theorists, who have pointed out that the association of blacks and females with corporeality excludes and debars them from the public sphere that makes subjectivity possible. (316)

In a public sphere that always seeks to maintain the hegemony of masculinity and whiteness, what happens to the reconstituting of the traumatized subject through testimony, which must always be publicly enacted to transform the isolation of traumatic experience?

As Houston Baker suggests in his essay "Scene . . . Not Heard," the public reception of testimony from people of color has created a rigid dichotomy between body and voice. Historically, people of color have entered the public space in body only. Their stories have been told by their displayed bodies, already marked as sexually and racially other within dominant cultural ideology. Baker describes use of the voiceless body in testimonies of racial violence: "For the slave--even when he or she is a 'fugitive from southern violence'--is expected to remain silent. At northern abolitionist rallies, for example, the fugitive becomes the 'Negro exhibit.' She silently turns her back to the audience in order to display the stripes inflicted by the southern overseer's whip" (40).

The scars are read as stories told through "silent display" (Baker 40). The image of a damaged black or female body enters the public consciousness without a voice. A silent object in the performance, her body is read to fit seamlessly within a cultural script that already marks her as 'Other.'

In her introduction to Twilight: Los Angeles, theater artist Anna Deavere Smith provides a scene from a crisis in contemporary life in which the survivor's body and voice remain severed from each other and the ability to perceive the suffering of another human being is hindered dramatically by racial difference:

For jurors in Simi Valley, Rodney King appeared to be a threat to the police. Moreover, he had been speeding. The officers were, as far as they were concerned, enforcing the law. Police officers reportedly concluded that King was on the drug PCP, impervious to pain, and therefore not responding to the beating. On the other hand, when I interviewed Rodney King's aunt, she burst into tears as she recounted seeing the beating on television, and 'hearing him holler.' She heard King's cries the first time she saw the tape. Yet a juror in the federal civil rights trial against the officers who also heard King's reactions to the police blows told me that the rest of the jury had difficulty hearing what she and King's aunt had heard. But when, during the deliberations, they focused on the audio rather than the video image, their perspective changed. The physical image of Rodney King had to be taken away for them to agree that he was in pain and responding to the beating. (Twilight xx)

The jury could not see King as a human being capable of suffering under the heavy, relentless blows and King as a large black man simultaneously. The meaning of the scene had been determined before the jurors had entered the courtroom. Ironically, seeing and believing still carry evidentiary weight, but this time the believing seems to precede the seeing. The jurors believe, on some level, that black masculinity is equated solely with aggression that must be controlled, managed, *tamed*. Only when they remove his body from the scene can they interpret it in any other way, only then can they connect the cries with human pain. In this case, King's story was told by visual artifact and not in his own words. Yet even with this record of his suffering, proof that seems to have been required for the historians of Laub's anecdote, the testimony is interpreted within an ideological frame that potentially distorts or denies the survivor's experience.

Although arguably, jurors and historians have very specific and limited goals in their search for meaning, they represent cultural forces participating in the creation of a dominant narrative that has the potential either to reflect or to displace individual memory. In the case of the King video, the jurors created a narrative based on the scene of racial violence in which the black body always performs as perpetrator. King's voice is never heard, which according to Baker, follows a continuum of silenced testimony from people of color in the public sphere. His body, captured on video, speaks for him. His memory alone has no credibility in the court of law. Part of this project includes analyzing scenes of public testimony that regulate bodies and voices and the impact of this regulation on the process of witnessing. These scenes of public testimony locate trauma within a static body or voice. An incomplete memory, an 'official story,' filtered through a racist and sexist

discourse, is offered to future generations. The official story does not account for the crisis of survival. This history-making privileges a dominant declarative memory, the facts and figures of those members in the position to record them, and violently erases the experience of implicit memory,² the collective bodily memory of trauma, which gets "bur[ied]. . . in the frightened fastness of the individual soul" (Taussig 49). The dominant cultural voice performs a kind of dubbing over the scene of violence, imposing itself as the interpretative force and reinscribing oppression through the dislocation of body and voice.

What are the consequences of this rejection on the survivor, on her ability to piece together experience in memory to reintegrate the self fragmented by trauma? How can we see beyond the scene, revealing its construction within a racist framework? Judith Butler asks, "If racism pervades white perception, structuring what can and cannot appear within the horizon of white perception, then to what extent does it interpret in advance 'visual evidence'? And how, then, does such 'evidence' have to be read, and read publicly, *against* the racist disposition of the visible which will prepare and achieve its own inverted perceptions under the rubric of 'what is seen?'" (16). Bearing witness to the suffering of another involves exposing oneself and one's potential as victim, perpetrator, or accomplice. A kind of false witness occurs whenever the listener thwarts the creation of

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According to Lawrence Kirmayer, we demonstrate implicit memory "through our accent, posture, habits of gesture" while declarative memory, based on the "model of consciousness as representation," involves details, images, and facts available for recall (177). Although declarative memory corresponds to common assumptions about the nature of memory, implicit memory offers possibilities for cultural resistance that I would like to explore further.

testimony to avoid its painful truths. This failure to provide an “addressable other” within collective space or cultural institutions reinscribes the mark of trauma onto the racialized or gendered body, thus containing trauma within this inscription and denying the vulnerability of the dominant symbolic order. This dissertation focuses on the creative efforts to read testimony against dominant perception and to counter a landscape of memory that supports white supremacy or misogyny through selective memory, collective forgetting, and denial of testimony that would threaten its hegemony.

Trauma fractures the symbolic order and testimony restores a sense of connection for the survivor. In the performance and literary texts I examine, the reconstitution of the self through testimony provides an opportunity to challenge the dominant symbolic order, and to challenge the “historico-racial schema” or the cultural inscription that silences the voices of survivors. The writers on whom I have chosen to focus in this dissertation linger in the struggle for the subject to re-define herself within a symbolic order that accommodates traumatic experience even as that experience always forces a recognition of the limits of representation. It is this struggle to listen to the body’s voice, to process its information, and to move beyond the isolation of trauma that renders the body mute that emerges in the texts examined in this dissertation. Part of the task of moving away from the false projection of cultural anxiety onto survivors entails acknowledging the actual bodily experience of trauma, or telling the body’s story, instead of inscribing a story onto the body.

This dissertation includes four chapters that focus on questions about testimony and traumatic memory, both in body and language. The playwrights and writers I have

chosen challenge the division of body and voice, or implicit and declarative memory, by looking at the survival experience across temporal and spatial boundaries. De Certeau's suggestion that "memory is a sort of anti-museum: it is not localizable" (108) bears out in the work of these writers. The performance texts use the body to critique the spectacle of the gendered and racialized subject and to probe the discursive boundaries of embodiment and identity. Performers Anna Deavere Smith and Robbie McCauley explore the limitations and possibilities of witnessing in a multiethnic public space. In the literary texts I have chosen, Maxine Hong Kingston, Gayl Jones, and Sherley Anne Williams create experimental narrative strategies to explore the challenges in representing the complex connections between the memory, language, and the body in the testimony. Challenging traditional narratives that restrict in form and content, they build new forms from memory fragments and bodily states. Like Ursa's improvisational blues, Maxine's spontaneous talk-story, and Dessa's jailhouse dreams, these forms include fantasy, temporal and spatial shifts, repetitions, and radical revision of the body's place in narrative.

The first chapter introduces issues of cross-racial witnessing and relationship between history and individual memory in Sherley Anne Williams' Dessa Rose. In the spaces of the plantation, auction block, and jail, memories emerge and become texts for reading and misreading the body's response to the unspeakable horrors of slavery. The chapter focuses specifically on the ways in which these memories counter and resist the 'official' interpretations of Dessa's experience made in the court and by the white writer, Nehemiah, who repeatedly attempts to control Dessa's story and deny her subjectivity within the pages of the historical record he strives to create.

In Chapter Two, which examines Anna Deavere Smith's play, Twilight Los Angeles, the city pavement and police tasers replace the sweatbox as the site of torture, but the site of testimony and official interpretations remains the courtroom. Just as Williams explores and exposes the biased perspective of the supposedly objective historian through the character of Nehemiah, Anna Deavere Smith challenges the video evidence presented in the Simi Valley courtroom where the officers who beat Rodney King were tried. The chapter focuses on issues of testimony and the visual realm, including video and media technology that rapidly reproduces the image of the violated body while silencing the survivor's voice. Anna Deavere Smith places the video image on pause, and through the community of voices she creates in her performance and play, she lingers in a twilight of meaning, an unsettled space which acknowledges the belatedness of traumatic experience and the possibilities of community testimony.

The third chapter focuses more thoroughly on issues related to the female body and cultural response to historical crisis, specifically in transgenerational trauma, in Maxine Hong Kingston's Woman Warrior and Gail Jones's Corregidora. Informed by recent theories about the transgenerational transmission of traumatic experience, it asks, how does trauma, in bodily memory and narrative, reproduce its own conditions and allow the female body to remain trapped in painful silence within individuals, family systems, and the community? How do writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Gail Jones address the unbearable weight of the testimony across generations and create an "addressable other" to counter the reproduction of traumatic experience and to transform the female body from an object that bears the mark of trauma within cultural narratives to the active

creator of her own testimony?

Finally, Chapter Four looks at rape as a traumatic event that divides women across racial boundaries in Robbie McCauley's Sally's Rape. "Pain is full of information," according to Robbie McCauley, who uses her own naked body to evoke a traumatic history and to reverse the internalization of shame and guilt by addressing the unspeakable and creating a space for possible dialogue.

Chapter One

“The Quick Gasp of Sympathy”:

Scenes of Witnessing in Sherley Anne Williams’ Dessa Rose”

Sherley Anne Williams’ Dessa Rose opens with an imprisoned female slave recounting in “halting speech and hesitant manner,” her experience in a recent slave rebellion (10). Her audience, the white writer Nehemiah, tries to negotiate the discrepancy between her confused presentation and the violent acts of which she has been accused. Like in the scene at the Holocaust conference described by Dori Laub and examined in the introduction to this dissertation, the survivor’s testimony faces the challenge of misinterpretation when read against the biased perceptions of the survivor’s body or an unyielding commitment to factual evidence. This chapter addresses the problems of cross-racial witnessing within Dessa Rose, a novel that exposes the psychological and representational processes devised to avoid the accusation implicit in testimony that speaks the truth about the pain of racist systems. Beginning with the violated body of Dessa Rose, an imprisoned slave, the narrative reveals the desire to constrict and contain the possible signification of her body, even in relation to her own story. The text deals with the production of an official narrative that refuses to recognize survivor testimony, mirroring the original violation threatening to annihilate the survivor’s voice. The story told is one of interpretation and reception, of readings and misreadings

based on the identities inscribed on survivors' bodies within a racist cultural code. It interrogates the spectacle of the racialized body, to question how seeing detracts from listening and impedes testimony. The novel reveals the gaps in sight, the shock evoked by images that transgress the rigid binary of black and white, and ultimately suggests possibilities for moving beyond the spectacle of racial difference into a realm of empathy. The deep connections between social context and testimony that the novel implies, allow for the exploration of the listener's integral role in understanding the crisis. By placing emphasis on the position of the receiver, we can see how cultural constructions of racial difference interfere with the way we receive evidence and acknowledge violence done to bodies of racialized or gendered others. In its ending, Dessa Rose suggests the possibility of creating a space in which body and voice can unite to speak experience and be heard, where the survivor's story penetrates the witness, breaking the seal that separates self and other.

Shirley Anne Williams' Dessa Rose raises questions about trauma, the body, and witnessing across difference through the story of her protagonist, an escaped slave who has experienced unspeakable brutality and bears the psychic and bodily scars to prove it. Her scars function as a visual text, as a site of contested meaning, in the novel. The plot centers around several scenes of cross-racial witnessing which provide multiple readings of the scars and the violence they represent. Each scene evokes painful memories in its witnesses and forces them to confront the violence of history. The scenes are particularly useful when examining the construction of identity through racial difference and how memory is negotiated and experienced. How is trauma revealed or concealed in each

scene? How does the body as visual evidence work with the translation of memory into narrative?

The novel is framed by the jailhouse scenes in which Dessa must face the humiliating demands of Nehemiah, the white writer who wants to determine her place within history. The setting reflects the imprisonment of her memory and her ability to reconstruct the story of her own past. Her captured memory must struggle against the forces of a racist society and the responses of her own psyche to trauma. The jail cell mirrors the psychic entrapment, suggesting the relationship between body and memory after trauma. Both traumatic memory and the jail are part of a whole, components of a larger bodily structure, but ones that resist change, remaining fixed within an otherwise dynamic whole.

In his introduction to Remapping Memory: The Politics of TimeSpace, Jonathan Boyarin posits that the body is “a ‘rubric’ in which spatiality and temporality coexist indissolubly, in which their necessary unity is most clearly shown. When you die in time you dissolve in space” (21). In trauma, the body image becomes fixed in time and space, as consciousness constantly relives the experience through the involuntary repetition of memory. Traumatic memory exists in two distinct forms: the relentlessly recurring image, stereotyped and static, and the unconscious bodily response to conditions that bear psychic resemblance to the original experience. The traumatic event disorients the individual's relationship to her own body in situation by creating a break in consciousness. Since trauma evades conscious understanding, memory becomes encoded on a bodily level and this embodied memory is experienced without a direct link to the ‘story’ of the

original experience.

The break between these two types of memory shape the understanding and experience of traumatic histories on both individual and cultural levels, as the process of representing the past mirrors the fracturing of memory after trauma. The survivor's struggle to find words that will unite the haunting images and senses is often thwarted by outside authority, which maintains the privilege to interpret her experience. In Dessa's case, she must face the violation that has severed her body from her voice within her own psyche and in her interactions with Nehemiah. Her memories remain 'jailed' by the traumatic experience and its reception in a public space imbued with white racist ideology.

The woman who exists in the jail cell at the beginning of the novel has suffered through the most excruciating emotional and physical pain. Dessa has lived in slavery her entire life, but the events immediately preceding the novel's opening surpass her ordinary encounters with evil, and I would argue, have left her deeply traumatized. Nine months pregnant, she has been sentenced to die immediately after the birth of her child for killing a white slave trader. She has not been allowed to bathe or see daylight since her imprisonment began. In the weeks before her trial and imprisonment, Dessa lived through the murder of her unborn child's father, a brutal beating that involved whipping her across her genitals, and confinement in a sweatbox, where she remained in her own excrement for days, unable to sit, stand, or lie down. When she emerged from the sweatbox, she was tied to a horse and dragged around the yard because the slave trader to whom she had been sold decided he needed to impress the mistress of the plantation.

The opening scene reflects Dessa's position as an African-American woman and

survivor in the 19th century south. Her fate has been decided by a court of white men, who failed to recognize her status as a human being, let alone as the victim of an atrocity. The meaning of her experience conforms to her position within the cultural script, which has designated her body as an aggressive force that can never be violated. Within this context her story is shaped to reflect the dominant racial ideology and to affirm its beliefs in white supremacy and black inferiority.

The events leading to Dessa's imprisonment occur before the novel begins and are not reported in complete exposition at the opening. Dessa herself gives very little factual information about her experience. Instead, the novel relies on her encounters with other people to expose her trauma. The trauma speaks through witnesses, the characters who not only hear the details of Dessa's story, but who also on some fundamental level share the terror, the shame, and the shock that she can only begin to comprehend herself. Several people receive the facts of her story, but not all become witnessing figures in Dori Laub's sense of the phenomenon. I am particularly interested in the responses of the two white characters, Nehemiah and Rufel, because their interactions with Dessa provide the opportunity to examine the problems of white perception.

Recent scholarship on race has focused on decentering whiteness and on making apparent the constructedness of white racial identity. In her essay "When We Are Capable of Stopping, We Begin to See," cultural critic Ruth Frankenburg argues that whiteness as an identity relies on the enactment of particular behaviors that become naturalized through repetition: "I have been performing whiteness, and having whiteness performed upon me since—or actually before—the moment I was born"(4). In Dessa Rose, Nehemiah and

Rufel's performance or enactment of whiteness becomes apparent in their specific and complex responses to Dessa as a survivor. Just as Dori Laub contends, the testimony exposes the receiver as well as the survivor. In this case, their reactions to Dessa, their interpretations of her scars and her words, proves their position within the racist scheme that tries to undo her. Through their interactions with Dessa, they must face themselves and make a choice. They must decide between continuing to act as perpetrators by failing to recognize Dessa's testimony and resisting the identification with whiteness and the racial fictions that deny black subjectivity.

Susan Stanford Freidman describes "scripts of relational positionality. . . [that] regard identity as situationally constructed and defined at the crossroads of different systems of alterity and stratification" (17). Relational positionality acknowledges the multiple forces at work in the manifestation of identity. 'Scripts of relational positionality' contest a fixed reading that denies the effect of context, cultural conditioning, and fluidity of individual relationships. Their textuality resists binaries, such as black/white and male/female, that allow individuals to remain defined according to an oppositional structure that privileges one term at the expense of the other. The initial script of post-traumatic experience relies on this kind of binary structure. The memory of the survivor remains beyond the survivor's grasp, its meaning locking the survivor in a rigid, dichotomy of victim/perpetrator. Relational positionality can be compared to the movement away from this fixity, when the survivor creates a new, dynamic relationship

between the self in memory and in the present.¹

Dessa Rose provides examples of these two types of scripts, particularly in relation to the process of making meaning from a traumatic experience. These scripts allow insight into the psyches of the individuals who participate in their construction, giving the opportunity to hear from survivors of racism's violence and "to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters" (Morrison 12). In the novel's early scenes with Nehemiah and Dessa, the relationship between them is determined within the code of racial ideology. Dessa's story and the memory that informs it, therefore, remain trapped; there can only be one possible reading based on her position within the racial binary. Later, at the abandoned plantation, a border space between past and present worlds, the complexities of Dessa's story emerge.

The first page of the novel introduces the reader to a brief time-line of the events that have led to Dessa's imprisonment. Nehemiah has created this strictly factual list and desires to flesh out the details through his interactions with Dessa, the subject of his research. He regards Dessa as an opportunity to advance the cause of his most recent project, a book on managing rebellious slaves, to follow his successful first book, *The Master's Complete Guide to Dealing with Slaves and Other Dependents*. However, despite his persistence, he finds the task of moving from his sketchy rendering to a more

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In her groundbreaking analysis, Judith Herman describes the necessity for survivors to transcend the boundaries that limit their understanding of the traumatic experience and its implications on the present. This process entails creating a dynamic space in which the survivor finds multiple readings of the experience to combat the relentless repetition of a single memory. See Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror, (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

complete portrait nearly impossible. The missing component is Dessa's memory. He attributes her silence to ignorance or insolence. Failing to understand the consequences of such an extreme experience on the memory of its survivor, he believes that a program of deprivation, threats, and manipulation will force the story from her closed lips.

Dessa lips remain locked in silence, however, in part because the meaning of the events has been evacuated from her memory. While she keeps images of the moments leading up to the death of Kaine and the sweatbox, the content of the image remains unchanged in its relentless repetition. Divorced from emotions, the images record the scene in the past with precise detail while eliding the element of suffering. Clearly intended to break her spirit, the sweatbox in fact fractures her memory. She survives the experience, it seems, through unconscious separation from it:

Memory stopped the day Emmelina met her as she had come out of the fields. Dessa came back to that moment again and again, recognizing it as dead, knowing there was no way to change it, arriving at it from various directions, refusing to move beyond it. Out there was nightmare, Kaine's body, cold and clammy beneath her hands, Master laughing in her face, the horror that scarred her inner thighs, snaking around her lower abdomen and hips in ropy keliods that gleamed with patent-leather smoothness. (56-7)

The 'death' of memory marks the site of trauma. The moment has lost its fluidity, its ability to change with Dessa as she continues to move through time in the present. It remains fixed and silent in her consciousness, and the novel's narrative, circling around the

moment, reflects this gap. She remembers her life on the plantation, their labor, their games, the comfort she received, and the love she knew. Italics indicate the separate space in which memories live.

"The absence of an empathetic listener," Dori Laub suggests "or more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story" (Laub 67). Dessa does not intentionally withhold the details of her worst hour from herself or others. In complete isolation, she does not have access to the memories that would form her story. She only has the physical evidence, her scars, to remind her that something has happened to her. A brief description of her days after the rebellion from the coffin, provided by the third person narrator, signals this gap in memory: "Even when others spoke around the campfire, during the days of their freedom, about their trials under slavery, Dessa was silent. Their telling awoke no echoes in her mind. That part of the past lay sealed in the scars between her thighs" (58). Her most brutal memories remain trapped within her body.

This point at which "memory stopped" is crucial to the understanding of the novel's representation of traumatic experience. The scars, which Mae Henderson describes as "inscriptions [that] produce the meaning of black female subjectivity in the discursive domain of slavery"(126-7), form a text that multiple readers must negotiate, including Dessa herself. In the first section of the novel, Nehemiah and the white male court define them as a mark of insubordination and beastliness. Within this context, the scars remain a source of pain and shame for Dessa, and although she faces their constant

reminder of her pain, her conscious mind protects her from piecing together the incident that created this brutal legacy. Thus, the context and her public seem to define her ability to remember, and to establish a psychic space in which her pain creates its own language.

This break between the kind of memory that can be recalled in language and image and the kind that can only be sensed by the body has been identified as defining feature of traumatic response (Herman 1992; Van der Kolk 1996). For Dessa, the break in memory, the point of rupture in language, occurs across her genitals. The connection between her sexuality and the suppression of her memory is difficult to ignore. Kobena Mercer posits that "Sexuality is a front-line point of access to the colonised psyche" (137). The scarring marks an attempt to write over Dessa's access to the power and pleasure of her own body, to inscribe the law of racial ideology, and to erase violently her desire to claim her life as her own. Not only is she silenced within the public sphere, but also within her own body. Her ability to connect, to communicate on a most intimate level with another human being, has been hindered both physically and psychically. By brutally damaging her genitals during her pregnancy, the slave master threatens to alter the association between the love she received from Kaine and the child that will pass through her in birth.

She struggles to find words to describe her recent experiences. She relies on images, sensory memories, telling the story from a survivor's perspective. Meaning cannot be extracted through simple narration of facts. Lawrence Kirmayer suggests that "Traumatic experience is not a story but a cascade of experiences, eruptions, crevasses, a sliding of tectonic plates that undergird the self. These disruptions then give rise to an

effort to interpret and so to smooth, stabilize, recalibrate" (182). During her imprisonment, Dessa lives through the constant 'disruption' in her psychic life following trauma. Her struggle to know her experience occurs on multiple levels. The memories of her previous life flood the dark, damp space, grounded in the soil of death and rebirth. The bodily nature of memory becomes tangible as Dessa moves across the floor of her cell: "Always, whether her eyes were open or closed, Kaine walked with her, or mammy. Jeeter tugged at her head-rag or Carrie Mae Lefonia, Martha-- They sat with her in the cellar. She grieved in this presence as she had not done since their loss" (51). Through memory, she creates a space in which her body and soul, even for a fleeting moment, can feel its former connection to community and intimacy: "Dessa flowered briefly, fled in dry spasm, gone suddenly as the dream had come, so lifelike had she felt herself with him, knew herself among Carrie and them, been swept up in the warmth of their presence" (4).

Although her body relives moments of love by raising memories, she appears to have lost the bodily link to the horror of the events that follow Kaine's death. Nehemiah describes her lack of affect when talking about the violence through which she recently lived: "It had been an entrancing recital, better in its way than a paid theatrical . . . all narrated with about as much expression as one gave to a 'Howdy' with any passing stranger" (13). The flatness of her narration reveals more about her condition than Nehemiah has the capacity to recognize. It is precisely at the point of this flatness that the most powerful experience has been embedded. In her article "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self," Roberta Culbertson describes the detachment of memory's emotional component from the factual

recounting the survivor's past:

The one who speaks without emotion presents only what [Charlotte] Delbo calls an 'external' memory—socially constructed, skating along the surfaces of words and engaging the intellect—not the body's reexperience, which because it is a recapitulation of the past, cannot be spoken about or related at the moment, just as it could not be originally. It is not known in words, but in the body. (169)

Nehemiah dismisses Dessa's failure to display feelings. For him, it signals her bestial status. Within his racist worldview, Dessa does not possess a moral compass to guide her actions or responses.

Before and during the telling of her story, Dessa faces efforts to control the meaning of the events leading to her imprisonment. Dessa's testimony does not conform to his expectations and desire. Failing to see her as a human who has just suffered extreme trauma, Nehemiah reacts with doubt and confusion to her attempts to present her story:

There had been nothing in the darky's halting speech and hesitant manner to suggest the slave revolt leader she was convicted of being. Held spellbound by that very discrepancy, Adam Nehemiah had leaned forward from his perch on the cellar steps the better to hear the quiet rasp of her voice. He hadn't caught every word; often he had puzzled overlong at some unfamiliar idiom or phrase, now and then losing the tale in the welter of names the darky called. Or he had sat, fascinated, forgetting to write.

Yet the scene was vivid in his mind as he deciphered the darky's account from his hastily scratched notes and he reconstructed it in his journal as though he remembered it word for word. (10)

The 'halting speech' with its gaps and uncertainties fits within the realm of probable responses to trauma, when "language is in process and in trial" (Felman 17), but this connection to deeper truths is quickly overwritten by Nehemiah's hand. Unable to tolerate the ambiguity that threatens to alter his relation to Dessa, Nehemiah seals the scene with his own words, fitting her story within his own. She provides him with an opportunity to demonstrate his expertise to the wealthy southern slave holders. Her story will allow him into a world he has existed on the fringes of his entire life. He signifies authority, the experts who are in the position to record events, impressions, and history. Through his character, we see the construction of an official story, one that uses the facts of the event to serve its own end. She must not only escape from slavery itself, but also from the legacy of the brutal institution, from the desire to own not only her body but also her story: to tell it, record it, interpret it so that it meets the needs of the dominant culture.

Nehemiah's preconceptions about slaves lead him to react incredulously to the information he receives from Dessa. He cannot, for example, fathom that slaves practiced birth control and abortion to thwart 'breeding' efforts of the slaveholders (11, 42). His repeated questioning about the file that he believes must have been part of the escape from the coffle often disrupts Dessa speech, causing her to shut down in silence.

Nehemiah's response to Dessa's body signals his inability to identify with her as a human being. He finds her repulsive and compares her jail cell to an animal's den, where

she sits on her 'haunches.' Through his reaction to Dessa, Williams exposes a subjectivity completely informed by a racial ideology. At every moment of their interaction, he positions himself as superior in relation to Dessa. He is made in direct relation to her unmaking. In the close space, he fears contamination: "He sniffed gingerly at his sleeve now, but could detect no telltale odor. Really, he must speak to Hughes about making provision for another meeting place. Being closeted with the darky within the small confines of the cellar was an unsettling experience" (16). He worries that he will become infected by her body, that not only will he carry her smell away with him, but that the difference between them has narrowed, and that his whiteness has been corrupted by her blackness.

At the end of the novel, Dessa finds herself faced with the same man who tried to violate her in language, and she is forced to return to the most painful moments of her life. Nemi wants her to strip naked in front of male authorities, to display her wounds as evidence of her guilt. By this time, however, the scars that lie across her genitals are no longer proof of her wild, untamed nature. They cannot be used as this kind of evidence, suggesting a transformation in the symbolic value of the scars. The difference is in the relationship with the women. When the women see the damage done to her body, they do not blame her. A transformation occurs between these two scenes. The transformation involves Dessa and Rufel, the white woman abandoned by her husband on a dilapidated plantation.

In Give Birth to Brightness, Sherley Anne Williams writes that "As the object of an almost always illicit desire and the butt of ribald, taunting jokes, the white woman is one

of the most traditional figures in the culture and history of Black people in America” (218). In the tradition Williams describes, the white woman has no redeeming qualities. She is selfish, childish, and mean, calculating and manipulative, using her femininity and her status as the unattainable sexual object to undermine black masculinity. In Dessa Rose, white womanhood is a menacing, haunting presence that must be confronted, demystified, and transcended. Through the character of Rufel, whose position within society has been shattered when her husband abandons her, the sanctity of white womanhood becomes corrupted. She is transformed from the belle of the land, an image she can only resurrect in memory, to ‘Miz Ruint.’ In this case, her ‘ruin’ takes on positive connotations because it is the deconstruction of white womanhood as defined in relation to its ‘purity’ or separation from blackness.

The destruction of Rufel as the emblem of white womanhood occurs as Dessa emerges from her traumatic unmaking and begins the process of reconstitution. There is a connection between the two women that warrants further exploration. As their relationship progresses, their struggle to define themselves in relation to and away from each other becomes the force that pushes the narrative forward. Evelyn Hammonds describes the relationship between black and white womanhood in a racist culture: “there is the way black women's sexuality has been constructed in a binary opposition to that of white women: it is rendered simultaneously invisible, visible (exposed), hypervisible, and pathologized in dominant discourses” (170). As Dessa emerges from her trauma to claim her own survival and story, she participates in the creation of a narrative that rebuilds her psyche through the destruction of the binary defining black and white women.

In her previous life as a field servant, Dessa had very little exposure to white women. She did, however, have one encounter that would change her life forever:

Once the white man's questioning had driven her into that desert and Young Mistress had risen from the waste, clothes torn, hair screaming, red-faced, red-mouthed. The four red welts in the suddenly pallid face, the white spot where the thumb had pressed the base of the red neck filled Dessa with a terror and glee so intense they were almost physical. Frightened at her own response, she was almost ashamed--not of the deed. No. Never that, but surely it was wrong to delight so deeply in anyone else's pain. She had seen the blood and bits of pink flesh beneath her own fingernails, felt the loose skin of Young Mistress's neck. And clamped her mouth shut, clanked her arms across her chest. She should have killed the white woman; they would have killed her then. It would have all been over; none of this would have begun. (57)

For Dessa, the image of a battered white woman marks the beginning of her painful journey, and her violent encounter with 'Young Mistress' after the death of her beloved Kaine has altered her physical and emotional landscape. She finds herself left with an ambivalence toward her actions and the emotions they evoke. Psychic pain returns in the form of embodied memory when she encounters another white woman, Rufel, after her rescue from the jail. According to trauma experts such as Judith Herman and Bessel Van der Kolk, the emotional and physical responses of the original experience are raised when the survivor perceives a potential threat in a new situation. Dessa awakens to Rufel's

presence before she has an opportunity to come to terms with her survival from the threat of execution. The initial scene in which Dessa feels the shock seeing Rufel so close to her marks the beginning of a series of moments, of shocking scenes, that alter the dynamic between the visual field of evidence and cross-racial witnessing.

The plantation functions as an open, unfinished space, in opposition to the jailhouse, and its inhabitants undergo change in this unsettled realm. It has been abandoned by its owner, Rufel's husband, and the slaves who once worked its land. In the center of the house there is a staircase that leads to nowhere, the result of an incomplete expansion project. No one has checked in on Rufel and her children. She has been left in ruin, to degenerate with the walls around her. Like an underwater shipwreck, the house seems to blur the boundaries between the artificial and the organic as it becomes consumed by its natural surroundings. It moves from a work in progress with a structural plan devised in strict accordance with societal norms, to a textual site whose meaning and function changes according to the desires and needs of its current occupants. As a site of memory and loss, it allows these occupants to linger in its ambiguity long enough for traumatic memory to sift through its multiple layers of meaning without becoming set in a single interpretation. For the fugitive slaves and Rufel, the degeneration of the plantation and the world it represented allows for a transformation in identity. The structure no longer holds, and neither do the identities once fixed within it.

Four scenes set on the plantation disrupt the violence of the original encounter, to which the desired outcome was death of both women, black and white. Each scene involves witnessing across difference, particularly in relation to the female body,

maternity, and sexuality. These scenes involve Dessa and Rufel and change their relationship to each other and their sense of their own identity as women. The scenes lead to the ability to serve as true witnesses to each other as survivors. They allow the women to know the other's struggle on multiple levels: emotionally, intellectually, and bodily and as mothers, daughters, lovers, and finally, as friends. The categories of difference that construct black and white womanhood in opposition to one another and prevent witnessing are broken down through empathy. Their encounter forces them to confront their own demons, reflected in their initial reaction to the other's story of survival and means of coping with the struggles in their lives.

Dessa awakens from her sleep and asks for her baby. What she sees is, "The white woman, her shoulder still bare, the curly black head and brown face of a new baby nestled at her breast, faced her now. 'See?'" (90). Dessa cannot fathom the possibility that maternal concern crosses racial boundaries. Nothing in her experience allows for such a possibility. Her reaction confirms the terror the scene evokes for her: "Naaaaaawwww!" The scream rushed out of her on an explosion of breath. She saw the glass-colored eyes buck before her own squeezed tight. The covers weighed her arms and legs; some voice screamed, 'Annabelle. Annabelle, get Ada! She starting up again!'" (90). She is faced with the sight of her child in the arms of the enemy, the final possession of her soul. For Dessa the sight raises feelings of violation, a revisitation with the most traumatic moment of her life. She awakes to see the only piece of Kaine she has left being swallowed by horrifying whiteness. The reader is aware that Rufel means no harm to the baby. Dessa, however, is startled by the appropriation of the mothering role.

The violence has caused Dessa's milk to dry up. The white woman becomes a surrogate for her, nurturing her child while Dessa heals. This moment signals a shift from Dessa as violated body to healing spirit. She is faced with the enemy, the pain the white female body evokes, and experiences the transformation of that pain. This scene introduces the white woman's role in Dessa's recovery. This is not to suggest that Rufel's role in this recovery is intentional or based in her own good will. She enters into a process of discovery as well. Her attitude toward Dessa, whom she often refers to as 'the wench,' is not much different from Nehemiah's at first. The critical difference between Rufel and Nehemiah occurs on a bodily level of empathy. Rufel responds physically to Dessa's suffering.

Rufel's act shocked not only Dessa, but all the refugees hiding at the plantation:

No one would ever know, she had assured herself, and feeling the feeble tug at her nipple, he's hungry and only a baby. Lulled as she was by the gentle rhythm and spent by the drama of the morning's events, she had dozed--and awakened to the startled faces of Ada and Harker. Their consternation had been almost comic. Ada had stuttered and Harker had gaped. In the pause Rufel had recovered her own composure, feeling somehow vindicated in her actions by their very confusion. She had confounded them--rendered Ada speechless. (105)

In this scene, the image shocks. The image of a white breast and a black mouth suggests a startling relationship, an unfathomable intimacy. It marks the beginning of 'Miz Ruint' emergence. Whether or not it may strike some as essentialist, Williams' Rufel makes her

decision to nurse Dessa's baby based on an instinct or drive to protect the helpless infant. One could argue that she is simply fighting two strands of cultural indoctrination. The first involves her role as mother. The second relates to her concern about appearances. Her feeling of shame upon being discovered reveals her internalization of the white supremacist ideology of her time. Either way, it becomes clear that the former wins the struggle.

The response to Rufel's act of surrogate mothering establishes what Marta Sanchez refers to as "[t]he geographical and psychological space...[that] marks a cultural borderlands where a marginalized white woman and a female slave fugitive encounter each other" (23). The encounter that this space allows problematizes components of gender and ethnic identity that have been naturalized in the dominant sphere.

As she sits by Dessa's bed, Rufel relives the glory of her former life in an incantation of memory. Unable to decipher her speech, Dessa believes that Rufel suffers from delusions. Dessa does recognize a repeated reference to 'Mammy.' Rufel's references allude to Dorcas, a servant purchased by her father as a childhood birthday gift. The white woman's love for the deceased care-giver remains fixed at the level of childhood. Rufel loved the way Dorcas cared for her. Even in memory, 'Mammy' provides sustenance for Rufel's fledgling ego, as she feeds on the dead woman's image. The psychic dimensions of their relationship bear a resemblance to Virginia Woolf's well-known metaphor comparing women to mirrors that enhance the male reflection but

receive no reciprocal magnification.² Dorcas made Rufel beautiful dresses, told her she possessed a certain beauty, and listened to her recount in great detail every social engagement. And Rufel accepted, even demanded, this treatment like a small child who expects her mother to live for her alone.

When Dessa can no longer tolerate Rufel's erasure of Dorcas's identity, she invokes memories of her own biological mother, which reveal the constraints on black motherhood under slavery. At the very moment she is disrupting Rufel's naive ideas about her relationship to Dorcas, Dessa also exposes slavery brutally hypocritical treatment of motherhood. Dessa forces Rufel to see a distinction between 'Mammy' as a cultural fiction, an identity created by the complete denial of black female subjectivity, and the real woman who did have any choice but to provide care for this white child.

Language and the ability to determine the meaning of history belong to Dessa in this scene. Overwhelmed by the need to voice the previously unspoken details of her own mother's life, Dessa performs a testimony of naming that implicates her listener, Rufel, in the crime of erasing the individual identity of Dorcas, the woman she has known only as 'Mammy' for her youth. Toni Morrison's call for a focus on the individuals who benefit from racism and the impact of this benefit on their subjectivity is answered in the interaction between the two women.³ When Dessa seizes the scene to tell the story of her mother's strength and loss, she causes Rufel to acknowledge her own blindness, however

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Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt, 1929.

³

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. (New York: Vintage, 1992).

desperately she fights it. It is Rufel who is exposed, even though Dessa discloses the depth of her grief over her mother's pain.

Rufel does not willingly submit to this transformation in consciousness. Instead, she desperately seeks to undermine Dessa, particularly as one who testifies to painful truths that Rufel has been sheltered from her entire life. In her search for evidence to discredit Dessa's voice, Rufel targets Dessa's greatest vulnerability, the trauma involving her scars. Rufel learns Dessa's scars from Nathan, and her initial reaction mixes disbelief and horror:

Rufel could see the scene as he described it. The darky himself tying the wench's hands, looping the lead rope over the pommel of his saddle, walking the horse across the yard and around to the front of the house as she stumbled along behind, seeing the darkies lining the drive, some as he said, hiding their faces, others staring straight ahead. Had her own people been there, Rufel wondered, her own Rose? She could almost feel the fire that must have lived in the wench's thighs. (144)

The violence becomes tangible to Rufel in that moment. She comes close to living it as it engages her sense of sight, sound, and touch. Yet even after hearing Nathan and Dessa's story about life in slavery she finds "it hard to reconcile" her memories with the living bodies before her. What appears to be most difficult for her to come to terms with is the possibility that "her own people" take part daily in the brutal system of slavery. At each moment of witnessing, Rufel must confront her own complicity. For Rufel, this complicity translates mostly into willful ignorance. She had asked her husband not to whip slaves in

the yard. Standing with Nathan, she wonders if he had simply moved the whippings to the woods, where screams could not be heard from the house.

As her own position within the slavery becomes difficult to ignore, she seeks safety in finding just cause for Dessa's pain. "'She must have done something pretty bad,'" Rufel contends, although she is "unable herself to imagine such a crime" (145). She attempts to excuse Dessa's former mistress by relying on stereotypes about black female sexuality that would figure Dessa as a seductress of white men. Nathan quickly disproves this accusation and exposes Rufel's pettiness for needing visual proof, to see Dessa's scars, before she believes her story. In her search for validation of her own life, Rufel must face the truth that Dessa represents. Through her relationship with Dessa, Rufel undergoes a radical transformation in her identity as a white woman.

Rufel becomes obsessed with discrediting Dessa's story. An unwilling witness, Rufel wants to annihilate the story. However, in one unexpected moment, her desire to escape is violently thwarted. Immersed in her own thoughts, she opens the door to the bedroom and finds Dessa standing nude. For one instant, the shock of facing Dessa's scars overwhelms her ability to deny the violence of slavery:

Barely able to suppress the quick gasp of sympathy surprised from her by that glimpse of the dark body, and acutely embarrassed, Rufel closed the door. The wench's loins looked like a mutilated cat face. Scar tissue plowed through her pubic region so no hair would ever grow there again. Rufel leaned weakly against the door, regretting what she had seen. The wench had a right to hide her scars, her pain . . . (166-7)

Distressed at what she has just witnessed, Rufel must acknowledge that Dessa's scars, and the story they tell, belong to her. Her body, once viewed as public property available to any white's proprietary gaze, becomes her own, finally 'private' in Rufel's sight. To gaze at her scars without Dessa's knowledge signifies another violation, another attempt to steal Dessa's control over her own body, its physical and psychic meaning, and it would appear that Rufel recognizes this violation, feeling ashamed at her own behavior.

Unknowingly, Rufel's search leads her to discredit her own ideas about black female sexuality. Following this narrative sequence, Williams destabilizes the construction of white female sexuality through character testimony and a scene that shocks the characters into facing that which they previously thought inconceivable. When the group find Rufel and Nathan in bed together, they can only manage a "startled gasp" and the words "Mis--Nathan!" (171).

Nathan's history provides a glimpse into the constraints placed on white female sexuality in the 19thC. Miz Lorraine, his former mistress who used her power over male slaves to satisfy her sexual needs, would have been considered a freak if she had expressed her sexuality openly or with a white man:

Nature was strong in her; she did not call on him that often, no more than once or twice every month or so, but when she did, she kept him awake most of the night and sometimes kept him for a day or even two. If she had tried to satisfy her sexual needs with white men, even ones outside her own class, she would have had no way of ensuring their silence. If a black man boasted, she could have his life. He never learned who else, if anyone,

besides her maid knew of the mistress's habits. He talked to no one about what he did and no one talked to him. This is what Miz Lorraine wanted: to be in control. (170)

The relationship between Nathan and Miz Lorraine reveals a complex dynamic of abuse and desire. The situation proves the falseness of white femininity, how it constrains and denies essential elements of subjectivity, and the power even the weakest member of white society had over Black slaves. It also makes clear the desire that always accompanies abuse of power. Miz Lorraine, therefore, is exposed in a scene of her own creation, and Nathan comes away with more knowledge of the struggles in her soul than she would have ever intended.

Dessa reacts with outrage to the sight of Rufel and Nathan. She feels betrayed by Nathan, and his lust disgusts her. The man most deeply associated with her liberation has surrendered to a white woman, the enemy who threatened her bodily and psychic integrity. Dessa was whipped after she slapped her former mistress for insinuating that the plantation master had fathered the baby she carried. With that accusation, the mistress denied Dessa's connection to Kaine, the man she loved and had just lost to white violence. Her punishment, again, sought to control, if not destroy, her sexuality.

The scene with Rufel and Nathan awakens a sense of searching in Dessa and provides Harker with an opportunity to reveal his feelings for her. When Rufel demands that Dessa apologize for calling her "Miz Ruint" and threatens to thwart Harker's plan, Dessa refuses and expresses her contempt for any plan that requires trusting a white woman. An argument ensues, and one of the men, Ned, calls the black women 'mules'

who were jealous of Nathan's relationship with Rufel. The attack leaves Dessa shaking with rage: "And then there was silence. Silence and a fire-burst where Ned's head should've been when I looked at him. I had to close my eyes. Was this what they thought of us? Mules. I was so choked I couldn't speak" (198). She thinks of the damage done to each woman in the room, their bodies used to breed and to please someone else's desire. And she thinks of Kaine, and wonders, "Had he really wanted me to be like Mistress. . .like Miz Ruint, that doughy skin and slippery hair?"(199).

The white woman's value as a desirable object correlates directly to Dessa's feelings of shame at her brutalized body. When Harker tells her that her scars only intensify his desire for her, he assigns high value to her status as a rebel and a survivor. The white woman's unmarked skin exposes her privileged life and her lack of struggle, but it also reveals her status as a well-kept possession. Dessa's scars are read as a sign of her subjectivity reaching beyond the boundaries of property toward self-possession, despite the dear price paid for such an assertion.

This reading of her scars against Rufel's 'doughy skin,' and the desire it suggests, elicits an emotional response that raises the memory of the sweatbox. For the first time in the narrative, Dessa remembers the lifetime of moments she spent trapped in the enclosed space:

I had cried for a long time in that box, from pain, from grief, from filth.

That filth, my filth. You know, this do something to you. To have to lay up in filth. You not a baby--baby have clean skin, clean mind. He think his shit is interesting; he want to show it to you. But you know this dirt.

Laying up in my own foulment made me know how low I was. And I cried. I was like an animal; whipped like one; in dirt like one. I had never known people could do peoples like this. And I had the marks of that on my privates. (207)

The point at which 'memory stopped' opens up when Dessa must face her own sexuality after seeing Nathan and Rufel's coupling and learning about Harker's attraction to her. She has to deal with not only the anger at what she had been denied, which Rufel's unmarked body evokes, but also the startling possibility that, even after the defilement of her 'privates,' someone could still find her worth loving. The realization that she "had never known people could do peoples like this" proves that the incident shocked her psyche, moving well beyond her previous exposure to the human potential for cruelty. That shock created the gap in memory, a gap that could only be traversed with force of another shock, which returned her to the point at which the memory was sealed.

In her discussion of the "textual healing" and "the erotic as a foundation for resistance" (526), Farah Griffen argues that "heterosexuality acts as a plot catalyst to action and as a narrative resolution throughout Williams' novel" (531). At one level, this argument appears to be viable because Nathan and Rufel's relationship and Harker's disclosure of his desire causes Dessa to process her most painful memories. However, it does not seem that the novel relies on heterosexuality alone as a liberating or healing force. Heterosexuality acts as a plot catalyst only when it evokes the trauma Dessa has undergone on a bodily and psychic level, and the scene between Rufel and Nathan, which arouses confusion, anger, and pain in Dessa, is only one of several scenes involving Rufel

and Dessa that function in the same manner. Within these scenes, the naked body of the other woman produces an identification with sameness that threatens the difference on which racism depends. Desmond nursing at Rufel's breast forces Dessa to confront and to *survive* the appropriation of her own body and ability to mother under slavery. The entwined bodies of Rufel and Nathan raise up the pain of her loss of Kaine, their profound love for each other, and the scars she bears that threaten her sexuality. Rufel too receives a transformative shock when she encounters the scars across Dessa's 'privates,' and, closing the door, finally sees Dessa as a woman has a right to her own body. The visible in these scenes defies the 'evidence' of the early scenes with Nehemiah. In these cases, believing does not inform and produce seeing; rather, seeing destroys previous beliefs.

In a final scene of witnessing between the two women, Rufel's vulnerability—and not her sexual agency—challenges Dessa's perception of power within the dominant order. This challenge occurs when the group stops for the night at a plantation owned by a man referred to as "Mr. Oscar." Still posing as a wife traveling the countryside to sell slaves for her family, Rufel receives the expected gestures of hospitality from Mr. Oscar. She performs her role as southern lady, eating, drinking, and socializing with her gentleman host. Dessa believes that Rufel enjoys the role playing a bit too much and watches the white woman carefully for any mistakes that she should report to Harker. It seems that Rufel is reveling in the privilege her whiteness allows, even if she now acknowledges the identity as fictional.

During that night, Dessa awakens to noises coming from Rufel and Mr. Oscar in Rufel's bed. Although she immediately assumes that the white woman has invited the man

to her bed, she soon realizes that Rufel is involved in a struggle with the drunken man. After they both manage to push Mr. Oscar from the room, they try to get some rest in the bed that only minutes before held the threatening figure. Dessa remains startled by the potential violation:

I laid awake a long time that night while she snored quiet on the other side of the baby. The white woman was subject to the same ravishment as me; this though kept me awake. I hadn't knowed white mens could use a white woman like that, just take her by force same as they could with us (220).

This reflection marks a key moment in Dessa's healing. Her realization of white women's vulnerability allows her to connect with Rufel as an individual woman. When she considers white women's potential for violation, Dessa confronts the weakness of the another woman, the white mistress who ordered her whippings, who haunts her worst moments and represents in her memory, more than any other, the breaking point in her psychic life. I am not arguing that she forgives or even understands this previous white woman's cruelty. However, in this scene Dessa's realization that the white women's power has limits in the world would seem to alter their threatening presence within her inner life.

Representations of whiteness, bell hooks suggests, often reflect "the traumatic pain and anguish that remain a consequence of white racist domination, a psychic state that informs and shapes the way black folks 'see' whiteness" (341). In Dessa Rose, there is a shift from the black body as a site of trauma and a sight to be controlled within the white gaze, to an emphasis on 'seeing' whiteness and the institutions dominated by white

supremacist beliefs. Through the perspectives of Dessa, Nathan, and Harker, the black gaze and voice gain control of the scene, and white inhumanity becomes the spectacle. In this way, survivors recognize the limitations of the perpetrators of horrible, institutionalized violence.

Their scheme to trick the white slave buyers involves a performance that denaturalizes the conditions and relationships buttressing the institution of slavery. In their plan, Rufel acts as a plantation mistress who needs to sell slaves because her family has fallen on hard times. Traveling from town to town and changing their story along the way, the 'slaves' are sold only to escape, meet the group, and begin the process all over again.

In the group's intentional reenactment of the traumatic conditions they become more conscious of the pain evoked by the life they had once known. They relive memories, take risks, but importantly, this repetition includes their ability to claim their own survival. Cathy Caruth's claim that trauma is "locatable not in one moment alone but in the relation between two moments" (Caruth 133) is reflected in Dessa's painful awakening. She becomes her own witness, seeing and feeling the brutality to which she has been subjected as if for the first time. When Dessa stands before the auction block and watches as the white auctioneer pinches and prods her friend, overhearing the comments made by spectators about the bargains to be had on this occasion, she becomes overwhelmed by the horrible knowledge this scene provides. She encounters the betrayal of her own flesh through the body of another. Pain that left her numb, her speech flat, and her memory broken, a trauma too powerful to face, emerges through indirect sight.

Farah Griffin describes Sherley Anne Williams as belonging to a group of African-American women writers who “replace the dominant discourse’s obsession with the visual black body with a perspective that privileges touch and other senses” (521). Dessa’s journey brings her face to face with the man who would use the marks of her suffering against her. When Nehemiah finds Dessa in the town center without Rufel, he recognizes her immediately. Her image has been imprinted in his mind as one he had to own. After she is dragged into the sheriff’s office, Nehemiah once again tries to rely on the visual ‘evidence’ of her scars to prove that she is the Dessa he seeks. The sheriff sends in a old blind slave to determine the accuracy of Nehemiah’s accusations. With one gentle touch, the older woman disrupts the primacy of the visual field. Her ability to feel and to know the meaning of Dessa’s scars creates a new reading, one that bears witness to suffering without condemning the survivor to silence. Dessa’s story finds its language in that encounter.

The struggle with language and naming that repeats itself throughout the novel, always involves naming across difference, or naming the “Other.” In the end, Nehemiah’s empty pages, which fly from his notebook in the jail, signify the failure of his efforts to seal Dessa’s voice and image within his script. Her own narrative, pieced together from a fractured memory, erases his zealous attempts to write her past and present. As she leaves the jail, Dessa corrects Rufel for constantly referring to her as “Odessa” by adding an “O” to her name. She refuses to accept anyone else’s version of her reality.

In the novel’s epilogue, Dessa’s story is told again, but this time she tells it to the children who will know it as part of their own history. Her desire to continue to claim her

own story for future generations becomes clear in the novel's final words:

I hope I live for my people like they do for me, so sharp sometimes I can't believe it's all in my mind. And my mind wanders. This is why I have it all wrote down, why I has the children say it back. I will never forget Nemi trying to read me, knowing I had put myself in his hands. Well this the children have heard from our own lips. I hope they never have to pay what it cost us to own ourselves. Mother, brother, sister, husbands, friends . . . my own girlhood all I ever has was the remembrance of a daddy's smile. Oh, we have paid dearly for our children's place in the world again, and again . . . (260)

In these final words, Dessa remembers the cost of memory. Not only has she freed herself in body, but she has found a language, and a narrative to shelter a vulnerable past. This home resides in her young listeners, whose lives bear witness to her survival.

Chapter Two

“Negotiating History and Memory in Anna Deavere Smith’s Twilight Los Angeles”

“Modern memory is, above all, archival.

It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace,

the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.

What began as writing ends as high fidelity and tape recording”

– Pierre Nora

“It was like the end of the world: the violence, the destruction, the terror.

I have never seen a movie like that.”

– opening line of Anna Deavere’s Smith’s Twilight Los Angeles, PBS production

The PBS production of Anna Deavere’s Smith’s Twilight Los Angeles opens with a line that confirms Nora’s observation that modern memory relies on visual cues and that media or technology sources mediate the transition between memory and history on an individual and cultural basis. As Smith’s source expresses, the events of 1992 in Los Angeles clearly exceeded the representation by media sources for those who lived within the “the violence, the destruction, the terror.” The comparison between an actual crisis

and film images suggests the dominant conception of memory as a photographic still¹ or a film engraved in consciousness to represent specific experience. Nora's claim suggests the way in which this conception functions on a cultural level, where visual images pervade the collective consciousness and shape the perception of events. "Indeed," Nora writes, "we have seen the tremendous dilation of our very mode of historical perception, which, with the help of the media, has substituted for a memory entwined in the intimacy of a collective heritage the ephemeral film of currents events" (8). This "ephemeral film" works within an "acceleration of history" and against the complex, belated memories of individuals and communities reconciling with post-traumatic experience. In her play Twilight Los Angeles, Anna Deavere Smith explores problems and processes related to historical perception and personal memory around the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles. Smith's play negotiates the intersection between history and memory, the point at which memory, still dynamic and fluid, meets history's desire to organize, place the past into a pattern that reflects either progress or degeneration. This chapter will argue that Anna Deavere Smith's Twilight Los Angeles offers a critique of the acceleration of history and an exploration of memory that exceeds representation or resists placement within the

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In "Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Narrative, Dissociation," Lawrence Kirmayer describes the popular comparison between memory and photography: "In one common version, memories are 'snapshots,' laid down at the time of experience through a process of registration. They persist unchanged throughout our lives to be recalled when we look for them, like opening a photo album" (176).

organizing strategies of the dominant symbolic order.² The play interrogates the modes of perception advanced by media sources covering the Rodney King beating trial and the violent uprising following the verdicts. Raising questions about visibility and the relationship between witnessing, history, and memory in a multiethnic society, the play offers the possibility of a kind of testimony through theater and text that allows the previously unheard voices a space in the public imagination.

When faced with the ‘acceleration of history,’ Nora explains, memory “has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken tradition, in the body’s inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories” (13). Lawrence Kirmayer also describes the existence of a memory system beyond representation:

we do not always have pictures for memories: often we have knowledge, skills, or dispositions to act which are represented by an image only after the fact. We are unable to remember the details of most of what we have lived through, although these events have surely formed us. There is much we commemorate through our accent, posture, habits of gesture and thought—things we may be unaware of and forever unable to describe except in vague, abstract, or secondhand terms. (116-7)

Through her interview subjects, Smith searches for what Nora refers to as the intimacy of memory to counter the “ephemeral film of current events” surrounding the trial and its

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The chapter will use the Anchor Books/Doubleday text and the PBS video production of Twilight because these resources are the most widely available for students, teachers, and scholars interested in Smith’s work.

aftermath. The search for this intimacy leads her to the body. “The body has a memory just as the mind does,” Smith asserts, and through her interviews, she allows the bodily memory a presence in public space by reproducing not only the words but also the gestures, affect, and body language of the interviewee (Fires xxv). Smith’s performance allows a space for bodily memory through what Shoshana Felman refers to as the “innovative figure of the witness,” the “medium of testimony” whose empathy allows more than the “mere reporting of fact” (24). Twilight confronts the iconic body and the trap of visibility and articulates memory in its fragmented, contradictory, and intimately felt forms. The play explores the points at which crisis and memory’s response to it exceeds known narrative structures. Creating a space in which the meaning of memory lingers unsettled, Twilight resists the acceleration of history, specifically in relation to the forces of media and civil authorities moving quickly to seal the incident within a dominant frame. In this space, between “the body’s inherent self-knowledge . . . unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories” (Nora 13) and historical narrative, testimony emerges to articulate traumatic experience.

“In trauma we are untimely ripped,” writes Juliet Mitchell (121), referring to the void created within the individual’s psyche when confronted with traumatic experience. Trauma obliterates all organizing schemes, and as Mitchell goes on to explain, “Psychoanalysis is equipped to contribute to the understanding of the reaction to trauma, not to the trauma itself” (Mitchell 121). Mitchell captures the belatedness of trauma; traumatic experience only exists in memory because it exceeds the individual’s capacity to process the event as it occurs, resulting in a state of shock or non-being. Traumatic

experience first registers within an individual's body and not within the consciousness. Explicit or declarative memory often freezes into fragments or flashes while the truth of the experience, the emotional or psychic content, remains embedded in the body, in an active state of arousal without a specific context.³ How does Nora's 'acceleration of history,' which leads away from the body's information, interact with the belatedness of traumatic experience, through which memories emerge in visual fragments and bodily arousal?

Nora writes that "Representation proceeds by strategic highlighting, selecting samples and multiplying examples. Ours is an intensely retinal and powerfully televisual memory"(17), invoking the dominant modern conception about memory as photographic still when it meets with the rapidly moving force of visual technology. The transition between spontaneous memory and history involves highlighting, selecting, and multiplying according to dominant visual tropes to create a symbolic meaning, and 'televisual memory' involves the acceleration of this process. Visual tropes participate in the construction of historical narrative or what Susan Stanford Friedman refers to in "Making History: Reflections on Feminism, Narrative, and Desire," as "the narrative of what has happened--[which] foregrounds the role of the narrator of past events and consequently

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Juliet Mitchell describes the experience as one void of content on a symbolic level: "Trauma makes a breach that empties the person out; probably after the gasp of emptiness, there is rage or hatred—an identification with the violence of the shock. This state cannot be lived with; quite often it is evacuated, and then a phoney or pseudo state will be resorted to" (159). It is the failure of the symbolic order to accommodate traumatic experience that results in the "phoney or pseudo state," which I suggest corresponds with the media representation of the trial and its violent aftermath.

the nature of narrative as a mode of knowing that selects, organizes, orders, interprets, and allegorizes” (12-13). Twilight looks at media images and visual perception as they become vehicles of dominant historical narrative that destroys intimate memory in its efforts to order, select, and organize. “The tremendous dilation of our very mode of historical perception” articulated through “the ephemeral film of currents events” (Nora 8) raises question about the power of media sources to shape the collective understanding of events, such as the trial related to the Rodney King beating and the violent response to the verdicts, that define and shape national and local communities.

Describing her work in Los Angeles, Smith reports that “the media became a very important character, so to speak, because the information that the media gave was really crucial. So they played this incredible role” (Laurino 43).⁴ In the struggle to find meaning from the crisis, to sort, order, and organize the crisis so that it can move beyond the individual and into representation, is a central concern within the play. Twilight explores the archival impulse, or the drive toward premature closure and placement of a past event within a dominant narrative scheme, as enacted by the media soundbite, the public

4

Peggy Phelan suggests that “In a certain sense, Smith’s performance seeks to preserve and contain the chaotic flood of images the cameras ‘mechanically’ reproduced [C]amera images may need to re-enter the space of theatre in order to be arrested, arranged, digested, comprehended, ‘explained’” (“Arresting Performances” 6-7). In Phelan’s argument, the camera images provide the raw material of crisis that needs a context or framework in which they can be read and understood. With the “flood of chaotic images,” the camera signifies the level of traumatic memory that also appears to be “mechanically reproduced,” immutable, relentless flashbacks within the consciousness of the survivor. Smith uses forms such as documentary and interviews in connection with her performance to create a hybrid genre that acknowledges and moves beyond the limitations of each form.

spokesperson, and the recorded image. Smith's reference to the media as a character within her work also reflects her desire to include the entire context of the event, to show how this context influences the process of making history. The voices within Smith's piece all provide their own reading of the crisis and the various media texts that attempted to document or distill some truth about the community.

In the case of the Rodney King incident, media texts such as news footage and video were central to her examination of the event and its effect on the community and its place within our cultural history. George Holliday's video of the Rodney King beating provided the public with a record, a visual statement of a traumatic event in which one man's body received dozens of blows that resulted in life-threatening injuries. The base reality which the video documents— that Rodney King was in fact beaten severely— remains uncontested. Rodney King's body suffered through a traumatic event. However, the meaning of the beating, the struggle to articulate his experience and its significance within a community, raises new questions about traumatic experience. These questions involve both the actual events and the process of creating meaning from this reality, a process that can harm the communities or individuals represented within the historical narratives. Media texts create history when read by within public spaces such as the Simi Valley courtroom, and Smith's Twilight explores the possibility for understanding the creation of histories within media-saturated contexts. The context within which a culture or its individuals interpret a crisis is of central concern both in Smith's performance and in relation to questions about art, traumatic experience, and witnessing.

In his essay "I'll See It When I Believe It': Rodney King and the Prison-House of

Video,” Frank P. Tomasulo points out the importance of understanding context and the levels of history in relation to the Los Angeles crisis:

Frederic Jameson’s observation that ‘history is what hurts’ is literally true for both Rodney King and South Central Los Angeles. History hurt in the sheer facticity of the physical beating of one individual and in the material, social, and economic scars wrought on a minority community. King’s bruises, the L.A. deaths, and the property damage were concrete and real cultural traumas, not a free play of signifiers—no matter how they were interpreted. But televisually mediated history also hurt, by creating a media morality play that transfixed U.S. viewers and fractured the American social fabric. (78)

Tomasulo suggests a kind of secondary traumatization, one that occurs through the representation and interpretation of an event that in some way silences or distorts the experience of survivors.

The performance offers critical commentary on the “televisually mediated history” through characters such as Katie Miller, a bookkeeper and accountant living in South Central L.A. Miller expresses her outrage at white newscaster Paul Moyer in her interview with Smith. Moyer’s response to the looting connects him to several other interviews with white Angelenos. The looting of an upscale department store disturbs him because he remembers shopping there as a child. Miller sees his reaction as based in an unconscious racism and class privilege. According to Miller, his words suggest the underlying thoughts: “How dare you loot a store/ that rich people go to?” (132). Miller’s

raw emotion rubs against the smooth surface of Moyer's televisually mediated sentiment, which gains an authority through its distance.

Tomasulo posits that "Media scholars need to realize that how people analyze and draw historical conclusions from TV newscasts is projective and purposeful, based more on their horizons of expectation and what they bring to experience than on what they get from it" (84). Twilight explores the trial as a media event about which the public reached diverse, contradictory historical conclusions and offers a counter-narrative to the trial as a public space that does not acknowledge the "horizon of expectation" involved when viewing the King beating and hearing police testimony.

As a public space, the courtroom operates as a kind of temporal vacuum, and this controlled environment that carefully screens testimony also shapes the 'horizon of expectations' for the jurors and the general public. In order to preserve the rights of the accused, innocent until proven guilty, the court must contain itself within the present moment. Placing a case within a context of personal or collective memory would be considered 'prejudicial' toward the defendant and thus would not be allowed under most circumstances. In an attempt to create a 'pure' space, the state moved the Rodney King trial to Simi Valley, a suburb whose whiteness seemed to promise a universal justice and an innocence from history.

In the courtroom, the camera, as used by legal authority, functions as the historical perspective that fixes the past within its organizational frame and acts as a substitute for the testimony of survivors. The camera captures an image of a body, the meaning of which is determined by an invisible authority outside the frame. The camera-

image allows spectators to remain at a safe distance. This frame's boundaries screen out aspects of testimony that contradict the interpretation advanced by the attorneys. For example, many witnesses were not allowed to testify, including the residents of the apartment complex overlooking the beating scene. These voices are left on the margins, silent within the formal process. Also, the beating began before Holliday started recording, but this information never reaches jurors. Instead both the defense and prosecution rely on the videotape as exclusive evidence of the beating.

In Discipline and Punish, Foucault describes the "disappearance of torture as a public spectacle" (7) and claims that "The body as the major target of penal repression disappeared" (8). Instead, according to Foucault, "The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property" (11). A trace of the former system of punishment, in which the punished body is displayed for public consumption can be found in the events of 1991-92 in Los Angeles. Foucault's statement relies on the assumption that liberties "regarded as both right and property" apply to every member of a society. When race becomes a factor, it becomes difficult to sustain the assertion that the body no longer functions "as the major target of penal repression."

The punishment of King's body does become a public spectacle. During the criminal proceedings, prosecutor Terry White invested his complete faith in the ability of the videotape to tell the story and to make his case. The reactions of public figures from the President to the mayor of Los Angeles confirmed that these images evoked powerful

feelings of outrage and condemnation for the officers' actions. Yet, as the defense put on its case, it became apparent that the tape could be used as evidence of King's guilt. The defense attorneys argued successfully that King's body represented a threat, even when faced with baton blows and taser guns. As Terry White, lead prosecutor asks, "what did he have to do to not be aggressive?" In his closing he asks, "Who are you going to believe, the defendants or your own eyes?"

The trial itself enacts the narrative of the impartial justice system, asserting a foundational myth of American identity at the expense of a community of 'others' whose suffering becomes the catalyst for the reproduction of this narrative. Quickly suturing the gaps of trauma, the trial imposes meaning within the specific ideological frame of the 'law and order' state. It has been suggested that the criminal trial was won because police officers can command 'center stage' in the public space of the courtroom. In his Twilight interview, District Attorney Gil Garcetti refers to the "magic" of police officers: "At least in the courtroom setting/that magic comes in./You want to believe the officers,/because they are there to help you,/the law-abiding citizen,They are still there to help and to protect you./That's what we've been sold all our lives,/so when an officer comes in/and tells you/something from the witness stand/there is something magic/that comes over that individual" (75). Their performances capture the audience's attention because of the allure of their societal role. The defense counsel clearly understands this power and has its clients perform accordingly. Words like 'policy' and police jargon are frequently included in officer testimony, furthering the mystique of authority. Each officer dresses conservatively, remaining cool and reserved, with minimal affect to betray any underlying

anxiety. Their performance in the courtroom contrasts sharply with the bodies that appear to lose control within the videotape of the beating.

Throughout the process, Rodney King, the human being, is displaced by King, the animal whose body receives dozens of blows in the aim of rendering him 'compliant.' When on the witness stand in the criminal trial, Sergeant Stacey Koon is asked to remember his initial assessment of Rodney King. He replies that he immediately noticed his muscular build, referring to him as "buffed up," and concluded that King was an ex-convict who had worked out while in prison. His first impression leads to the criminalization of Rodney King. Sergeant Koon refers to his cries as "bear-like," and testifies that King groaned "like a wounded animal." King's behavior seems to Koon to indicate that he had been using PCP, which would make him act like a "monster."

Melanie Singer, a white female officer with the California Highway Patrol, completes the racial nightmare constructed by the defense attorneys. First on the scene and a witness for the prosecution in the criminal trial, Singer testifies that King had been initially resistant and began "waving and smiling at the helicopter." He also grabbed and shook his right buttock in response to Singer's commands. Officer Powell then told Singer that they would "take over" and the beating began, rescuing white womanhood from the beast, the "gorilla in the mist,"⁵ that must be subdued or destroyed.

The defense uses the videotape of the beating for its own end. Sergeant Charles

5

"Gorillas in the mist" refers to Officer Powell's infamous comment over police radio about the call he had responded to immediately before the King incident. The call involved a domestic dispute at an African-American family's home.

Duke, a "use of force" expert, goes over the video, frame by frame, analyzing the action of its players. The stilled images transport Rodney King's black male body into a racist iconography, robbing the individual of a dynamic place within history, both personal and collective. Freezing his movement causes a radical revision of time and space, decontextualizing the incident and removing it from history. Instead of providing a narrative that included the victim's cries, the fixed images become a series of nightmarish flashes, black skin breaking through moments of bright light, evoking the terror on which white racism depends. The closing statements of defense attorneys Darryl Mounger and Michael Stone seal the interpretations of the images by tapping on the fears of the mostly white, suburban jurors of the 'urban jungle,' constantly threatening their borders. Their safety from "the likes of Rodney King" comes from the police force they have now been called upon to judge.

Rodney King never takes the witness stand. His absence, Houston Baker suggests in his essay "Scene . . . Not Heard," reflects a public reception of testimony from people of color that has created a rigid dichotomy between body and voice. Historically, bodies of color have entered the public space without voice and in body only. Their stories have been told by their displayed bodies, already marked as sexually and racially other within dominant cultural ideology. Baker describes use of the voiceless body in testimonies of racial violence:

For the slave--even when he or she is a 'fugitive from southern violence--is expected to remain silent. At northern abolitionist rallies, for example, the fugitive becomes the 'Negro exhibit.' She silently turns her back to the

audience in order to display the stripes inflicted by the southern overseer's whip. (40)

The scars are read as stories told through "silent display" (Baker 40). The image of a damaged black body enters the public consciousness without a voice.

Frantz Fanon's well-known words seem to echo in the courtroom. "I am overdetermined from without" (116), Fanon writes in Black Skin, White Masks. The testimony given in the criminal trial clearly defines Rodney King according to a racialized scheme in which his body must be read and reread as a threat to dominant values. Jurors and other spectators only have to recognize him as a Black male to enact a plot that includes the erasure of his subjectivity. Instead of hearing his voice or considering his suffering, King's body falls into what Fanon refers to as "a historico-racial schema," which relies on the perception of the black body to activate the myths and historically ingrained stereotypes buttressing racist ideology.⁶ Fanon describes this phenomenon:

The elements that I used had been provided for me not by 'residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character, but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. I thought what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations.
(111)

6

The discussion of the "historico-racial schema" occurs in a well-known passage of Black Skin, White Masks when Fanon encounters a young white child in a public setting, and the child expresses fear, points at Fanon, and exclaims, "Look, a Negro."

Within the conservative courtroom setting, the video functions as one of the “anecdotes” to which Fanon refers, reproducing the “historico-racial schema” and thwarting its potential as survivor testimony. There is no opportunity for King to claim his body within the setting of the courtroom. The “physiological self” of the video, the one writhing and wailing in pain, is replaced by a brute incapable of feeling human sensation. The transformation of King from human to monster exacerbates the traumatic impact of the video for an entire community to whom the video serves as confirmation of a long-ignored reality.

Fanon desires to construct a new body to counter the iconic body that reproduces the trauma of history through the visual field and interactions in public space. His comparison between historico-racial and physiological bodies invokes the two different memory systems, explicit or narrative and implicit or bodily memory, that Smith describes in her statement: “The body has a memory just as the mind does” (Fires xxv). Like Fanon, instead of focusing on the culturally-privileged visual or language-based memory, which also deploys with its cues the narratives of racial bias, Smith’s performance searches for a memory found in bodily responses beyond the visual. To counteract the placement of the black male body into the “historico-racial schema” within the courtroom, one could look to Fanon’s expression of the need “to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations” as it operates within the performance of Twilight Los Angeles and Smith’s work in general. In the work of Anna Deavere Smith, bodies of memory are constructed to give voice to the process of making meaning from traumatic moments. Smith offers her body as an intersection between private memory and public history, using

her own body as an agent in the transmission of memory to provide this new public space. Instead of imposing a narrative from outside of the individual, she searches for the place that language cannot contain, exposing the struggle with meaning that accompanies the traumatic experience.

In Unmarked: The Politics of Performance, Peggy Phelan argues:

Visibility is a trap . . . it summons surveillance and the law; it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession. Yet it retains a certain political appeal. Visibility politics have practical consequences; a line can be drawn between a practice (getting someone seen or read) and a theory (if you are seen it is harder to 'them' to ignore you, to construct a punitive canon); the two can be reproductive. While there is a deeply ethical appeal in the desire for a more inclusive representational landscape and certainly underrepresented communities can be empowered by an enhanced visibility, the terms of this visibility often enervate the putative power of these identities. (6-7)

Phelan goes on to suggest the need for “A much more nuanced relationship to the power of visibility”(7). Her argument against an uncritical acceptance of visibility politics in relation to groups outside the dominant culture corresponds to or confirms a need to move beyond the body as seen within public space. The introduction to Twilight and the Angela King and Josie Morales interviews expose the limits of visibility when they describe the videotape of the King beating. When faced with the video image, many jurors could not hear King’s cries:

Yet a juror in the federal civil trial told me that the rest of the jurors had difficulty hearing what she and King's aunt had heard. But when, during deliberations, they focused on the audio rather than the video image, their perspective changed. The physical image of Rodney King had to be taken away for them to agree he was in pain and responding to the beating.

(Twilight xx)

The jurors could not see and hear King simultaneously because their reading of the visual testimony represented by his writhing body in the videotape contradicted the aural expression of physical pain, which demonstrates that a disembodied voice more convincingly conveys suffering within a racialized world.

Twilight shifts the focus from the scene or seen to the act of seeing, from an objectifying gaze toward the subjectivity of perception. In this way, the process of creating meaning from the actual reality of an event in history can then be seen in terms of the multiple perspectives. Twilight seeks an answer to Wendy Chin's question: "How then can we negotiate multiple and possibly conflicting testimonies between witnessesHow, then, can we listen and respond to testimony so that one testimony does not substitute for another, but rather resonates with it?"(17). Josie Morales, the Los Angeles city employee and neighbor to George Holliday, witnessed the King beating. Her interview focuses on her concerns about the trial, and that in spite of the fact that she saw the beating firsthand, she did not have the opportunity to testify at the trial because her testimony would have contradicted Officer Melanie Singer's version of the events. Morales tells Smith: "I remember that they just not only hit him with sticks,/they also

kicked him,/and one guy,/one police officer, even pummeled his fist/into his face,/and they were kicking him” (66). In the text version of the play, Morales’ interview immediately follows and responds to Charles Duke, who testified as the expert witness of LAPD’s use of force policies and practices. Duke’s cold, quasi-scientific description of the weapons used against King comes in contact with Morales’ distress, as she recounts savage and chaotic beating she immediately witnessed.

The Judith Tur and Allan Cooper interviews work together to complicate the reading of another videotape related to the L.A. violence. In “War Zone,” reporter Judith Tur shows Smith the recorded footage of the Reginald Denny beating. Tur narrates each moment for Smith, beginning with general comments about the state of race relations. Her attitudes convey a sense of outrage and privilege. “This is not my United States anymore,” she angrily asserts. She goes on to say that “what’s happening in South-Central now,/ I think they’re really taking advantage” and “white people are getting so angry now”(97-8). In the text version of Twilight, Tur’s comments precede Allan Cooper’s interview in which he gives another reading of the Denny beating. Both Tur and Cooper blame forces beyond themselves and when read alone, they provide a limited vision of the scene. Tur fails to see the violence occurring everyday in the lives of the citizens of South Central LA. She fails to see how “her United States” created this problem. She accepts no responsibility in creating a climate that would allow for such rage and aggression. Instead, she allows the images of a brutally beaten white man to justify a generalized rage. Cooper too seeks to blame and fails to see Reginald Denny’s humanity when he focuses on the truck being in the wrong place at the wrong time, which

somehow justifies the beating. The historical context he provides when describing the years of beating and the secret rooms in police headquarters where people of color are tortured counters Tur's perception that the citizens of South-Central do not have justifiable rage.

Through these complex and unusual connections, Twilight resists absolute authority of the visible realm and builds memories from previously unspoken experience. "Art can be a space where the memories of trauma are articulated," Sander Gilman has noted in his "Truth Seeking, Memory and Art: Comments Following Four Weeks of Life in the New South Africa." Gilman observes the relationship between bodies and memory in South African art:

All of these artists are building bodies of memory. And the sense of a three-dimensional body is rooted in the half-remembered bodies of the past. For the history of South Africa is a history of these represented bodies of memory and it is in such bodies of memory that one can begin to search for the articulation of the trauma of the past and its evocation in the present.

The process of constructing "half-remembered bodies" from the traumatic memory of individuals through art, performance, or writing means creating a space in which the exchange between the original witness and the individual or group who receives his or her testimony can be examined. Gilman's piece, in connection with the work on trauma by Laub and others, makes it relevant to ask, what are the possibilities of art in articulating trauma in the public space? Or, how can the artist use her work to see the possibilities and the problems of testimony, particularly when the testimony implicates an entire culture,

such as in the case of South Africa or the Los Angeles uprising of 1992 in the United States? How does Smith build bodies of memory from the crisis to articulate traumatic experience from multiple perspectives?

In the text version of the performance, the section titled “War Zone” ends with the words of Dean Gilmour, an official at the L.A. County Coroner’s office. Part of the ‘clean-up crew,’ Gilmour tries to offer statistics for the dead, including sex, ethnicity, and cause of death. He stresses, however, that the facts cannot be confirmed. His office is still in the process of investigating each incident. He begins his interview by referring to one family whose daughter has been missing since April, presumably killed in a store fire. Her body has never been found, even though they have searched the site multiple times for physical traces, or “human remains.” The absence of her body has caused the family tremendous pain: “The family doesn’t have . . . /They can’t really get on with their life until they have/ some/resolution to it” (190). This final piece in the “War Zone” section refuses to provide closure as well. In the shocking aftermath of traumatic experience, the body is both always present and absent, nowhere and everywhere. Attempts to locate the body are thwarted and it remains outside the official record of the event. Instead of being accounted for in statistics, the body can only be measured in loss and unfulfilled desire for closure.

The body in the Gilmour interview remains outside any community; neither the family nor society can identify or claim it. This loss suggests the fundamental shattering of identity occurring with traumatic experience. “Trauma” Juliet Mitchell writes, “can reactivate aspects of autistic states in anyone because some degree of rejection of the

body, some sense of the body as alien, is probably the human lot" (151). Unable to communicate experience, remaining closed off and alienated, the survivor's story remains trapped within a body that now seems strange and unknown as well. "The core experiences of psychological trauma," according to Judith Herman, M.D., "are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (133). She pieces together a whole from the interviews, reintegrating individual voices isolated in trauma into a community of survivors.

The recovery or identification of bodies does not occur in isolation, but requires a community's effort, as the Gilmour interview suggests. Questions about identity, trauma, and the body emerge in the process of fleshing out the half-remembered bodies in Twilight.⁷ As an African-American woman portraying characters across racial, gender, ethnic, age, and class lines, Smith's performance reveals the complex negotiation of identity formation in a multiethnic community, affirming Peggy Phelan's assertion that

Identity cannot . . . reside in the name you can say or the body you can see . . . Identity emerges in the failure of the body to express being fully and the failure of the signifier to convey meaning exactly. Identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other—which is to say, it is a form

⁷

"Early on in my work," Smith explains, "I wanted to use my body as evidence that a human being can take on the identity of another. . . . I think we have immense potential for compassion as individuals. But that gets stopped when we take on fixed positions." (Berson A13).

of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other. In that declaration of identity and identification, there is always loss, the loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being.

(Unmarked 13)

The collective and individual identities only find meaning in relation to each other.

Twilight uses the opportunity that a crisis provides, with its instability and gray, mutable moments, to create new chapter in the history of race relations, one that reveals the ways in which racial or ethnic identity always defines itself against another group. Both the formation of racial identities and the process of witnessing require an intersubjective dynamic, but they work at cross-purposes. In white supremacy, the relationship between black and white allows white to form as a superior identity at the expense of the black subject. In the witnessing relationship, one needs to move from the isolation of traumatic experience into a symbolic, meaning-making encounter, and the witness needs to suspend her own ego boundaries to accept the burden of the trauma. It is precisely the struggle between these two types of dynamics that Twilight negotiates when attempting to articulate the “half-remembered bodies” of the LA crisis.

The articulation of trauma through bodies and between bodies is an idea that has been the pursued by scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub. In Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History, trauma scholar and psychiatrist Dori Laub describes a level of witnessing that involves “being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (75). This level of witnessing includes and reflects the

two other types of witnessing, described by Laub as “the level of being a witness to oneself within experience” and “the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others” (75). These two levels involve a connection or the creation of a space in which the inner chaos of trauma transforms from a purely private, isolating encounter with the unspeakable into the public enactment of testimony. Two bodies must occupy or constitute this space, the survivor-witness and listener-witness. Through their encounter they seek to find words, a common if fragmented language, to give voice to the silent images of traumatic memory.

As the “innovative figure of the witness” Smith explores the point at which bodies are “half-remembered,” incomplete constructions within art. Smith occupies the position of survivor and listener, emphasizing the process by which memory transforms from purely private to a more externalized, public form. As Shoshana Felman suggests, testimony is a speech act (17). The body cannot be divorced from language, as the internal conflict is externalized and made meaningful through the encounter between two bodies. How the words are expressed and how they are received become as important as the words themselves. Smith’s work makes it clear that in the process of creating testimony, the exchange provides the context in which the crisis can approach comprehension. She also reveals the risky process of going public with one’s testimony before various audiences, when the fragments of survivor memory are most vulnerable to external power struggles. Through Smith’s performance, we can see that survivor struggles to define his or her experience against the internal obstacles caused by trauma and the external conflict with the dominant ideology which may be complicit in the initial trauma and in silencing the

survivor's voice.

As the “innovative figure of the witness,” she must use her body, her presence, to bear witness and also convey a sense of otherness from time and place, the delay which defines the traumatic experience. She uses her body to create a new context that challenges a conventional “medium of testimony” by creating a hybrid form that disrupts the distancing and ordering gaze of the camera-eye to create new narratives from the fragmented voices of the previously unheard survivors. Or, as Peggy Phelan describes:

She personifies and animates the ‘untold’ stories of the people who were instigators, victims, and participants in Los Angeles’ April 1992 ‘twilight.’ But of course the stories are ‘untold’ only in the sense that the camera cannot penetrate them—or rather the way the camera reproduces these stories is different than the way Smith reproduces them—in her voice, across her body, in their living presence and in ours. (“Arresting Performances” 6)

The multimedia dimension of Smith’s performance, including the use of video, allows her to convey this sense of time or the dissonance between the acceleration of history and the delay in time surrounding the experience for survivors. In her performance, she embodies both the camera-eye, observing and recording, and the “I” of subjectivity whose restructuring emerges as the goal of testimony.

How does she become the “medium of testimony”? Smith's method and the theater it produces are often compared to documentary and journalism, the traditional forms associated with the reconstruction of the event and representation of the aftermath of large-scale crisis. However, Smith’s interest in the body and memory complicate these

comparisons to traditional modes of fact-finding and reporting and can offer a more compelling understanding of the relationship between traumatic experience and art. Smith's process of conducting interviews and performing them entails embodying the words and gestures—the language-based and bodily memory—of the other. Smith writes that “The frame of reference for the other would *be* the other. Learning about the other by being the other requires the use of all aspects of memory, the memory of the body, mind, and heart, as well as the words” (*Fires* xxvii). In her self-conscious display of the process, Smith reveals to audiences the paradoxical nature of the witnessing encounter. She occupies two spaces at once—performer and performed—making apparent the body-based exchange occurring between survivor and listener, while showing that the gap never closes between survivor and the individual chosen to receive her story.

In Smith's performance pieces, the emphasis on bodies invokes the significance of material reality. Using her own body as the site of representation, the site at which meaning is contested and formed, Smith transforms the binary of reporting self and recorded other. Ideas are expressed through bodies with hats, braids, blouses, wigs, and jewelry. Gestures, facial expressions, and stuttering accompany perceptions, analysis, and rhetoric. There is no separating the message from the messenger here. No bodiless narrative trying to pose as objective data or fact. To inhabit another body in performance, as Smith does, is a radical move toward a more complex, irreducible truth and way of knowing. There is no backstage in Smith's performance, no place for her to change into a new character and hide the performative nature of the act. For while she speaks the “characters” precise words with their expressions and in their clothing, she also

reveals her process, her moment of becoming the character. In this way, she never poses as an authority on a particular culture but rather as a vehicle of expression.

This reenactment of bodies and words has broader, political implications for Smith: “I am interested in how inhibitions affect our ability to empathize. If I have an inhibition about *acting* like a man, it may also point to an inhibition I have about *seeing* a man or *hearing* a man” (Fires xxviii). Empathy here marks a departure from the distance required to present an objective rendering of an individual, culture, and event in time. The value of the presentation is not in its ability to adhere to strict factual evidence to reconstruct the reality of the past. Rather, the actual event is already acknowledged as somewhere beyond the point, beyond the grasp of the present. What Smith seeks to understand is not exactly what happened as much as how it was experienced by the individuals involved. For Smith, “The spirit of acting is the *travel* from the self to the other” (Fires xxvi) and through this travel she closes the distance between two positions and shows the possibility of movement in cultural identity. In her performance she identifies as or with the interviewed subject yet maintains a distance to show that she does not try to obliterate their position into sameness, and this distance prevents identity from stabilizing. The constant mutation into different characters challenges the primacy of the visual aspects of identity, allowing Smith to move between eye-witness and I-witness to the struggling subject trying to reclaim a self after trauma.

To interrogate and display the act of witnessing and to move beyond ‘fixed positions,’ Smith reads bodies as well as listens to the words expressed by interviewees:

I can learn to know who somebody is, not from what they tell me, but from

how they tell me. This will make an impression on my body and eventually on my psyche. Not that I would understand it but I would probably feel it. My goal would be to--these words are funny and probably, in print they would sound even worse--become possessed, so to speak, of the person. (Martin 192).

By allowing herself to become 'possessed' by the testimony of her subjects, Smith offers her own body to "the struggle that he or she has to sift through language to come through" (192). At another point, Smith describes early experiment with language and identity: "I had not controlled the words. I had presented myself as an empty vessel, a repeater, and they had shown their power" (Fires xxv). In her method, Smith identifies the relationship between language and identity that constitutes or informs the post-traumatic experience. Smith describes her purpose as helping "to create an atmosphere in which the interviewee would experience his/her own authorship" (Fires xxxi). The implicit goal of the witness-survivor and witness-listener relationship, according to Dori Laub and others, entails the reconstitution of a self through story. The listener must help the survivor sort through the fractured memory and also through moments that have been sealed over too seamlessly.

According to Bessel van der Kolk, "since the early part of this century very few published systematic studies have used patients' own reports to explore the nature of traumatic memories" ("Trauma and Memory" 280). Perhaps the reason for this neglect is that the survivor speaks in broken language described by Smith. Rather than the closed narrative of fact pursued in the courtroom, survivor testimony "does not offer. . . a

completed statement, a totalizable account of those events” (Felman 5). Her performance of Twilight Los Angeles problematizes the master narratives of the courtroom and mainstream media and builds new narratives from the broken speech of the crisis. In her interviews, she intentionally seeks the moments when the individuals “lose their grammar” (Bourne 15). Smith inserts another body of evidence, her own, at the scene to destabilize the absolute authority of the visual and challenge the quest for fact.

“I think the thing I am by nature, is a listener,” Smith tells Hap Ernstein in an article for The Washington Times (D1). For both Twilight Los Angeles and Fires in the Mirror, an earlier piece focusing on the Crown Heights riots of 1991, Smith lives in the community and through local contacts finds individuals to interview either by phone or in person at their homes or another familiar venue. She records the interviews, which she later sorts through, repeating gesture and word, to capture some essential moment. When interviewing individuals involved in the crisis, Smith searches for the residue of trauma found in the body language and speech patterns of subjects. “In L.A.,” Smith explains, “people were less articulate, which was a good thing for me because I’m looking for the place where language fails, where people have to struggle to find words” (Laurino 43). Smith’s pursuit of the break in language supports Shoshana Felman’s suggestion that “As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frame of reference” (5). Those moments for which Smith searches, the breaking points of language, are portals of entry into a forgotten

world. They reveal the bodies buried in memory, left outside of history, what Gilman refers to as “the half-remembered bodies of the past.” In Twilight, the interviews break away from the initial question posed and move as if guided by another force.

In her search for a place that language will not hold, Smith’s performance fragments dominant narrative, reveals the painful condition of fragmentation within traumatized communities, and rebuilds a new community in the aesthetic space of her performance. In an interview with Smith, Carol Martin characterizes Smith’s apparent commitment to documenting an event without allowing its multiplicity to congeal into a single, absolute form: “Instead of trying to make a cohesive picture,” Martin tells Smith, “you revealed different landscapes of emotions and histories” (190). Or as Sandra Richards puts it:

Smith’s artistry unsettles as it delights: it challenges viewers to locate—and relocate—themselves within a kaleidoscope of oftentimes contradictory positions. It presumes and speaks to a desire for community even while dramatizing the fractured quality of contemporary social networks. (35)

The lack of cohesion comes from Smith’s resistance to constructing a seamless narrative from the many stories she receives in her interviews. In both form and content, her text and performance signify the friction, inconsistency, and fragmentation that exist in the “real” world of Smith’s characters and audiences. The fragments with jagged edges bleed into the space around them instead of becoming polished, fabricated bits of packaged information.

Fragments in memory and in language suggest an effort re-organize the world in

relation to a crisis. The stutters, shifts, and meanderings that characterize Smith's interviews offer insight into the struggle to understand and to articulate an identity in relation to the catastrophic events in Los Angeles. The dislocations and disruptions in their speech interrupt the self-conscious narratives the interviewed subjects construct to position and define themselves in relation to the crisis, revealing the points at which the narratives they construct contain their own undoing; the narratives can never contain the truth of the crisis.

By emphasizing these fractured moments, Twilight questions narratives that close off alternative meanings. However, the play does not promote instability or to exalt the fragment. Fragmentation does not end but neither does the desire for and drive toward cohesion. Although Smith's work has been referred to as postmodern, its recognition of the importance of the need for community, its emphasis on experience, the desire to recognize one's self, and the search for meaning in the face of crisis should not be under-emphasized. The postmodern idea that identity is performative should be considered in relation to the post-traumatic experience when the self-image fractured by the crisis attempts to recover a lost wholeness. In the testimonial encounter, the survivor and her witness create narrative, a representational space from which the survivor can piece together an identity that bridges the gap once left by the trauma. This performance is very different, however, from the play and pleasure celebrated in some forms of feminist postmodernism. As feminist scholars Lynne Layton and Marta Caminero-Santiago have argued, there is nothing liberating about a fractured psyche. In her experience as a trauma clinician, Lynne Layton has found that the experience of survivors contrasts painfully with

the privileging of the broken whole in some postmodern theory:

The tendency in certain uses of postmodern theory to split off pain from pleasure is what enables a theorist to celebrate a fragmented subject as the authentic subject. But fragmentation arises historically, from private and public developmental traumas. These traumas lend particular specificity to the fragments, which tend to be coded in rigid binaries, in stereotyped ways that are the opposite of the fluidity longed for by postmodern theorists.

(114)

Instead, Layton values writing that “Captures the specificity of the cultural sources of fragmentation and the effect on an individual psyche” (117). Or, as Homi Bhabha suggests, the political responsibility of individuals working in the realm of cultural criticism is to “attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present” (12). Therefore, although it may be productive to contest the seamlessness of historical narrative, specifically as it supports and reproduces dominant ideologies of racism and sexism, it would be ineffective and disempowering to reject completely the desire for cohesion in the stories constructed by subaltern communities whose collective memories and cultural identity have been denied by cultural imperialism.

In “Ludic Feminism, the Body, Performance, and Labor: Bringing *Materialism* Back into Feminist Cultural Studies,” Teresa Ebert argues against a postmodernism that “substitutes a logic of contingency for the logic of social necessity,” thereby “preempt[ing] any need for collective, organized social transformation—any need, in other

words, for emancipation” (7). It is not enough to “recognize and validate the multiplicity of local points of resistance power itself already generates.” For Ebert, postmodernism threatens to reinforce the status quo, what Ebert refers to as the *what is*, by failing to offer the possibility of change beyond the realm of play and performativity. Seyla Benhabib captures this concern when she asks: “If we are no more than the sum total of the gendered expressions we perform, is there ever any chance to stop the performance for a while, to pull the curtain down, and let it rise only if one can have a say in the production of the play itself?” (21).

Anna Deavere Smith has provided a possible answer to Benhabib’s question and the problems of postmodernism and political agency. Through her performance pieces, that have a “say in the production of the play” of representation, Smith injects postmodernism with a political life force that critiques absolute and essentializing concepts of cultural identity and exposes the historical forces that have perpetuated real material differences. Her work dismantles the dominant historical narrative and its monologic voice of objective epistemology and disrupts notions of history as a narrative of some stable past. However, she does so without disowning narrative itself and without abandoning the individual stories of the survivors or witnesses to particular events in time. Her work examines the process of creating testimony and making history—of documenting an event through narrative—and in doing so, it transforms dynamics of power by constantly shifting the perspectives of interpreter, witness, spectator, and community member and by never fixing the relations among these positions.

The representation of these voices is a *making* of history that includes the active

presence of an interpretative force: the audience, the performer as interviewer and observer, and the reader. The subjects of history, the people who lived through the event or experience, no longer stand passively like bodies preserved in a museum or within the frame of a documentary. The emergence of a living, interactive history acknowledges the truth of an event that can never fully be known because the conditions of *knowing* constantly change. The performance pieces reveal these conditions as audience and moment based. In Twilight Los Angeles, Anna Deavere Smith changes the scene of history. By using the actual words of individual members of the community living through the events and their aftermath, she reveals the shifting, complex realities elided in dominant representation. Neither the community nor the event becomes simplified or essentialized. Their individual experiences maintain an authority while the process through which they come into language reveals its complications and inconsistencies. “There is little in culture or education that encourages one unifying voice,” explains Smith in her introduction to Twilight. “In order to [approach] real unity, all voices would have to be heard or at least represented” (xxv). Working on the shifting “boundaries of ethnicity,” Smith searches for a new language, a new way of seeing, hearing, and reaching the meaning of the events in time that in some way define our lives.

Legal scholar and critical race theorist Mari Matsuda has suggested that “Linguistic anxiety is the new proxy for racial anxiety” (90). “What history has given us,” Matsuda contends, “is speech–linguistic space—as a playing ground on which we struggle for power and ascendancy” (96). A crisis such as the one in Los Angeles provides an opportunity in this struggle for new definitions and alternative histories to enter public

consciousness, or at least to enact Lydia Liu's desire to "rethink the nation as a territory of struggle between competing subject positions, narratives, and voices where nationalism or nationalisms may win, as they have indeed won in many parts of the world, but cannot wipe out the traces of the struggle" (37). The struggle over linguistic space, and the anxiety this struggle produces, indeed functions as a substitute for racial conflict at that particular moment in Los Angeles. Twilight illuminates the competing forces attempting to define the significance of the crisis within the national history or to determine how story becomes incorporated into national framework. Smith refers to this struggle to define racial issues: "I think there's an assumption that the public want to know what the spokespeople are saying. But we can't depend on the spokespeople to define race anymore. That definition is ultimately going to have to come from the community" (Laurino 43). Politicians, law enforcement agencies, and corporate-sponsored media sources crush competing interpretations, its rising volume drowning out other voices. A campaign of denial and evasion that decontextualizes the violence threatens to obliterate the possibility of witnessing the horror documented by the tapes.

Communities are made and unmade in Twilight as obvious alignments shift and new connections emerge. By placing the 'voices of authority' alongside the 'community voices' Smith alters the creation of an 'official story.' The process through which language manipulates perception is exposed, and the voices of authority lose their position of privilege within the formation of the narrative. Individual motives and biases are revealed and a less unified front is exhibited. Although some may argue that the voices resist grouping, there seems to be a clear connection between individuals whose lives have

changed after the uprising, who are survivors in relation to the events of April 1992, and those for whom the uprising represents the culmination of years of injustice and suffering.

Since the case revolved around state-sanctioned violence of the Los Angeles Police Department, it makes sense that many of the Twilight's interviews speak directly from positions within that system. Some of Smith's sources seek to distance themselves from the events of 1992 by describing their foresight and invoking specific memories in which they could predict the imminent conflict. Others offer anecdotes about local politics and carefully thought-out theories to explain the causes of police actions and the unrest. With these interviews, Smith captures the desire to rationalize crisis, to find a clear and definite reason for its occurrence. Specifically, these interviews demonstrate a government or society's desire to 'bury' the bodies. Wislawa Szymborska's "End and Beginning" expresses this phenomenon quite strikingly: "After each war/ somebody has to clear up/ put things in order/ by itself it won't happen" (661) and "Those who knew/what this was all about/must yield to those/ who know little/ or less than little/ essentially nothing" (62).

The voices of public officials such as Stanley Sheinbaum, Gil Garcetti, Darryl Gates, and Sergeant Charles Duke provide a sense of the distance between those who have access to media formats that inform public perception and the creation of historical records and those individuals and communities whose daily lives have been directly impacted by the struggle the officials attempt to neatly organize in their carefully chosen words. Smith's editorial choices expose the construction of an official voice. Sound-bite speech, deflected responsibility, and political grandstanding become obvious, and the

voices of reason and authority lose any appearance of authenticity or connection to the events they discuss. Nationalism in this case comes across as the ability to remove “race” or ethnicity from the equation and to move into an almost scientific discourse about the use of force techniques or to sanctify bureaucratic policy.

In spite of the tendency to seek protection within their artful observations and public relations strategy, each of these interviews contributes to the sense that the unified front has collapsed, that the dominant order is truly in a state of disorder. Instead of working for common goals, or the ‘common good’ that can convince juries that 45 blows to a prone body are a necessary evil, the officials show the tribalism and territoriality at the heart of every action taken by the state agencies. Former Police Commissioner Sheinbaum describes a scene when he had to defend his decision to speak with gang members involved in a truce meeting. The police officers asked him, ““So which side are you on?” (15). At another moment, he tells Smith about Police Chief Darryl Gates’ hasty departure from the city immediately following the verdicts. Although he functioned as the President of the Police Commission, he does not seem to accept responsibility for the problems between the citizens and the police force.

Sergeant Charles Duke, the defense’s expert witness who rereads the videotape frame by frame, shaping its entire meaning for the jury, provides the most damaging testimony against the police in his interview with Smith. He too implicates Gates in the creation of a climate that led to police abuse. According to Duke, the police chief was engaged in a dispute with the City Council and the Police Commission over use-of-force techniques. Gates, it seems, resented that the city government would no longer allow the

chokehold or upper-body-control hold because, as Duke explains, “we had something like/ seventeen to twenty deaths in a period of about 1975-76 to/ 1982, and/ they said it was associated with its being used on Blacks/ and Blacks were dying” (62). Duke blames the increased use of PCP, the drug Rodney King was accused of being on as justification for his beating. Hospital testing found no trace of the drug in his system. No mention is made of Gates’ infamous comment that Black neck anatomy requires an increased application of force for the hold to be effective. To Duke, the average police officer faces extreme risk and consequences because “Daryl Gates/ and the Command staff were gonna do an ‘in your face’ to/ the City/ Council and the Police Commission” (65). He claims to have seen many cases in which the people were beaten into submission, “some of them identical to Rodney King” (64). His interview complicates and oftentimes contradicts his testimony at the criminal trial. As the expert witness, who interpreted each blow as falling within department policy, he failed to mention the internal conflicts surrounding the use-of-force techniques. The jurors’ reading of Duke’s testimony was based on a blanket acceptance of department policy as correct. The department, it would seem, was above politics in the jurors eyes. As long as the officers acted in accordance to its law, their behavior was beyond reproach. Duke’s Twilight interview reveals the assumptions behind his own ‘expertise’ and the jury’s inability to question that authority.

Darryl Gates, former chief of the LAPD, feels the fingers pointing at him and quickly begins to claim that he has been scapegoated. His memory seems curiously fuzzy regarding the night of the verdict. He begins by addressing the concern over his whereabouts on that night: “First of all, I . . . I don’t think it was a fund-raiser,/ I don’t

think it was a fundraiser at all” (180). Smith chooses the moment in his speech when he stutters to indicate the anxiety behind the words. The “I . . . I” cues the audience that a kind of double-talk has begun. The stutter could stem from simple nervousness. After all, Gates is now a man on the witness stand testifying on his own behalf. The PBS version of Twilight includes a voice-over of Gates’ making the claim that the King incident ‘was not about race.’ He reacts with frustration in the text interview: “And suddenly,/suddenly,/ I am the symbol/of police oppression./ Just because some officers/whacked Rodney King/out in Foothill Division/while I was in Washington, D.C.” (187). Gates’ position mirrors the courtroom’s failure to consider the history of police abuse when examining the King beating and the community reaction. The event captured on video becomes a discrete happening, an aberration, which invalidates the outrage expressed by the citizens of South Central Los Angeles.

“In order to serve as a generally useful concept,” Kai Erikson explains, “‘trauma’ has to be understood as resulting from a *constellation of life experiences* as well as from a discrete happening, from a *persisting condition* as well as from an acute event” (185). Within the community of South Central Los Angeles, the King video in many ways acted as an externalization of traumatic memory and its ‘official’ interpretation denied the community’s feelings and experience in the public space of the courtroom. The King

video, along with the video and court decision in the Latasha Harlins murder,⁸ invoke memories of brutality that have existed within the community since the middle of this century, when African-Americans began relocating to Southern California in large numbers. This past includes the Watts riots of August 11, 1965. Berkeley Professor Jewell Taylor Gibbs notes the legacy of another day in American history that Southern California has inherited when describing the climate in which the Watts rebellion occurred:

Since the days of the days of the Dust Bowl migration, the police force had been a major route to the mobility and perfect institutional vehicle for spreading attitudes of racial superiority and customs of white supremacy for poor white Okies and Arkies in Los Angeles. So it was that mainly southern-bred cops were responsible for law and order in mainly southern-bred Watts. (14)

The institutionalized violence did not restrict itself to the Black community. In the 1940s, Mexican-American men were rounded up and beaten by police in what has been referred to as “the Zoot Suit Riots.” Years of living under state-sanctioned violence, however, remained on the margins of the official history, even as it was recorded within national consciousness in April 1992.

8

Fifteen-year-old, African-American Latasha Harlins was shot and killed by Korean-American Soon Ja Du March 16, 1991. A store surveillance camera captured the shooting. The tape also includes several white police officers entering the store and walking around the now, presumably, lifeless body of Harlins. They examine the scene, look around the aisles and the counter, possibly worried that they may encounter someone hiding out. Perhaps they have already assumed Harlins was guilty of some crime and had an accomplice. In the meantime, they completely ignore her. Her body, like her death, seems meaningless.

In her essay "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality," trauma expert Maria Root presents a type of trauma that is particularly useful when trying to understand the effect of the videotapes on L.A.'s African-American and Latino communities. She refers to it as "insidious trauma":

Insidious trauma is usually associated with the social status of an individual being devalued because a characteristic intrinsic to their identity is different from what is valued by those in power, for example, gender, color, sexual orientation, physical ability. As a result, it is often present throughout a lifetime and may start at birth. . . . As a rule in, insidious trauma's effects are cumulative and directed toward a community of people. In effect, it encompasses some very 'normative,' yet nevertheless traumatic experiences of groups of people. (240)

By 1992, police brutality and an unresponsive justice system would seem 'normative' within South Central Los Angeles, since it occurred on a daily basis and resulted in 14 million dollars in annual settlements. However, even people who have lived under state terror for their entire lives cannot continue to tolerate the public disavowal of their testimony and consequently their humanity.

Instead of an acceleration of history, pieced together with fragments of soundbites and archives such as the Darryl Gates voice-over and the courtroom space, Wendy Hui Chun argues that:

A better way to relate traumatic events is via citation, by arguing that the force of the traumatic event comes partly from its citation of other such

events. By doing so, we can link events together, yet insist on the singularity of each one. Iteration alters, yet a citation gains force only because it 'repeats' or refers to other events. If we view such events as citations, we can discuss larger social implications in ways that shift the focus away from the perpetrator's inner psychology or intentions. Rather, we can discuss the community that the perpetrator joins with his/her actions. (18)

The courtroom failed to link events or place the Rodney King incident within any historical context that would acknowledge the citational nature. Smith's play creates an environment in which the citational nature of traumatic experience can be examined.

Smith's observations on the community in which she immerses herself to create Twilight appear to support Bessel Van der Kolk and Maria Root's arguments about the connections between social justice, environment, and traumatic experience. In a Newsday interview with Maria Laurino, Smith refers to her Los Angeles audience as "in the state of . . . post-traumatic stress" (43). Her search for character and identity, which "lives not in what has been fully articulated, but in what is in the process of being articulated, not in the smooth-sounding words, but in the very moment that smooth-sounding words fail us" (xli), has taken her to the post-traumatic moment in language and life when the stability of self and the community have broken down.

In The Location of Culture, Homi Bhabha writes that "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities'

are given essentialist identities” (149). Smith’s work, like Bhabha’s own contribution, offers counter-narratives to the ‘essentialist identities’ created within the courtroom and mainstream media following the events of 1991-1992 in Los Angeles. Bhabha could be describing Smith’s project when he tells her in his phone interview that

We have to interpret more in twilight,/ we have to make ourselves/ part of the act,/ we have to interpret,/ we have to project more./ But also the thing itself/ in twilight/ challenges us/ to/ be aware/ of how we are projecting into the event itself./ We are part of producing the event/ whereas, to use the daylight/ metaphor,/ there we somehow think/ the event and its clarity/ as it is presented to us, and we have to just react to it. (233)

Bhabha’s interview articulates the connection between the ambiguity of the witnessing encounter and the creation of a space in which both survivor and listener (or audience member or juror) make meaning from the twilight of the post-traumatic moment. His words seem similar to Dori Laub’s concerns about acknowledging one’s own agenda when receiving testimony, to avoid being “driven to confirm [one’s] own knowledge, by asking questions that could derail the testimony” (61). Instead, both Bhabha and Laub—and Smith—seem to confirm the necessity of becoming aware of one’s own place in the testimony’s production. The daylight metaphor is useful when thinking about the juror’s experience in the courtroom. He or she accepts the facts as presented by the attorneys. The judge provides jury instructions and controls the amount and type of information circulating within the courtroom. The juror needs simply to insert herself into the role of “reasonable” citizen interested in upholding the law that protects the common

good. The daylight eliminates the shades and contrasts that would allow alternate realities to be known.

Smith interviews and performs several members of the Los Angeles community who place the Rodney King incident within the context of a larger history of police brutality. These voices, representing another, older generation whose stories have remained as oral testimony within the community but who have been largely ignored by the outside world, raise the 'half-remembered' and unclaimed bodies of the past, mixing their own memories with their observations on the current crisis. "I think that there is a gap between those who are heard and those who speak," Smith writes in her introduction to another performance, Fires in the Mirror. "Those who speak in their own communities, to their own people, are not heard as frequently as those who speak on a regular basis with authority" (Fires xli). In her work, she creates a space in which the individuals heard within the community can voice their insights and experience alongside the voices of 'authority' outside the community. Rudy Salas, Jr., Angela King, Theresa Allison, and Katie Miller offer a perspective that counters the idea that the 'riot' occurred because of the depraved indifference of youth gangs. Their interviews complicate any reading that isolates the present and refuses to implicate the past in the events of 1992. They capture the devastation that comes from witnessing their children face the same violence they faced and the secondary violation that accompanies reactions of indifference and denial to their suffering.

Angela King, Rodney's aunt, begins with a seemingly unrelated comparison between her life and the Dorothy Dandridge film Carmen. The comparison leads to a

story about her mother stabbing her father and subsequently serving a prison sentence that left the children without parents. “My brother and I were the only two that stayed together,” she explains, “and that brother was the father of Rodney” (52). Throughout her interview she refers back to Rodney’s father. It becomes clear that the beating evokes the pain of that earlier trauma for her, and in many ways violates her place of safety in memory, the one connection she managed to preserve after the devastating loss of her parents, her relationship with her brother. The film does not replace or shape the memory; rather it evokes the texture of memory, the sights, sounds, and emotions of previous relationships and experiences.

As founder of Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC), Theresa Allison works to ensure the future of the community’s children. The “unjust system” is the enemy from which she seeks protection. In her interview, she offers the story of her nephew’s shooting by police, an event that shattered her family: “My son changed./ (*She’s crying*)/ Other guys in Watts changed./ Our life totally changed/ from happy people/ to hurting people./ I mean hurting people, / I mean *hurting, pain.*” (35). While talking about her nephew Tiny, who died after a policewoman shot him in the face, Theresa Allison describes this same officer’s routine violence against African-American youth: “she used to go in an’ pull these kids,/I mean from twelve years old,/and kick ‘em and hit their heads against trees/and stomp on the ground./Why you got to do Black kids like that?” (39). Mike Davis, a writer and activist, echoes this painful question when he tells Smith that “this is a city at war with its own children” (29). Former Black Panther Elaine Brown places the current situation in historical context when she tells the story of Jonathan

Jackson, a young African-American man, “who went to a courtroom by himself/and took over for that one glorious minute/ in the name of revolution and the freedom of his brother/ and other people who were in prison/ and died that day” (227). The Jackson story invokes a brutal scene within the public space of the courtroom, which relates to the in a citational manner to the King case and the other stories of brutality occurring under the premise of maintaining law and order.

Brutalized bodies figure prominently in Twilight, but in contrast to the trial scene, these images correspond directly to the intimacy of memory of those individuals directly involved. While the trial did not include the testimony of Rodney King but only the visual image of his beating, Twilight connects the perception of the visual record with receiving the oral testimony of survivors. For example, Michael Zinzun, a community activist who won a police brutality law suit, lost sight in one of his eyes after a police beating. He keeps graphic photographs of bodies bloodied and battered by the LAPD in his office, including one of “a man with part of his skull blown off and part of his body in the chest area blown off, so you can see his organs” (16). This scene powerfully counteracts the one in the courtroom when the defense uses the visual evidence of Rodney King’s brutalization against him. In the first line of his interview, Zinzun tells Smith: “I have witnessed police abuse,” countering the efforts to read this violence in relation to any “use of force” policy. Rudy Salas, the artist who opens the text version, describes his fractured ear drum after a police beating (3). In an interview titled “The Territory,” Stanley Sheinbaum describes a meeting with gang members in which a man opens his shirt to expose a bullet-mutilated body. Sheinbaum read the body as evidence that this man had

“been through the wars” (14). He tells Smith: “One guy who was really disheveled and disjointed/and disfigured/opens up his whole body/and it’s clear he’s been shot across . . . /not in that . . . not in that day,/months or years before,/and you know,/these guys have been through the wars down there” (13-14). A white authority figure and a cop, Sheinbaum represents the possibility of an alternate seeing, one that risks alienation from one’s own cultural group. Sheinbaum’s participation in the meeting angers the police officers surrounding the scene, who want Sheinbaum to choose sides.

One of the most interesting ways in which Smith complicates the representation of the LA crisis is in her dealings with emotions of guilt and shame in white Angelenos. Dominick La Capra’s description of a “middle voice,” applies to Twilight’s depiction of perspectives within traumatic experience that may include guilt and accountability without forcing those voices into a search for blame. The middle voice, La Capra writes:

At least when used in a certain way . . . may be argued to be the most suitable for representing or writing trauma, especially in cases in which the narrator is empathically unsettled and able to judge or even predicate only in a hesitant, tentative fashion. It would not seem to be a vehicle for truth claims or for ethico-political judgments having any significant degree of decisiveness. It would rather more or less radically problematize such claims and judgments and, at its most forceful, be a way of placing basic beliefs or perspectives in an antagonistic, possibly fruitful interaction with one another—hence also a way of placing the self or subject in question.

(197)

Twilight does not censure the white voices. Smith explains that the prosecution lost the trial, but “The city of Los Angeles lost much more. Twilight is an attempt to explore the shades of that loss. It is not really an attempt to find causes or to show where responsibility is lacking” (xxi). Twilight explores questions of guilt as a part of the struggle to make meaning from the crisis without directly pursuing accountability and blame.

Twilight's representation of whiteness includes a critical consciousness about race relations within Los Angeles and the role white privilege plays in creating the conditions that incite rebellion and unbridled rage. In the text, movie producer Paula Weinstein reflects on the climate that fueled racial division:

I guess what disturbed me,/which I really . . . what I think I would wanna talk about the most/about that week,/was watching rich white people guard/their houses/and send their children/out of L. A./ as if/ the devil was coming after them./And/it wasn't realistic./It was,/I think, a mediafest/ of making white people/scared/of the African-American community,/and, and/ nothing had changed. (211)

In an interview titled “Godzilla,” a Hollywood agent reflects on his life of caesar salads and Armani suits, telling Smith that he wonders “What, what was, was/ ‘I deserve it,’/you know,/was I, was I getting/my . . . /when I was *fearing*/for/safety/or my family or something . . . /those moments...I thought me, personally—no,/me, generically,/maybe so” (139). Jason Stanford, a young white actor struggles with language: “I don’t know, you don’t say/black/or you don’t say/Negro”(21), and describes when he was arrested by

police officers who talked about tennis and told him that he looked like “mr all american white boy...you look responsible” (22). Bill Bradley tells the story of his friend’s experience as an law intern in LA in the 60s, when police assume the white woman traveling with Bradley’s friend, an African-American law student, is being held against her will. The woman pleads with police to release him. When they realize their mistake, the police do not apologize, and the powerful lawyers for whom the law student worked did nothing about the incident.

In contrast with the moments of critical awareness, several other white characters evade the issue of white privilege. Under ordinary circumstances, their evasion would not appear striking or even interesting. However, the play makes attempts to deny white privilege *visible* by placing them alongside previously marginalized or silenced voices. Several interviews bring whiteness into focus as their subjects sort through feelings of shame, outrage, or confusion. These interviews do not attempt to satirize their subjects. Rather, the emotions and thought processes exhibited provide insight into the struggle to understand or place oneself in relation to whiteness and racism in the late 20th century, post-civil rights era. When discussing the Washington leadership, Maxine Waters, the Congresswoman from the South Central district, claims that “it’s not enough to say they’re insensitive/or they don’t care./They really/don’t/know./I mean,/they really don’t see it,/they really don’t understand it,/they really don’t see their lives in/relationship to/solving these kinds of problems”(163-4). This observation resonates in the other interviews. However, Twilight captures a moment when the white or privileged citizens of Los Angeles had to see their lives in relation to race relations.

“We’ve been portrayed as white racists,” the anonymous juror tells Smith in the “Your Heads in Shame” interview (73). He reacts to media efforts to scapegoat him and other jurors by representing jurors as racists and publishing the value of their homes. Smith’s portrayal of the juror in video clearly conveys a sense of deep shame. In a dim space, he barely makes eye contact and his voice frequently breaks. He has become the pariah, the symbol of racism that absorbs the blame, and his body appears heavy in the anguish and confusion this position evokes. When describing a supportive letter he received from the KKK, he turns to make eye contact, emphasizing his disgust. However, he appears to feel repulsed by himself, as he struggles to sort through a confusing array of emotion, from shame, to guilt and anger.

Elaine Young, a real estate agent, reacts defensively when she receives a letter accusing her of callousness in her response to the violence. The letter-writer calls her a ““dumb shit bimbo/talking about having fun during the riots at the Polo Lounge,/How stupid can you be./You’re an embarrassment””(154), referring to an interview about the closing of the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel, in which Young told reporters about gathering to drink and socialize during the riots. She attempts to explain herself, she verges on caricature of superficial, materialistic Los Angeles culture.⁹ Trying to defend herself, she tells Smith that the Polo Lounge offered protection during the riots.

9

For a critique of Smith’s portrayal of white female subjects, see Tania Modeleski’s “Doing Justice to the Subjects: Mimetic Art in a Multicultural Society: The Work of Anna Deavere Smith” in Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism. Ed. Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian, and Helen Moglen. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999. 57-76.

In another interview, a young female USC student describes her fear for her father's antique car collection: "All I can think of . . . one bottle,/ one shear from one bottle in my father's car, he will die" (157). Former Editor of the LA Times and a member of the prominent Los Angeles family, Otis Chandler appears to sincerely desire change, but also repeatedly emphasizes failure or forgetting. His interests, like the USC student and Elaine Young, involve maintaining a sense of safety for the citizens of Los Angeles. His words reveal a thinly-veiled concern for the privileged, mostly white Los Angeles for whom the riots represented a shocking disruption of peace, unlike the South Central residents, who lived with violence and brutality as part of their daily existence. He tells Smith that "This is going to be a safe,/ pleasant city/for everybody" (220). His interview ends with his voice trailing off: "'cause if our cities deteriorate into jungle land, which they are now . . .'" (223). Chandler clearly seeks to maintain and distinguish the boundaries between the "jungle land" and the "safe, pleasant city."

Twilight makes whiteness visible while also moving beyond a frame that defines race relation in the United States only in terms of black and white. Moving beyond black and white also confronts post-traumatic response at its core. Although trauma causes a breakdown in organizing schemes and the symbolic order, the post-traumatic experience is characterized by rigid, inflexible, binary or "black and white" thinking. In "The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race," Juan F. Perea argues that "the paradigm dictates that all other racial identities and groups in the United States are best understood through the Black/White binary paradigm. Only a few writers even recognize that they use a Black/White paradigm as a frame of reference through which to understand all racial

relations” (346). Smith attempts to move beyond this paradigm in her selection of interview subjects, and she refers in play’s introduction to dramaturgs Dorinne Kondo and Hector Tobar, who “passionately attacked the black-and-white canvas that most of us in the room were inclined to perpetuate” (*Twilight* xxiii), and who helped shape the production toward the inclusion of Latino and Korean-American perspectives.

At the opening of the text version of *Twilight*, Rudy Salas, Jr., a Mexican-American sculptor and painter, describes his experiences with police brutality, asking the painful question “How do you think a father feels, stuff that happened to me fifty years ago happened to my son?”(6) A shared history, one not accounted for within the pages of the “official” history, binds Salas’ experience with his son and other members of his community. Salas describes the beating he survived, which resulted in a loss of hearing. In another interview, Julio Mnejivar recounts his experience during the riots, which included watching his mother, sister, and grandmother almost shot by national guard, witnessing a man being slapped for speaking Spanish, and another man crying because the handcuffs were too tight (125-127). When Katie Miller tells Smith that “they talk about looting in Koreatown . . . those wasn’t blacks,/those wasn’t blacks, those was Mexicans/ in Koreatown” (129), she identifies the invisibility of Latinos within dominant historical perception.

In “Traces of the Master Narrative in the Story of African-American/Korean American Conflict: How We Constructed ‘Los Angeles,’” Lisa C. Ikemoto argues that it is “white supremacy’s prescriptive, conflict-constructing power, which deploys exclusionary concepts of race and privilege in ways that maintain intergroup conflict.” She

elaborates, "Further interrogation suggests that despite the absence of obvious whiteness in a conflict described as intergroup, culturally embedded white supremacy (racism) provides the operative dynamic" (302). The interviews of Korean-Americans reveal the "racial positioning" described by Ikemoto. The Korean-American community seems to occupy an in-between position in relation to whites and African-Americans or Latinos. They serve to shield whites from the rage of more disenfranchised groups. Mrs. Young-Soon Han and The Park family provide insight to feelings of disconnection and disillusionment caused by a failed American dream. In her home, which Smith notes is "an imitation of the European aesthetic" (142), June Park tries to make sense of what happened to her husband, Walter, who had a partial lobotomy after a gun shot wound in the head. Mrs. Park struggles to understand her husband's fate after he adhered so closely to the rules of the American dream; he "donated a lot of money to the Compton area./And he knows the City Council,/the policemen, they knows him./Then why,/why he has to get shot?" (147). In "Swallowing the Bitterness," Mrs. Young-Soon Han, wonders "why do we have to be left out?" (245). She identifies with the African-American struggle yet feels that the violence against Korean-American businesses by African-Americans in the riots has not received the acknowledgment necessary for a peaceful resolution.

In contrast to the sense of hopelessness and anguish expressed by the Parks and Mrs. Young-Soon Han, Reverend Tom Choi, a Chinese-American minister, describes spending time in a black neighborhood in an effort toward reconciliation. He tells Smith that he wore his minister's collar in hopes that it might protect him from any anti-Asian hostility. Instead of anger, he encountered a sense of community: "And in every

instance,/you know, of these people that quote unquote/were supposed to be hostile on TV and whatnot,/there was nothing but warmth, nothing but a sense of . . . of/ 'Yeah, we should stick together' and nothing but friendliness/that I have felt" (203). His experience confirms Kai Erikson assertion that "trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the center of group space while at the same time drawing one back" (186). Twilight negotiates the difficulty in mapping out or defining community in the constantly shifting ground of the post-traumatic period.

Smith's textual inclusion of cultural critics, activists, and artists like Cornel West, Elaine Brown, Homi Bhabha, and Gladis Sibrian counters the traditional relationship between community and reporter, or group and ethnographer. Rather than act as authorities over the LA community, their voices become part of a dialogue that includes community members. The inclusion of their voices reveals the hybridity of this kind of "documentation" or making of history. Scholarly or seemingly objective knowledge is not privileged over the knowledge of experience. The boundaries between scholarly knowledge and lived experience are transcended and shown as false. The meaning of an event comes from acknowledging or recording the multiple narratives and points of representation. This does not mean that the commitment to the retrieval of truth is absent. However, the emphasis is placed on the process instead of only on the goal. The ideas expressed by critics such as Bhabha leave the realm of pure thought and are anchored firmly within a given historical context. At the same time, the voices in the community also theorize about their experience. By lingering a little longer in the place where truth is unsettled, Smith resists the simplistic, reductive, and well-worn roads leading back to the

dominant ideology.

The texture or palpability of identity can be seen in Cornel West's contribution to the dialogue that is Twilight Los Angeles. In his scene, West offers a genealogy for the emergence of gangs in the African-American community. West links gangs to the culture of the West and the "frontier myth in America," which posits that "we gain some moral and political (sic) regeneration and expansion by means of conquest and dispossession of the people's land" (41). As this quotation from West reveals, there is no separating the ideas expressed from the person who expressed them and how they were expressed (the accent, dialect, and emphasis). Smith identifies West as "Scholar," aligning him in our minds with the abstract and the disembodied. Our cultural assumptions about the nature of the "knowledge" or information he will convey to us is challenged in Smith's presentation of West. While developing his connection between the frontier myth and gangs, West is described in bodily terms: "He is leaning forward, with his head down close to the desk, his glasses seeming to sit on top of his ears, and screwing up his face, as *he literally puts his body into the idea*" (42, emphasis added). This placing of a body into an idea identifies passion, feeling, and politics with the idea and with a particular historical context.

Cornel West describes Smith's performances as "a grand example of how art can constitute a public space that is perceived by people as empowering rather than disempowering" (Fires xix). Pierre Nora refers to the impulse to create sites of memory to counter the erasure of memory within the acceleration of history: "There are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de memoire*, real

environments of memory” (7). Within *Twilight*, two interviews reveal the desire for a public memory or alternative spaces for the articulation of the “half-remembered bodies” of the L.A. crisis. These sites of memory would forge cross-cultural connections in unexpected, unsettling spaces and attempt to control the visual representation and reception of the riots. They provide insight into the survivor’s need to seize control of the representation and reception of the event.

Reginald Denny describes a room in which he hopes to display the letters of support he received after his beating. He tells Smith that “It’ll just be a fun thing to be in there,/ just like a fun thing,/ there won’t be a color problem/ in this room” (111). Another interview acts as a response in many ways to Denny’s desire to create a space of unity. Paul Parker begins his testimony by referring to the L.A. Four, the defendants in the Reginald Denny beating. He wants to have “just one room/ set aside. It’s going to be my No Justice No Peace Room” (177). His explanation of the concept behind his room is filled with pauses, captured in the text by ellipses and “um”: “you know, with No Justice No Peace/it’s . . . its,/you know, um,/ I guess you might say it’s fairly simple,/ but to me it’s pretty, um,/ not complex,/ but then again it’s deep,/ it’s nothing shallow” (177). Parker’s struggle for definition suggests the complicated process of creating a space to bear witness to the crisis, a space in which language does not fix meaning. The Denny and Parker interviews both reveal the desire to counteract the “acceleration of history” which would leave the event in the distant past, with stories forgotten or untold, and traumatic experience unarticulated by those individuals who lived through the crisis of 1992.

“It is a critical question,” Bessel Van der Kolk explains:

whether public acknowledgment and validation of the personal suffering of traumatized individuals in places such as Rwanda, Bosnia, Lebanon, Cambodia, and the inner cities of the United States is a useful social process that can promote a shared sense of trust, empathy and personal responsibility. Can individuals and nations afford to face the awful truths about their past, as long as life's basic necessities have not been provided for?" ("Trauma and Its Challenge to Society" 41).

When the state offers no opportunity for justice and renders meaningless the history of oppression that traumatizes communities, art can provide a public space in which bodies and memories unite to offer testimony. The challenge to create public contexts that acknowledge the suffering of individuals and communities defined by Van der Kolk is in many ways undertaken by Anna Deavere Smith in Twilight Los Angeles. Twilight explores the possibility of recognizing bodies of memory beyond the scene of history.

Chapter Three

Uncanny Spaces: Trauma, Collective Memory, and Female Body in Gayl Jones's Corregidora and Maxine Hong Kingston's Woman Warrior

Maxine Hong Kingston's Woman Warrior and Gayl Jones' Corregidora begin with a crisis related to the reproductive body. In the Woman Warrior, "The No Name Woman" commits suicide soon after childbirth by throwing herself into the community well. Ursa, the protagonist in Corregidora, loses the ability to bear children after her husband pushes her down a flight of stairs, resulting in an emergency hysterectomy. These crises signal a shift in the relationship between the female body, collective trauma, and intergenerational testimony. Kingston's narrator, Maxine,¹ and Ursa Corregidora must negotiate the legacy of cross-generational narratives, sorting through the process by which memories enter language and become imbued with the ideology of patriarchy. Through their own imagination and fantasy, Maxine and Ursa return to the bodily experience of memory to disrupt the dominant narratives suppressing female testimony. The narrators need to bear witness but do not wish to reproduce the stories as they have been told to them by their female relatives.

1

Following Kingston scholars such as King Kok Cheung (see Articulate Silences), I refer to The Woman Warrior's narrator and protagonist as Maxine within this chapter, making the distinction whenever appropriate between the adult narrator and the child on whose experience she reflects within the text.

In Woman, Native, Other, Trinh T. Minh-ha's chapter on "Grandma's Story" looks at the imperative of each generation to claim the cultural narrative of the female ancestor. The grandmother's story provides a link to a common past, a connection silenced within traditional history. Minh-ha suggests that the repetition of the story fulfills both giver and receiver, giving them a sense of "pleasure in the copy." In her discussion of story-telling as counter-memory, Minh-ha refers to The Woman Warrior and Corregidora when describing the urge to repeat the family stories and to prevent the silencing of the family's past. Minh-ha identifies the strong desire to bear witness and to tell unspoken truths. However, in The Woman Warrior and Corregidora, the "copy" passed down includes behaviors, emotional states, as well as a narrative that has been fixed within a cultural framework that implicates the female body in its own trauma. This chapter will examine the disruption in the reproduction of narratives that inscribe the female body with the mark of trauma. The opening crises signal a shift in this reproduction of narratives about the female body, and new possibilities for testimony follow that attempt to release the protagonist's body from the collective anxiety projected onto it. The protagonists must create a narrative that recognizes the ways in which the body functions as speech and text, both discursively as a site of cultural inscription and as the locus of traumatic response. Recognizing the gaps in consciousness created by trauma, Kingston and Jones use the body strategically to indicate the limits of language, particularly in relation to expressing post-traumatic experience. They intervene by *writing trauma*, which "involves processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and 'giving voice' to the past" (LaCapra 186) and using the

body as a vehicle to express what remains outside conventional narrative. Both Jones and Kingston use illness or accident to indicate a period of transformation and transition. Recovery in both texts involves body and voice. When Maxine develops her own ability to “talk-story,” and her “throat burst[s] open” and Ursa performs her “New World Song” as a jazz singer, they “give voice” to the past, using their own bodies and fantasy constructions to disrupt the reproductions of false testimony that scapegoat the female body and individual women. According to Cathy Caruth, “the belated experience of trauma. . . suggests that history is not only the passing on of a crisis, but also the passing on of a survival that can only be possessed within a history larger than any single individual or any single generation” (Unclaimed Experience 61). Caruth’s comments on the belated experience of trauma indicate aspects of the experience that cannot be understood or lived immediately. It may take generations to understand more completely the implications of the traumatic experience. In this context, the Corregidora women’s desire to “make generations” to tell the story signifies a recognition that the truth or evidence of their past can emerge only belatedly, through the voice and bodies of their kin. Kingston and Jones offer perspectives on this belatedness through their protagonists’ search for meaning several generations beyond the initial crisis and their struggle to understand the experience of survival passing through their own bodies. Ursa and Maxine must first sort through the residues of traumatic experience as they exist within the cultural and familial framework and confront the process through which they have integrated the resulting cultural narratives into their own self-image as young women.

The transmission of family stories within both texts can provide insight into the

relationship between collective trauma and individual lives. When considering the transmission of traumatic experience across generations, it becomes crucial to look at the ways in which trauma alters structures of language, time, and space for the individual survivor. Traumatic memory has also been defined as a “solitary experience” and “In contrast to the narrative memory, which is a social act, traumatic memory is inflexible and invariable. Traumatic memory has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 163) because it fractures an individual’s sense of a coherent self, leaving her stranded outside a symbolic order on which any community defines itself.² However, the experience compels the survivor toward expression. A survivor-based account, a testimony, includes the struggle to find a language, and recent scholarship on transgenerational trauma posits that this struggle passes down within families. In her article “Violence: Effects of Parents’s Previous Trauma on Currently Traumatized Children,” Kathleen Olympia Nadar observes that “From transgenerational transmission [of trauma] described in the oral and written traditions of several cultures, it appears that experiences that occur with intensity—positive or negative—are imprinted on the parent or family in such a way that they emerge in subsequent generations” (Nadar 581). According to Maria Root this “imprinting” includes bodily responses and “The transmission of unresolved trauma and attendant defensive behaviors and/or helplessness that is transmitted transgenerationally as the result of an ancestor’s direct trauma” (241).

2

Shoshana Felman describes the drive to testimony: “To bear witness is to *bear the solitude* of responsibility, and to *bear the responsibility*, precisely, of that solitude. And yet, the *appointment* to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment the confines of that isolated stance, to *speak for* others and *to* others” (3).

Both Nadar and Root suggest that subsequent generations pass on the experience through the transmission of narrative memory, or family stories, and through responses and behaviors that, since they reveal “unresolved trauma,” may contradict or exceed the narrative.

Implicit memories³ emerge within a specific cultural context beyond the individual or family. While the trauma survivor struggles with the inadequacy of language to express her experience, the crisis and its aftermath occur within a particular cultural framework that from the beginning shapes the collective understanding and reception of the trauma.

Lawrence Kirmayer suggests that:

the distinctive qualities of trauma narratives can also be understood as differences in the culturally constructed *landscapes of memory*, the metaphoric terrain that shapes the distance and effort required to remember affectively charged and socially defined events that initially may be vague, impressionistic, or simply absent from memory. (175)

These landscapes define the gaps and silences of traumatic memory and configure them within discursive norms. Alternative meanings remain within the survivor, who reenacts them in her daily life and must struggle to account for aspects of her experience that the dominant cultural framework has screened out. In this way, the memories must negotiate

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According to Lawrence Kirmayer, we demonstrate implicit memory “through our accent, posture, habits of gesture” while declarative memory, based on the “model of consciousness as representation,” involves details, images, and facts available for recall (177). Although declarative memory corresponds to common assumptions about the nature of memory, implicit memory offers possibilities for cultural resistance that I would like to explore further.

multiple filters on individual, familial, and cultural levels.

In both novels, the trauma of the female ancestor occurs during a historical period of collective crisis. Both Ursa's Great Gram and Maxine's aunt face blame for exposing their communities to the threat of death or actual death in relation to outside forces. As Gayl Rubin points out, sexuality acquires an aura of danger in times of crisis: "Disputes over sexual behavior often become the vehicle for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity" (4). Female sexuality evokes collective anxiety immediately following the crisis and as the story passes down to subsequent generations. The narratives inherited by the protagonists suggest that female sexuality poses a threat to the individual woman, her lovers, her family, and the community.

Kingston's nameless aunt becomes pregnant during starvation times in China, when "To be a woman, to have a daughter in starvation time was waste enough" (6). Maxine explains the relationship between the community crisis and the collective response to the aunt's situation:

If my aunt had betrayed the family at a time of large grain yields and peace, when many boys were born, and wings were built on many houses, perhaps she might have escaped such a severe punishment. But the men—hungry, greedy, tired of planting in dry soil—had been forced to leave the village in order to send food-money home. There were ghost plagues, bandit plagues, wars with the Japanese, floods. My Chinese brother and sister had died of an unknown sickness. Adultery, perhaps only a mistake during good times, became a crime when the villagers needed food. (13)

When the villagers attack the family home, they sever the connection between the family and the community. The family, in turn, blames the aunt for bringing this violence into their lives: ““Aiaa, we’re going to die. Death is coming. Look what you’ve done. You’ve killed us,”” they tell the aunt. They fear that she has exposed them to death, infecting them with the vulnerability of her pregnant body. When the memory of the event becomes a family story, the aunt’s body signifies the anxiety and violence that the family must contain through secrecy or denial.

The violent events haunting Ursa occurred during legal slavery and colonialism on a Brazilian coffee plantation. Ursa’s great-grandmother, the “Coffee-bean woman,” tells story after story linking women’s sexuality to death. If any man from her own community took an interest in her, he risked his life. In one story told to Ursa by her mother, the Coffee Bean Woman speaks to a young black man in a field. Corregidora witnesses this interaction and sends men and hounds after the young man when he tries to run away from certain punishment. Memory alone preserves the man’s innocence: “Wasn’t nothing but seventeen. Couldn’t have been more than seventeen or eighteen. And he had this dream he told me about. That was all he wanted me for, was to tell me about this dream” (128). Corregidora interrogates her about the young man, telling her that he has sent men to catch the youth. As he seizes her body, regaining control of her through rape, she imagines the young man’s desperate attempt to escape: “And then somehow it got in my mind that each time [Corregorida] kept going down in me would be that boy’s feet running. And then when he come, it meant they caught him . . .” (128). Feeling a sense of complicity, she imagines her body as a conduit of death, and this connection between

sexuality and destruction continues to shape the inner life of the Corregidora women long after slavery ends.

“Public events,” explains Laura Brown, “visible to all, rarely themselves harbingers of stigma for their victims, things that can and do happen to men—all of these constitute trauma in the official lexicon. Their victims are rarely blamed for these events” (102). The public events to which Brown refers include war and natural disaster and not the intimate violence suffered by the women in these texts. The violation of the Coffee Bean Woman and the No Name Woman occurs in private spaces, or rather the experience of the violated women remains a private, voiceless phenomenon. Their stories enter public discourse, however, through punishment and a spectacle of suffering for those involved with the woman. In each case, the community or law punishes the woman by harming those close to her. Although the circumstances of her pregnancy remain shrouded in mystery because she had no power to present her own story, the aunt in the Kingston text faces the wrath of the villagers for concealing her condition: “The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them” (13). The destruction of her family home warns against secrecy, even if disclosure had resulted in punishment as well. In Corregidora, the slave women’s resistance against rape meets with a brutal display of power, as Great Gram describes:

they might wont your pussy, but if you do anything to get back at them,
it’ll be your life they be wonting, and then they make even that some kind
of sex show, all them beatings and killings wasn’t nothing but sex circuses,
and all the white peoples, mens, womens, and childrens crowding around

to see (125)

The exploited female body emerges as the readable text from the scene of the traumatic event, silenced in public but resonating with traumatic shock in the intimate core of her being.

Through these public scenes and family secrets, the female body becomes marked within the cultural script as the bearer of traumatic instability. In the stories the female body harbors death, and through the repetition of the stories, she continues to threaten and warn. The stories illustrate the way in which women and death or trauma, the threat of death, occupy the same space in patriarchal discourse; they both embody the negation, the lack, that has been perceived as a menacing opposite to the phallus. Women's bodies signify the uncanny traumatic experience causing one to lose the filter that screens out the inevitable mortality; to be traumatized is to be feminized.⁴ The women's bodies, as uncanny objects, invoke fear and dread; their threat involves the surfacing (or re-surfacing) of something hidden or repressed. Freud defines the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). In Freud's essay on the uncanny he defines the "familiar made strange" by referring to the maternal body:

This unheimliche place, however, is the entrance to the former Heim of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time

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See for example Sandra Gilbert's "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War," which argues that the anxiety surrounding the wounded soldier in cultural discourse reveals a fear of the corruption of femininity.

and in the beginning. There is a joke saying that ‘Love is home-sickness’; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: ‘this place is familiar to me, I’ve been here before,’ we may interpret the place as being his mother’s genitals or her body. (245)⁵

One does not wish to return to this home, the point at which birth and death merge in a pre-symbolic chaos associated in psychoanalytic theory with the female body. The uncanny as Freud describes it evokes fear; it threatens because it involves the re-surfacing of something hidden or repressed, a connection with the mother’s body that also suggests the destabilization of a coherent self. The symbolic order defines itself against this space. Death and sex work together to threaten the individual or community sense of wholeness, stability, or strength.⁶

Feminist re-visions of Freud’s theory about the uncanny shift the emphasis away from the acceptance of the uncanny nature of women’s bodies and toward an analysis of the misogynistic assumptions forwarded by this reading.⁷ Elisabeth Bronfen redefines the

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“It often happens,” Freud writes, “that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about female genital organs” (245).

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“Men say that there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex,” writes Helene Cixous in “The Laugh of the Medusa.” “That’s because they need femininity to be associated with death; it’s the jitters that give them a hard-on!” (342).

7

See Janet Todd, “The Veiled Woman in Freud’s ‘Das Unheimliche,’” *Signs* 11.3 (1986): 519-528 and Elisabeth Bronfen, “From Omphalos to Phallus: Cultural Representations of Femininity and Death,” *Women: A Cultural Review* 3.2 (1992): 145-158 and *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*, (New York: Routledge, 1992).

uncanny as that which “always entails anxieties about fragmentation, about the disruption or destruction of any narcissistically informed sense of personal stability, bodily integrity, immortal individuality” (Over Her Dead Body 113). According to Bronfen the anxiety evoked by the maternal body stems from the fear of death and not only the loss of the phallus. The female body therefore becomes associated with death and not just sexual difference:

To be precise, what the phallus, as the privileged signifier for patriarchal notions of potency, ultimately screens out, is a recognition of death. Under the aegis of the phallus, culture can insist on the concepts of immortality by deflecting notions of mortality, in a ‘press for translation’ on to the feminine body, sexualising them in the image of the castrated or demonic Woman, who as the feminine equivalent of the phallic masculine subject, harbours the denied recognition of death. (“From Omphalos to Phallus” 151)

The Coffee Bean Woman and the No Name Woman become the “castrated or demonic Woman” within the cultural narratives that contain their traumatic experience.⁸ Their stories passed down even by female relatives align them with supernatural, uncanny powers, reflecting the internalization and perpetuation of this cultural message. Collective memory inscribes trauma on the female body, thus containing trauma within this inscription, a strategy that delays indefinitely a direct confrontation with human

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Mary Jacobus writes that Freud’s phallic woman theory suggests “the startling idea that women actually do pose a threat to men after sexual intercourse” (116).

vulnerability. Represented by some sexual other, death anxiety can be articulated without infecting or destabilizing the living subject's construction of self within the present order. The female body provides the site for the struggle against the threat of ego dissolution, since woman functions symbolically as the embodiment of precariousness.

The silence and the repetition encountered in relation to the stories of the female body's violation represent a bodily performance of traumatic memory. Traumatic memory often alternates between silence and uncontrollable repetition. In The Woman Warrior, the image of the No Name Woman, whose body plugged the village well, haunts the narrator. She remains voiceless within her family script, but her story functions to warn against the threat of female sexuality. The aunt's silence drives the narrator into finding her own voice in Kingston. In Corregidora, the survivors' voices repeat the same story over and over, creating paradoxically a kind of noisy silence for Ursa. The repetition both overwhelms and numbs Ursa, and she too must search beyond the story she has been told to locate its meaning in her own life. In Corregidora, the Brazilian authorities burn evidence that would prove incest. The "No Name Woman" story remains a secret within the family. In each case, there is a desire to erase the traces of a painful matrilineage.⁹

The uncanny force, the "buried truth" or what Freud referred to as "everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light," (224) does not remain hidden in the texts. Female relatives resurrect the ghosts. "There is in each

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Death of the maternal erases "the site of origin and completes a desire for the mythic innocence, for sacrificial cleansing, against our recognition that we must accept the responsibility of history that comes with our birth" ("Omphalos," Bronfen 149).

survivor,” Dori Laub explains, “an imperative need to tell and thus to come to *know* one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one must protect oneself. One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life”(63). In the space of her own imagination, Ursa repeatedly addresses the Coffee Bean Woman, fleshing out the slave woman’s subjectivity, violated in life and erased in history. Maxine attempts to feed the neglected ghost of her aunt, who “remains forever hungry” because, as Maxine recognizes, “the real punishment was not the raid swiftly inflicted by the villagers, but the family’s deliberately forgetting her” (16). Ursa and Maxine learn to listen to the language of ghosts, who exist within the bodies of the living, transmitting memory through these bodies.

In Corregidora and The Woman Warrior, Ursa and Maxine search to find a language for implicit memory and the place of the body in testimony. Part of the task of moving away from the false projection of cultural anxiety onto femininity entails acknowledging the actual bodily experience of trauma, or telling the body’s story, instead of inscribing a story onto the body. Ursa and Maxine use their bodies to construct an alternative testimony, identifying and differentiating the way in which the female body functions in narratives of crisis from the actual experience of that crisis.

In the patriarchal culture, these stories function within what Sandra Lee Bartky has called a ‘pedagogy of shame’ that instructs young girls learn about the inherent danger and corruption of their bodies. Not directly connected to specific actions, the experience of shame and guilt in relation to their bodies and sexuality stems from the female socialization process in which girls are taught “to internalize the gaze of . . . a ‘hostile witness’ to our

bodily being” (225). Bartky suggests that “To the extent that we so often accept the lesser lives that are offered us, and insofar as we internalize intimations of inferiority, we must assume that the inculcation of shame and guilt in women is a pervasive feature of social life” (225). In this case, the trauma narratives fail to create a true witness. No real address appears from the telling of the stories.¹⁰ Rather, the witness turns inward and the psychic isolation this creates repeats or copies the initial traumatic response and undermines testimony.

Ursa’s beauty forces her to struggle constantly with those who would possess her. Jones provides the reader with many descriptions of Ursa’s physical appearance and her attractiveness. Throughout the novel, there are constant reminders of Ursa’s sexual desirability. In every interaction, she must see herself as an object of someone’s else’s desire or as a sexual threat to other women. In both the public space of the nightclub, the fair, and the town streets and in the private spaces in which she seeks refuge and recovery, Ursa’s body exists as a spectacle, revealing a legacy that she has internalized, confirmed by the outside world. With no relief in either private or public life, Ursa feels overwhelmed by a sense of imminent danger related to sexuality. Her sexuality defines her essentially, and very little space exists for other aspects of her subjectivity. The legacy of Corregidora’s plantation follows her, and she seems enslaved to others and owned by their desires.

¹⁰

The idea of address is crucial within theories of trauma and testimony. According to Dori Laub, “the absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story” (68).

Tadpole cares for her following the accident and makes his sexual feelings for her known very soon after she begins to heal. When she seeks refuge at Cat's home, she finds herself fighting off the advances of Jeffy and learning about Cat's desire for her. A nightclub patron she meets while singing interrupts a friendly conversation with "'Tell me ain't got some good pussy'" (171). During her trips home to Bracktown, she receives harassing stares and remarks from the local women, while the men, no matter the age difference, comment on her body in explicit terms, speaking about her as if she could not hear them or would suffer no embarrassment at their directness. This emphasis on her sexuality may be part of Jones's development of her character to let her reader know the extent of Ursa's beauty. However, this strategy also provides the reader with a sense of entrapment and fatalism. Jones emphasizes Ursa's awareness of others watching and evaluating her and the struggle she faces for her own bodily integrity when confronted with the propriety of others' gaze. It seems that Corregidora's own haunting visage returns through these daily encounters, claiming its rights over her. She bears the Corregidora mark, and her own desire remains entangled in the story of Corregidora's women.

One of the early dream-memory moments involves her sexual experimentation as a child. Her mother sees her friend Henry look up her dress and then calls out to Ursa to return home. Once inside, her mother scolds her. Immediately following the specific memory, another voice utters:

I bet you were fucking before I was born.

Before you was a thought.

“‘Ursa, what makes your hair so long?’

‘I got evil in me.’

Corregidora’s evil.

Ole man, he just kept rolling (42)

The voice appears to offer a response to the first memory, suggesting that for Ursa even an innocent moment from childhood has been tainted by the Corregidora legacy. “I have a birthmark between my legs” (45), Ursa reminds herself later. Sensing the ghosts that haunt the space of their intimacy, Mutt pleads with her to put some distance between their lives and their painful family history: “‘Don’t look like that, Ursa,’ he had said and pulled me toward him, ‘Whichever way you look at it, we ain’t them,’” she cannot respond affirmatively, “I didn’t answer that, because the way I’d been brought up, it was almost as if I was” (151). While she feels she carries the mark of Corregidora, Ursa cannot feel her own sexuality. She experiences the numbing effects of trauma. During her sexual encounters with Mutt and Tadpole, her body performs but the rest of her remains at a distance, removed from the intimacy. The sexual games Mutt plays with Ursa mirror the paradoxical obsession with and detachment from sex that has affected their married life.

The dynamic between Mutt and Ursa begins to reflect Ursa’s family history.

Mutt’s possessiveness consumes him as he watches the male audience members respond to Ursa. He refuses to make love with her at home but brings her to a fair and forces her to dance provocatively with him in front of others at the fair. Rubbing against Ursa, aware of the eyes of strangers with a pornographic self-consciousness, he creates a public performance of their sexuality. Although he appears to perpetrate a cruel act that

reinforces the connection between intimacy and violation, Mutt's performance can be interpreted as a more complicated reaction to the problems within their private lives. He simply forces Ursa to see others watching them. Their lovemaking always has a sense of being watched, as Corregidora haunts the space between their bodies and perverts their intimacy.

While Ursa's inheritance includes being perceived as too sexual, Kingston's ancestral story seeks to squelch any burgeoning sexuality. The Woman Warrior opens with the story of the No Name Woman, a narrative that silences the voice of the female ancestor, and in doing so, also threatens young Maxine. Desire and grief intermingle in her aunt's story, and Maxine does not miss the connection. She learns from an early age that unchecked sexual desire leads to danger for women within the Chinese culture of her parents. Indeed, with the exception of this story told as a warning, "No one ever talked sex, ever" (7), and this narrative of sexual trauma shapes her subjectivity.

Like Ursa, Maxine suspects that she has inherited a propensity for sexual violation:

I wanted to ask again why the women in our family have a split nail on our left little toe. Whenever we asked our parents about it, they would glance at each other, embarrassed. I think I've heard one of them say, 'She didn't get away.' I made up that we are descended from an ancestress who stubbed her toe and fell running from a rapist. I wanted to ask my mother if I had guessed right. (198)

The split nail marks her body, making visible the vulnerability she feel beneath her skin. Her parents' whisperings and embarrassed glances only make her more suspicious about

her own ability to “get away” from the destiny. The message is clear: to be female is to embody threat and instability: “‘I’m not a bad girl,’ I would scream. ‘I’m not a bad girl. I’m not a bad girl.’ I might as well have said, ‘I’m not a girl’” (46). As a girl, she embodies negativity and waste within language.

Not only does her femininity make her vulnerable, she also receives the message that her existence also places the entire community at risk. Her mother advises against disclosing the aunt’s story. “‘You must not tell anyone,’ my mother said, ‘what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say your father had all brothers because it was as if she had never been born’”(1). She only hears it once, yet it has a dramatic effect on her:

‘Don’t let your father know that I told you. He denies her. Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don’t humiliate us. You wouldn’t like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful.’ (5)

As if no time has passed since the starvation period, the aunt’s story remains a threat to family security. The aunt’s body in the well acts as a seal, her death containing and blocking the fluidity threatening to seep into the other side, while the village remains grounded in its traditions. The aunt’s body remains fixed within cultural narrative, removing the contamination of trauma, which causes life and death to slip into one another, boundless as water.

Maxine must confront the impossibility of being female and remaining whole. Trauma scholar Maria Root notes that “Females might be more likely than men to

experience indirect trauma during the course of a lifetime” (240). She continues:

The frequency of insidious traumas results in a construction of reality in which certain dimensions of security are not very secure; as such, the individual is often alert to potential threat of destruction or death and accumulates practice in dealing with threat, especially insidious experiences like ageism, homophobia, racism, and sexism. Subsequently, activation of survival behaviors, heightened sensitivity . . . are frequently observed in response to seemingly ‘minor’ stressors by outsiders. (Root 241)

Maxine displays a kind of vigilance associated with Root’s description of insidious trauma.

The split in the nail, the fracturing of wholeness that marks her body and threatens her security, has implications for psychic health of her family’s women. Indeed, the body bears the trace of trauma that cannot be erased because it has permanently altered the structure of existence and the relationship to language and place. The suppression of female sexuality, the pedagogy of shame reinforced by story and experience, hinders the expression of creative energy, as language appears dangerous because of its threat to the secrecy necessary for the reproduction of shame. Maxine describes the outcome of this process: “I have believed that sex was unspeakable and words so strong and father so frail that ‘aunt’ would do my father mysterious harm” (15). Insanity seems imminent “I thought every house had to have its crazy woman or crazy girl, every village its idiot. Who would It be at our house? Probably me”(189), Maxine tells herself. She suspects that she has been doomed to a life of insanity and interprets the “adventurous people” inside her head as a symptom of mental weakness instead of burgeoning creativity. She

fears that she will wander in a no-man's land, stranded beyond a viable landscape of memory in which to articulate her experience.

Ursa too worries that the story will remain trapped within her now that she can no longer "make generations" to bear witness to the horrors of Brazilian slavery.

Corregidora has infected her inner life so completely that she even attributes the fall to his desire to thwart her efforts to pass on the story: "Even my clenched fists couldn't stop the fall. That old man still howls inside me . . . My veins are centuries meeting" (46).

Corregidora, the perpetrator of unspeakable crimes against the human soul, looms large in Ursa's psyche. Even the blood within her veins divides her. Both victim and abuser exist within her frame. She feels connected beyond her control to the story of her family:

"Consequences. It seems as if you're not singing the past, you're humming it.

Consequences of what? Shit, we're all consequences of something. Stained with another's past as well as our own. Their past in my blood. I'm a blood. *Are you mine, Ursa, or theirs?* (45). The stain marks her body, and "consequences" implies the sense of guilt she has internalized as a Corregidora woman.

Since there is nowhere to express their pain in the outside world, the Corregidora women keep it to themselves, repeatedly telling their stories within the confines of their own home. The trauma remains a part of their inner world, separate from the public space hostile to the female body. Although they tell the story in an effort to preserve the 'evidence' that would exonerate them, the space in which they contain their testimony creates a painful rift within the psyche of their granddaughter, who inherited both the story and its private telling, which functions as a kind of 'pedagogy of shame' for her. She

takes with her into the public sphere a secret knowledge of her family and therefore of herself. After the accident, she struggles with the internal witness created by this dichotomy, struggling to form a testimony that incorporates the complexity of her experience.

The “hostile internal witness” appears in the dreams of both characters. These dreams contain vivid scenes that portray the female body as a demonic force that reproduces its corruption and instability. Dreams reveal the internalization of the fear of the female body as contaminated with death. In dreams the protagonists give birth to monsters incompatible with life or become violent monsters themselves, almost involuntarily destroying life around them.

Maxine’s mother, Brave Orchid, describes experiences as a midwife in China, not sparing from her daughter any details. “My mother,” Maxine recounts, “was midwife to whatever spewed forth, not being able to choose as with the old and sick” (85). Like Ursa, Maxine too responds to her mother’s stories by dreaming of monstrous babies:

My mother gave me pictures to dream—nightmare babies that recur, shrinking again and again to fit in my palm. I curl my fingers to make a cradle for the baby, my other hand an awning. I would protect my dream baby, not let it suffer, not let it out of my sight. But in a blink of inattention, I would mislay the baby. I would have to stop moving, afraid of stepping on it. Or before my very eyes, it slips through my fingers because my fingers cannot grow webs fast enough. Or bathing it, I carefully turn the right-hand faucet, but it spouts hot water, scalding the

baby until its skin tautens and its face becomes nothing but a red hole of a scream. The whole turns into a pinprick as the baby recedes from me. (87)

In other dreams she not only neglects other people but actively participates in violent acts against them. As Maxine incorporates the horror of the stories, she struggles with the pain that has no outlet in her life. In her dreams, she releases her anger and becomes a predator:

I had vampire nightmares; every night the fangs grew longer, and my angel wings turned pointed and black. I hunted humans down in the long woods and shadowed them with my blackness. Tears dripped from my eyes, but blood dripped from my fangs, blood of the people I was supposed to love. (190).

As a vampire, she represents the 'undead' that feeds on the living, much like the legacy of the female ancestor who "did not get away" threatens to devour her sense of security in her own life. Her dreams also seem to reveal a sense of corruption from within. She embodies the uncanny force that threatens her family's safety. Although she may feel powerful in the dream, she awakens to the shame and guilt of her desire to hurt those who would hurt her. She has internalized the female body's association with the uncanny, which the aunt's story perpetuates. In a sense, the narrator's dreams reflects the violence of the outside world turned inside.

Ursa struggles to incorporate the sexual abuse experienced directly by her great-grandmother and grandmother and suffers from a trauma linked both to her family's past and her present condition as a woman. In her dreams, the traumatic family history repeats

itself, as Corregidora's body fills her in every aspect of procreation, both in sex and in birth:

I dreamed that my belly was swollen and restless, and I lay without moving, gave birth without struggle, without feeling. But my eyes never turned to my feet. I never saw what squatted between my knees. But I felt the humming and beating of wings and claws in my thighs. And I felt a stiff penis inside me. 'Those who have fucked their daughters would not hesitate to fuck their own mothers.' Who are you? What have I born? His hair was like white wings, and we were united at birth. (77)

Ursa's dream suggests that she fears she will continue to function as a vessel for Corregidora's evil. Her body reproduces the source of its own suffering. She gives birth disconnected from her body and "without feeling," unable to register the experience tactually or visually. She only senses the violation of a "stiff penis inside" and the voice that names the violation. The union, or reunion, that occurs at birth traps her in a cycle of pain, and her body's seeming complicity threatens her psychic integrity.

Elisabeth Bronfen suggests possibilities for countering the false projections that include turning the mirror back on the masculine subject and the cultural narratives that advance this projection:

For a feminist hermeneutics to *solve* the riddle of femininity means, then, to deconstruct such strategies of repression and denial, and to give back to the masculine subject those aspects of the self he has projected on to femininity—such as loss, drives, facticity, vulnerability—all of which emerge

as transformations of the concept of mortality. (Omphalos 151)

Ursa and Maxine suffer through periods of actual illness compromising their bodies, making visible the instability projected onto the female subject. Both texts “deconstruct such strategies of repression and denial” by using physical illness to represent a movement through uncanny spaces, thus showing the spaces as transitory and not fixed or essentialized. Although the body has been seized in narrative and traumatic memory, the texts use illness and the rest associated with it as a kind of gestational period, fluid and dynamic, through which a new body passes. Illness functions as transformation, and in these states of sickness and recuperation, the protagonists explore other possibilities of representation.

As Gloria Anzaldua describes, a by-product of being “pushed out of the tribe,” or what Maria Root refers to as insidious trauma, is a heightened artistic perception and drive to create meaning from the chaos, to express the experience of the borderlands. In Corregidora and The Woman Warrior, the female protagonists pass through a borderlands when illness or accident compromises their bodily integrity and forces them into a period of physical rest. The *Coatlilcue* state offers a reprieve from all forms of intimacy, including sexuality, allowing the individual to separate from the demands of others on her body and to distinguish her own desire from the expectations of others. They emerge from this period changed, with new voices ready to testify. Ursa and Maxine do more than repeat the stories handed down to them. They uncover the unspoken truths omitted within the official archive of the event and seek to reconstruct what Ursa refers to as “private memory” to escape the all-consuming forces of a collective memory that aligns femininity

with danger and instability.

Maria Root's description of insidious trauma includes the development of a keen sensitivity to environment. This altered awareness appears very similar to Gloria Anzaldua's writings on the "Intimate Terrorism" in Borderlands, particularly the development of extra-sensory perception, or *la facultad*:

La facultad is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant 'sensing,' a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the face of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one who possesses this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world It is anything that breaks into one's everyday mode of perception, that causes a break in one's defenses and resistance, anything that takes one from one's habitual grounding, causes the depths to open up, causes a shift in perception. (39)

La facultad, as Anzaldua explains, is an affective feature of individuals who have been rejected from or wounded within the group, those who no longer fit because their pain—their trauma—has isolated them and changed them permanently. Anzaldua links this sense to the *Coatlicue* state, an uncanny place in which the individual must face all the uncertainty of being. "Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland," Anzaldua writes, "is what makes poets write and artists create" (73). Traumatic experience causes one to pass through this borderland, which Anzaldua also refers to as a "prelude to

crossing” (48). The process corresponds to creative endeavors, to the creation of a testimony to express the crossing. Infected by the images of corrupt, dangerous female sexuality, Ursa and Maxine must retreat into themselves to disrupt the repetition of this narrative by creating new landscapes of memory. Since they cannot change their physical environment, the new landscapes form in the altered state of illness and recovery. The Coatlicue state conjures or invokes implicit memory, a memory form that exists within the body in search of a language.

At two separate points in her life, Maxine retreats into varying degrees of what Anzaldua refers to as a Coatlicue state, a retreat into oneself, a kind of deep sleep for the psyche, beyond language and community, through which one find rejuvenation. In her early years at school, Maxine’s imagination expresses the experience of being silenced through paintings: “My silence was thickest–total–during the three years that I covered my school paintings with black paint. I painted layers of black over houses and flowers and suns, and when I drew on the blackboard, I put a layer of chalk on top” (165). In her school artwork, she makes and unmakes the world, representing real objects and then layering over them with black paint. No one seems to understand the hope implicit in her desire to express the point at which representation fails to accommodate experience. However, the pictures signify the creation of a space in which she expresses both the failure or betrayal she has felt in relation to language and also the desire for new forms of expression: “I spread them out (so black and full of possibilities) and pretended the curtains were swinging open, flying up, one after another, sunlight underneath, mighty operas” (163). Later, after she attacks the quiet girl in the school bathroom, Maxine

becomes ill and remains indoors for over a year: “The world is sometimes just, and I spent the next eighteen months sick in bed with a mysterious illness. There was no pain and no symptoms, though the middle of my left palm broke in two” (182). Maxine seems to benefit from removing herself from the business of daily life: “It was the best year and a half of my life. Nothing happened”(182). Perhaps she brutalizes the silent girl for being both present and absent at once, having the ability to remove herself from the daily interactions from which Maxine desires relief.

Ursa Corregidora struggles with feeling out of control of her own body and her life because of both accident and fate. When her husband pushes her down the stairs, she loses her ability to fulfill the wishes of her female ancestors to “make generations” to continue to bear witness to the story of their enslavement and sexual abuse. Deeply connected to her grandmothers’ desire for her to create with her body a vehicle for memory, Ursa’s sense of destiny and self-perception changes radically with the physical alteration.

Ursa has significant gaps in her memory around the events of the accident. She does not remember her trip to the hospital clearly, which she and Tadpole discuss while he cares for her at his home. These memory gaps present a contrast with Ursa’s sense of responsibility for preserving family history. She carries a photograph of the “mad Portuguese” slaveholder who fathered her grandmother and her mother, so she never forgets what he looks like (9). During her physical recovery from the accident, Ursa becomes haunted by dreams and thoughts of her grandmother and great-grandmother, and these “flashbacks” occur as italicized sections interspersed throughout the novel. The

interruptions in the linear narrative appear as inner dialogues and direct memories of specific events. They also involve a preoccupation with memory itself and the act of remembering; Ursa becomes focused on recalling her grandmother's remembering. The novel, in large part, explores the memory process, including the inheritance of both specific memories and a style of remembering.

According to Robert Jay Lifton:

the struggle in the post-traumatic experience is to reconstitute the self into the single self, reintegrate itself. And it's in that combination of feeling and not feeling, that the creative aspect of the survivor experience, or the potentially illuminating aspect of the survivor experience, takes shape.

("Interview," Caruth 137-8)

This space of "feeling and not feeling" is a kind of borderlands, like the Coatlicue state described by Anzaldua and through which the protagonists of The Woman Warrior and Corregidora pass. The reconstituted self emerging from this transitional space must address the competing, often contradictory discourses of displacement and belatedness found in cross-cultural and post-traumatic experience.

In Corregidora and The Woman Warrior, the reintegration includes what Lifton refers to as "the creative aspect of the survivor experience," which entails finding a form for the multiple, often paradoxical types of memory informing the post-traumatic life. Through the Coatlicue state, the characters invent imaginary spaces in which they can confront the inscription of their bodies as unstable, chaotic. When they leave this transitional space, they must invent forms that allow for the creation of an address so that

the internal witness, the one suffering from self-alienation caused by the pedagogy of shame, finds a voice for her own story. Lawrence Kirmayer suggests that the challenge of moving from fantasy-like accountings, which may offer a more accurate rendering of the crisis of witnessing, to recognizable narrative structures, is one of language: “their problem is not the limits of memory but of language—the inadequacy of ordinary words to express all they have witnessed” (175). In “Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self,” Roberta Culberston describes the process of creating an address from the fantasy-like re-constructions that allow the survivor to tolerate the traumatic experience as it occurs and in the first memories, to a more “conventional” narrative that allows the memories to be comprehended beyond the survivor:

In time I put a story together, residing in the place of the omniscient narrator, constructing this conventional accounting of something far from what I first knew and then recalled. Oddly, in doing so, in creating a context, I created an explanation for myself, and hence, quite literally, a self—one not predisposed to disorder and chaos, to wild bodily recall understood only half-heartedly as the meanderings of fantasy. (190)

The texts seem to acknowledge the problems with using either pure fantasy or narrative realism to express the experience of survival. Instead they shift between these forms, highlighting their distinctness while also allowing them to blend into each other.

Corregidora shifts from first-person exterior narrative to interior dialogues with ghosts of the past. In The Woman Warrior, the young narrator Maxine reconfigures traditional

myth so that she acts as the woman warrior who avenges her family and bears their testimony on her skin. They disrupt absolute realism with experimental writing strategies, such as non-linear, inner monologues and fantasy, more suitable for the expression of psychic trauma and the inexpressible language of the soul. The alternatives to narrative realism or linearity allow the truth of experience, the unspeakable or that which resists representation, to come forward and demonstrate the need to integrate the various aspects of experience.

They must establish a self to counter patriarchal assumptions about female sexuality. According to these assumptions, female sexuality both destroys and creates, or weakens and strengthens, representing a dangerous force within cultural narratives while individual women have no power to control their own lives. When trying to redress the internalization of these destructive messages, the female protagonists of The Woman Warrior and Corregidora engage in a counter-pedagogy similar to that which Frigga Haug calls “memory work.” Memory work creates “an account of the process of the separate sphere of sexuality, of sexualization of the body, be pieced together out of our own experience, carried with it a requirement that the object of research herself become researcher” (Haug 35). Memory work in Kingston and Jones involves piecing together moments in childhood that connect them to the fate of their female ancestors, or reintegrating their stories with the stories of the female ancestors.

In the third section of the text, Ursa reconstructs her own history, a history of her own female sexuality and sexualization process. The section begins with a reference to the suicide of a neighbor, the Melrose woman, who killed herself over a man when Ursa was

ten years old. Ursa remembers the suicide in connection with a childhood friend, May Alice, a precocious girl whose early sexual experimentation leads to pregnancy. May Alice instructs Ursa in sexual matters through her own example and conversation. In general, Ursa's responses to May Alice display a fear of sexuality. It appears to Ursa that May Alice and the Melrose woman are casualties to their sexuality. The community whispers about them, perhaps even pities them, but they are outsiders once they reveal their sexuality in the public gestures of pregnancy and suicide.

In The Woman Warrior, Maxine describes the punishment for transgressions against family code or cultural practice: "Chinese smeared bad daughters-in-law with honey and tied them naked on top of ants nests,' my father said. 'A husband may kill a wife who disobeys him. Confucius said that.' Confucius, the rational man" (193). In spite of these warnings, she cannot help but protest against condemnations of her very being. However, her rebellion against condemning words also creates a scene in which her corruption, her complete inability to control her mind and body, becomes apparent to the individuals who speak the words: "When one of my parents or the emigrant villagers said, 'Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds,' I would thrash on the floor and scream so hard I couldn't talk. I couldn't stop" (46). When she returns home later in life, it becomes clear that the misogyny she encounters earlier has shaped her relationship with her family: "When I visit the family now, I wrap my American successes around me like a private shawl; I *am* worthy of eating the food" (52).

The No-Name Woman's story shows Maxine the way in which cultural narratives of traumatic experience can implicate the victims in their own suffering. In another

episode, Maxine witnessed the erasure of her aunt, Moon Orchid, from her husband's memory: "It's as if I turned into a different person. The new life around me was so complete; it pulled me way. You became people in a book I had read a long time ago" (154). In response to this erasure, Moon Orchid gradually loses the ability to define her existence. She spills out into nothingness, as if the boundaries of her self had disintegrated when her husband removed her from his narrative. When her family visits her after she has a nervous breakdown and lives in an psychiatric institution, she describes her new life with the other castaways: "'We speak the same language, the very same. They understand me, and I understand them.' Sure enough, the women smiled back at her and reached out to touch her as she went by. She had a new story, and yet she slipped entirely away, not waking up one morning" (160). She hears the tragic story of her aunt's arranged marriage and sees another aunt, Moon Orchid, degenerate after an encounter with a husband who had rejected her many years before. The possibility of her own marriage produces a great deal of anxiety in her. It must, in many ways, feel like a kind of death warrant. Nothing in her experience tells her that she would gain a mate, only that she would lose herself.

When trying to express her own experience, Maxine faces a bind. Language contains and perpetuates this signification of women: "There is a Chinese word for the female I—which is 'slave.' Break the women with their own tongues! (47). As she identifies the location of power in language with its ability to "break" or enslave women with "their own tongues," she acknowledges that ideology relies on the complicity of its subjects. If she refuses to utter the words aloud, she will reject this self-perpetuation and internalization of blame. Like Ursa in Corregidora, she engages in an internal dialogue

that allows her to create an alternative space, a new landscape of the imagination for the articulation of experience. However, also like Ursa, this voice represents a retreat into self that would ultimately undo her: "I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity. Insane people were the ones who couldn't explain themselves. There were many crazy girls and women" (186). To save herself from slipping away into insanity, she would need to learn to define herself within a new structure, to create her own landscape of memory through the imaginary space of narrative, and to find a new a structure to accommodate the connections between transgenerational trauma, gender, and the diasporic experience. When faced with the limits of language, the narrators use their bodies to function as speech to express the unspeakable. Their creative experiments become the basis for the public performance of testimony. Ursa desires to create and perform "A new world song. A song branded with the new world," a public testimony that acknowledges the layered texture of her experience as a Corregidora woman. Maxine Hong Kingston's narrator finds her "throat burst open" before her family and words spilled forth, her body acting as the vehicle for that which could no longer be contained. The publicness involves creating an address to include the original story and its effects on the lives of the women whose bodies and spirits bear its legacy. Ursa and Maxine recognize that they have been called on to perform as witnesses and that they need to distinguish the voices of the past from the ideological renderings. Their testimony articulates the need to identify and to revise the stories used within the "pedagogy of shame." By investigating the transmission of testimony as it shapes identities across generations, they complicate the biological determinism that binds

them by sex to a destiny of pain. They reveal that the corruption of bodily integrity is not inherent to female sexuality but instead defines traumatic experience. This corruption becomes associated with femininity through the cultural marking of female sexuality and silencing the survivor's voice. Returning to the female body, what Freud refers to the "unheimliche place . . . the entrance to the former Heim of all human beings, to the place where each of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning" (245), Ursa and Maxine seek to transcend the fear and instability inscribed onto that body within patriarchal discourse. The texts transform traumatic memory from a spectacle of suffering to a dynamic performance of narrative, allowing the expression of past and present pain within collective and individual memory. Personal crisis becomes creative opportunity when Ursa and Maxine use their abilities to form new testimonies and bear witness to the process of witnessing itself.

In Corregidora, transformation begins by recognizing the bodily response within the process of remembering. In the first flashback, we are introduced to Ursa's great-grandmother and the stories she would recount about her sexual abuse under slavery: "It was as if the words were helping her, as if the words repeated again and again could be a substitute for memory, were somehow more than the memory" (11). Memory and words are connected here, but are not one and the same. Memory becomes more than the narratives constructed through language and transmitted to listeners. Ursa recalls observing a process or performance of memory, a testimony wherein the words narrate not only a past event but the present conditions of the person re-experiencing the memory on some profound level. Shoshana Felman describes testimony as a performance that

involves the body and voice: “to vow to tell, to promise and produce one’s own speech as material evidence for truth--is to accomplish a speech act, rather than simply to formulate a statement (17). In testimony, the survivor attempts to piece together the fragmented memory, join the frozen, muted image with the body that has been appropriated by terror. Testimony of traumatic memory, therefore, involves the struggle to produce a language, a voice and form, which expresses the unknowable and unspeakable existing through the gaps in consciousness. Indeed, the struggle itself is an element of the testimony. This struggle for the production of a language to voice the previously unspeakable also constitutes a performance of memory that counters the temporal break caused by trauma.

The connection between body and memory appears throughout Corregidora. When Ursa returns home late in the novel, she watches Mama recounting one of Great Gram’s stories, and the boundaries between performer and performed blurring significantly: “It was as if she had *more* than learned it by heart, though. It was as if their memory, the memory of all the Corregidora women, was her memory too, as strong with her as her own private memory, or almost as strong. But now she was Mama again” (129). Ursa herself has been called on to give her body to the cause of preserving memory by “making generations.” Her grandmothers want her to reproduce so that the story could be passed on. Other forms of physical evidence had been destroyed long ago, after slavery ended in Brazil when “the officials burned all the papers cause they wanted to play like what had happened before never did happen” (79). Their situation is not unique, as Tadpole, Ursa’s employer and future husband, tells her with his own family story of stolen property and destroyed records: ““Nothing. Anyway, they ain’t nothing you can do when

they tear the pages out of the book and they ain't no record of it. They probably burned the pages'"(78). The 'evidence' of their violation would exist only through children in the reproduction of their bodies and their memory: "*The important thing is making generations. They can burn the papers but they can't burn conscious, Ursa. And that's what makes the evidence. That's what makes the verdict*"(22). This imperative could not be questioned, as Ursa discovers at a young age:

'You telling the truth, Great Gram?'

She slapped me.

'When I'm telling you something you don't ever ask if I'm lying. Because they didn't want to leave no evidence of what they done—so it couldn't be held against them. And I'm leaving evidence. And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence. And when it come time to hold up the evidence, we got to have evidence to hold up. That's why they burned all the papers, so there wouldn't be no evidence to hold up against them.'

I was five years old then. (14)

Ursa remembers her grandmothers' story so vividly because they have created a witness in her. The importance of making generations exists not only in reproducing the narrative but also in reproducing the process of bearing witness, or the witness and witness-listener dynamic, which they created and repeatedly performed within their home. Dori Laub explains the role of the listener:

The emergence of the narrative which is being listened to—and heard—is,

therefore, the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the 'knowing' of the vent is given birth to. The listener, therefore, is party to the creation of knowledge, *de novo*. The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. (57)

Ursa functions as a 'blank screen' on which the older Corregidora inscribe their testimony. Their home becomes a kind of theater of witness.¹¹ Without subsequent generations, the performance cannot exist. Corregidora raises important questions about the impact of witnessing relationship on generations who inherit and function as witness to stories of trauma.¹² Thus Jones's narrative strategy of weaving together Ursa's response to the accident and her memories of her role as the witness-listener presents the complex psychic connections between events. The narrative style reflects the layering effect of trauma.

The implicit or body memories surface within the texts as a kind of counter-memory, disrupting the continuity of the present and thwarting the reproduction of oppressive cultural narratives. The uncanny provides an opportunity to destabilize hegemonic discourse within narratives of crisis that project instability onto the female body and locate that body in the past. Post-traumatic memory in these texts is

11

I borrow the term "theatre of witness" from Karen Malpede's essay "Teaching Witnessing: A Class Wakes to the Genocide in Bosnia," Theatre Topics 6.2 (1996): 167-179.

12

In the Nadar study, second generation Holocaust survivors showed signs of traumatic stress syndromes as a result of having been repeatedly exposed to their parents' memories. In addition, since traumatic stress is cumulative, these individuals were more vulnerable to suffer extreme reactions to the traumatic stressors within their own lives.

reconfigured across spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries, and the diasporic landscape produces a testimony informed by these shifting cultural borders. Bhabha identifies a cultural border, a liminal space associated with the uncanny, that provides “a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness—that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (Location 9). The categories of the uncanny are double for Maxine and Ursa. They face dislocation in relation to a culture of origin within the dominant culture of the 20th century America or 19th century Brazil. This prevents them from seeking comfort in the stability of prescribed ethnic or gender roles. Their creative efforts as blues singer and word warrior entail a new ‘presencing’ or relocation of self in relation to both these categories of subjectivity and their family’s past.

Critics have noted that both novels represent the making of a transcultural female artist. King Kok Cheung suggests that Kingston works with the sense of ‘presencing’ and relocation through a narrative strategy that shifts between different stages of the writer-narrator’s life: “By counterpoising the partial and provisional perspectives of young Maxine with the author’s adult insights, Kingston creates an ‘autobiography’ that chronicles the psychological development of an artist” (79). Ursa and Maxine’s artistic development entails working in the borderlands between private and collective memory to find the intersecting points that explain their lives to them. Homi Bhabha’s description of “the borderland work of culture” seems to fit the creative endeavors of the protagonists, whose effort:

demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of a continuum of

past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The past-present becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia of living. (7)

The sense of the "past-present" is part of the legacy of trauma that must be negotiated in Corregidora and The Woman Warrior. However, the "performance of the present" is interrupted not by choice or creative strategy at first, but the testimony emerging from the women's experience does express or dramatize the relationship of their bodily selves to a "past-present" in which they live and struggle to understand. As Bhabha notes, the uncanny or "'unhomely' has resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites" (9). In Corregidora, the sites that must be negotiated include 19th century plantation life in Brazil and 20th century American south, while The Woman Warrior moves across generations in China and California.

Janice Harris calls Corregidora an "uncompromising portrait of the artist as a young woman" (2), arguing that one should not neglect the development of Ursa's artistry by focusing on the psychological issues obviously present within the novel. However, it seems impossible to avoid the connections between her music and her survival. The blues music performed by Ursa acts as a form of mourning and remembrance, stages in recovery

according to Judith Herman, noted trauma scholar.¹³ The change in Ursa's voice after the accident reflects the alteration of her psyche. As Cat tells her, "it sounds like you been through something" (44). At one point she asks herself in an interior monologue, "*What do the blues do for you?*" to which another voice responds, "It helps me to explain what I can't explain" (56). Since she can no longer rely on "making generations," she brings her story into the public in her singing, and with the audience, creates an address that includes all the pain, grief, and pleasure of her life: "*Then let me give witness the only way I can. I'll make a fetus out of grounds of coffee to rub inside my eyes. When it's time to give witness, I'll make a fetus out of grounds of coffee. I'll stain their hands*" (54).

From the grounds of coffee, fragments suggesting the ashes of Great Gram, the Coffee Bean Woman, and the remains of the Brazilian coffee plantation, she conceives a new song. Through her music she finds a pure space in which she expresses a self: that transcends the corruption of the Corregidora legacy: "*I am Ursa Corregidora. I have tears for eyes. I was made to touch my past at an early age. I found it on my mother's tiddies. In her milk. Let no one pollute my music. I will dig out their temples. I will pluck out their eyes*" (77). In her performance she finds a sense of bodily integrity. The 'evidence' that was once trapped in the body of Corregidora women, only finding an outlet through the generations, now emerges as an address in public space. And in her live singing, the record she creates from this evidence is never the same. Through her

13

See Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror. New York: Basic Books, 1992., Herman's major contribution toward including women's experience in the study of traumatic stress.

performance, she bears witness to the act of witnessing itself, which is what she has had to survive as a Corregidora daughter listening to the stories repeated by her grandmothers.

The testimony she struggles to create with her singing does not bear witness to the experience of her female ancestors alone. Rather, she must find a way to document her own experience, the legacy of the brutality that cannot be contained within one lifetime.

She describes her desire to find a new form for her testimony:

I wanted a song that would touch me, touch my life *and* theirs. A Portuguese song, but not a Portuguese song. A new world song. A song branded with the new world. I thought of a girl who had to sleep with her master and mistress. Her father, the master. Her father's daughter. The father of her daughter's daughter. How many generations? Days that were pages of hysteria. Their survival depended on suppressed hysteria. She went and got her daughter, womb swollen with the child of her own father. How many generations had to bow to his genital fantasies? They were fisherman and planters. And you with the coffee-bean face, what were you? You were sacrificed. They knew you only by the signs of your sex.

(59)

The blues offers an experimental form through which she can find respite from the direct testimony of her grandmothers. The music also allows her to express the other aspects of her inheritance: the emotional and behavioral legacy that she communicates to her audience. On stage, singing lyrics dripping with sexual innuendo, Ursa creates a performance from her status as the irresistible object of desire. She stages the familiar

story, her body before the male audience, seeming to invite them with her song. The responses she invokes become part of the performance, a drama of the dynamic into which she and the women in her family have been forced ever since the Coffee Bean Woman had her genitals examined on the auction block. Within the setting of the club, however, the male behavior is censured, as disruptive audience members face removal from the club. Her performance causes a shift in accountability, and the men must deal with the consequences of objectifying the female body.

Ursa's mother resists her singing because of the sexuality implicit in her lyrics. Instead Mama listens to gospel music, a form from which all hints of sexuality have been purged. Ursa does not seek to purify with her music. Rather, she tries to understand and explain:

'Yes, if you understood me, Mama, you'd see I was trying to explain it, in blues, without words, the explanation somewhere behind the words. To explain what will always be there. Soot crying out my eyes.' O Mister who comes to my house You do not come to visit You do not come to see me to visit You come to hear me sing with my thighs You come to see me open my door and sing with my thighs.' (67)

The gospel music chosen by Ursa's mother offers a kind of cleansing and forgiveness, which Ursa does not seek. Instead, she wants to know and speak the truth of her feelings of survival. For Ursa, the public expression of her painful emotions provides a healing previously unknown to her. Her mother's gospel music assumes a higher authority. Ursa acknowledges only the power of her song to help her move a little closer to the truth of

her own life.

The difference in their preference for music reveals a greater gap between mother and daughter, specifically, in the way they cope with the legacy of Corregidora. In her gospel music Mama finds absolution and a reprieve from her physical existence. She can deny her sexuality, painfully complicated as it is, and focus on the life of the spirit alone. Ursa senses Mama's effort to forget her own life and her own desire: "And when she talked, Mutt, it was like she had something else behind her eyes. Corregidora was easier than what she wouldn't tell me. They'd look at her. They'd tell theirs and then they'd look at her to bear them witness" (102). Ursa remembers, however, that Mama began questioning the testimony, trying to understand Corregidora's acts against the women: "How can it be? She was the only one who asked that question" (102). Ursa's memory of Mama's questioning leads her to ask about Mama's own life, the first life lived outside the physical bounds of slavery. The spiritual boundaries are much less clear, as Ursa discovers, and the past consumed her mother's own story.

Ursa asks, "How could she bear witness to what she'd never lived, and refuse me what she had lived?" (103). Her need to rebuild her past and release herself from traumatic memory begins with her mother's past, specifically the story of her parents' relationship and her birth: "I couldn't be satisfied until I had seen Mama, talked to her, until I had discovered her private memory" (104). Mama's private memory provides the possibility for Ursa to construct her own "new world song" to bear witness to the passing on of survival and to move beyond the repetition of the Great Gram and Gram's testimony.

When Ursa returns to Bracktown, she comes with the purpose of bridging the gap

in her family history, the absence of her own birth story, and, more importantly, to understand her mother's relationship with her father. Mama tells Ursa about the short-lived marriage, reluctantly at first but then her words take on a life of their own as she finally commits her body to her own testimony. Ursa learns that her mother's relationship with Martin, a father she did not know as a child, never developed outside of Corregidora's influence. "Corregidora is responsible for that part of my life," Mama tells Ursa. "If Corregidora hadn't happened that part of my life never would have happened" (111). Ursa wants to find the point at which she can separate the histories, where Mama's life is distinct from the nightmare of her grandmothers' past: "I wanted to ask if *their* past could really have had so much to do with her own, but I just kept watching her" (111). If she can determine that point in Mama's life, perhaps she can learn how to live her own life beyond the reproduction of the Corregidora narrative.

During the visit, Mama tells Ursa about the man who called her Corey, the only time she is identified by her own name in the text (120). Their relationship was, like Ursa and Mutt's, also marked with sense of being watched in their most intimate moments, of a sexuality that must perform before a desiring audience, but one that also does not approach real intimacy. Mama describes the incident when Martin walks into his mother-in-law's room and finds the older woman powdering naked breasts, as she stands in the doorway, watching her husband, staring at her mother, who is aware of both presences. Corey knows that her mother has helped to create the scene in the bedroom, yet she does nothing to cover her nudity. It is as if she prolongs the scene to give Corey long enough to absorb its content. Once again, Corey must perform as witness to her mother as an

object of male desire. The scene also exposes Martin. Men are all ruled by their desire, Gram, Corey's mother, seems to want her to learn and to accept. To Martin, all Corregidora women are whores. This belief is confirmed later when he tears Corey's dress, forcing her to walk down the street half-dressed. Once in the street, she finds herself being perceived as indecent, a Corregidora woman with her body displayed in the public space for all interested parties to evaluate and make their bids.

The exchange between Ursa and Mama again confirms that their sense of self, including their sexual identity, connects to a family history. Ursa wants to free her mother from the traumatic memory of her grandmothers. Mama's life, as Ursa sees it, has been blocked by the overwhelming responsibility toward the past. The painful knowledge of her birth prevented Mama from developing her own sexuality, and this in turn, has affected Ursa's relationships. Ursa leaves Mama feeling less burdened : "I was thinking that now Mama had gotten it all out, her own memory—at least to me anyway—maybe she and *some man*. . . But then, I was thinking, what had I done about my own life? (132). The grandmother and great grandmother's memory had subsumed Mamma's memory, but now Ursa has a more direct link to an immediate history. Ursa finds strength and healing from her ability to act as a midwife to her mother's personal story, and in this moment locates a critical difference between the collective memory of slavery, on a familial and community level, and individual memory. This delivery allows Ursa to pursue the questions about her own life and to develop answers beyond the repetition of the Corregidora nightmare.

The Woman Warrior documents the development of an artistic perspective informed by a traumatic legacy. Maxine, the narrator, travels through several stages in her

movement toward a new narrative. The earliest stages involve a visual language of childhood drawings, bodily inscription, and dreams. She later moves into language when her throat “burst open” in speech to her mother and when she confronts the family at the dinner table, finally using language to fend off the FOB (fresh-off-the-boat), the immigrant who comes to the laundry every day to watch her, sitting on a box that contains pornographic magazines, and a fate of sexual betrayal.

Transformation from slave to warrior begins with reconstituting oneself within the language of a powerful story. Indeed, it seems clear in the narrator’s comments throughout the Fa Mu Lan chapter that it becomes essential to harness some of its power for her own life:

When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talk-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen. Even if she had to rage across all China, a swordswoman got even with anyone who hurt her family. Perhaps women were once so dangerous that they had to have their feet bound. (19)

The No Name Woman “gave silent birth” (11), never having the chance to rebel or name the man who helped create the situation that left her an outcast. However, Maxine rejects this heritage of silent victimhood, preferring to articulate her rebirth as active resistance through her other inheritance, her mother’s ability to “talk-story”:

After I grew up, I heard the chant of Fa Mu Lan, the girl who took her father’s place in battle. Instantly I remembered that as a child I had followed my mother about the house, the two of us singing about how Fa

Mu Lan fought gloriously and returned alive from war to settle in the village. I had forgotten this chant that was once mine, given me by my mother, who may not have known its power to remind. She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up to be a warrior woman. (20)

Like Ursa, Maxine focuses first on the act of remembering or the performance of story, so she can gain access to the tools that will allow her to transform the content of the story.

In her essay “Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers,” Kingston responds to the reception and feminist celebration of the Fa Mu Lan myth:

Readers tell me it ought to have been the climax. But I put it at the beginning to show that the childish myth is past, not the climax we reach for. Also, ‘White Tigers’ is not a Chinese myth but one transformed by America, a sort of kung fu movie parody. (97)

Several critics have remarked that the chapter’s focus on fantasy and revision subverts traditional cultural means of recording and stabilizing the past. King-Kok Cheung argues that “The author emphatically resists the opposition of fact and imagination in the face of received falsehood and historical silence. She achieves feminist dialogic by integrating biography and poetics, and by re-visioning Chinese myths and mythologizing American history” (77). For Ruth Jenkins the chapter’s supernatural quality “provides women writers a means to challenge monolithic histories, narrative styles, evaluative standards, and scripts that dictate what experience is worthy of record and how that experience is to be articulated” (70). Kingston’s reworking of the myth may be parody or pure fantasy,

but on another level it also reveals Maxine's desire to overcome the vulnerability of being young and female and, importantly, it exposes the limits of narrative realism to describe the experience of transgenerational, cross-cultural survival. Kingston's placement of the Fa Mu Lan revision after the No Name Woman story uses the myth to depict the imaginary life of a silent, alienated child referred to as a ghost by her relatives, who relies on words to extract revenge from those who attempt to oppress her. Fantasy in this case offers an escape from realism, which limits her emotionally and artistically. The introduction of fantasy, the only form that comes close to representing survivor experience, functions as counter-memory.

By connecting herself as the mythical hero Fa Mu Lan, Maxine authorizes herself to fight the oppression perpetuated through language:

The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblances so that I can return to them. What we have in common are the words at our backs. The idioms for *revenge* are "report a crime" and "report to five families." The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words—'chink' words and 'gook' words too—that they do not fit on my skin. (53)

Reporting or writing becomes a subversive act. The words inscribed on the warrior's body reconfigures Woman away from the position of a sign bearing a fixed cultural meaning, transforming passivity into fierce activism. The family carves their story in her skin in a performative gesture that shows the connection between the body and language

in testimony, but also specifically this act acknowledges the female body's symbolic relationship to the uncanny and collective trauma.

The words inscribed on the back of the woman warrior in 'White Tigers' reflects a childhood fantasy, revealing both the desire to overcome the limits of language and the inescapable connection between language and the body in testimony. In fantasy, Maxine's heroine receives honor for bearing witness to her family's suffering. With the aunt's story the female body functions as a sign of a corruption in communal life, but the Fa Mu Lan revises its place within the cultural text.

Maxine interjects descriptions of her American life within the telling of the Fa Mu Lan myth. This narrative shows Maxine acting out the promise of her revised myth, "reporting is the vengeance," in that she "reports" the injustices perpetuated through language in her own life. Her statement, "My American life has been such a disappointment" (45) is ironic in this context, for as soon as she makes this statement, she begins her testimony to challenge the oppression she has encountered within her life as a Chinese-American woman. She names the uncle who calls her maggot, the traditions that fail to celebrate her birth, and the boss who uses racist slurs. In this rebellion, she aligns herself with the Fa Mu Lan of her own creation, and her fantasy helps her to form her own narrative.

Kingston's narrator finds herself with the uncontrollable urge to speak out, but this time the story she tell is her own. Like Ursa, Maxine must make a public statement to bring her conflict into the shared space and to create an address from the secret shame within her. The process she begins allows her to acknowledge and express her feelings of

shame and guilt. She creates her own testimony this time, instead of retreating into silence or hiding her thoughts under a layer of darkness. The act of speaking out allows her to move from confession to rebellion when she tells her parents that she will not be sold off to the FOB. The FOB's presence in her parents' laundry causes Maxine immediate physical distress: "The hulk, the hunching sitter, brought a third box now, to rest his feet on. He patted his boxes. He sat in wait, hunching on his pile of dirt. My throat hurt constantly, vocal cords taut to snapping" (200).

The incessant revelation triggered by the FOB's presence creates tension between mother and daughter, and Brave Orchid demands that her daughter desist. Maxine obeys her mother at first, but the urge to express herself, to externalize the conflict she faces, continues to press at her with an increasing sense of urgency: "So I had to stop, relieved in some ways. I shut my mouth, but I felt something alive tearing at my throat, bite by bite, from the inside. Soon there would be three hundred things, and too late to get them out before my mother grew old and died" (200). The confessions articulate her own sense of impending doom, the connection between female sexuality and punishment, even death. In some inescapable way, she needs to account for every moment in her life to find the source of her guilt, to purge herself before the doom. Instead, her voice unlocks the fear and shame that she has internalized.

At a pivotal moment in her movement from silence to voice, she can no longer contain herself: "One night when the laundry was so busy that the whole family was eating dinner there, crowded around the little round table, my throat burst open. I stood up, talking and burbling" (201). The moment her "throat burst open," she forces the hostile

internal witness into the light of day, and the possibilities of language expand to include her own perspective. “There is a Chinese words for the female I—which is ‘slave.’ Break the women with their own tongues!” (47), Kingston’s narrator explains at an earlier point in the text. Now, she can utter the word “I” and reject the slavery of sexual determinism.

As an adult writer, the narrator returns the story of the No Name Woman: “My aunt haunts me—her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote paper to her, though not origamied into houses and clothes” (16). This return to the aunt’s story years after hearing it in childhood reveals the drive to bring forward the ghosts, to allow them to surface and to claim their own story within the life of the survivor. Maxine now recognizes the contamination spread through a body blocking the community’s well. In her re-vision of the aunt’s story, this body breaks down, element by element, along with the narrative structure of the story. As she removes her aunt’s body from its fixed position within the cultural script, the narrator inserts her own experience of the story, developing herself as a witness to the violation and allowing the reader into the process of creating a testimony from her encounter with death. In the address she creates from the gaps in the story, she searches for her aunt’s voice to move beyond the limitations placed on female sexuality, which use the body of a woman to contain the corruption of trauma.

Unlike Ursa, Maxine never gives the reader a sense of her struggle to claim her own sexuality. Sex remains mysterious and dangerous. Instead, she chooses logic and language, but sexuality in her own life remains unspoken. There is no mention of her relationships or her own desire. She does, however, write about the possibility that the

No Name Woman desired the man who impregnated her. Shirley Goek-Lin Lim suggests that the “No Name Woman is a figure for woman as that which is displaced by man and from man, a gap in his-historical memory. But the act of writing is itself not unambiguous; the rescue into memory through writing is after all a testimony to No Name Woman’s sins . . .” (261). It is unlikely, Maxine admits, that her “sins” involved the agency of her own desire or free will: “Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil. I wonder whether he masked himself when he joined the raid on his family” (6). In reconstructing her story from the gaps of traumatic and culturally-imposed silence, she can only hope that the aunt too found ways of leaving her body when the pain became unbearable:

And she might have separated the rapes from the rest of living if only she did not have to buy her oil from him or gather wood in the same forest. I want her fear to have lasted just as long as rape lasted so that the fear could have been contained. No drawn-out fear. But women at sex hazarded birth and hence lifetimes. The fear did not stop but permeated everywhere. (7)

The fear that “permeated everywhere” is, however, contained at last within the niece’s testimony.

Roberta Culbertson describes the reintegration of self through a narrative that accounts for all the pieces of self fragmented in trauma:

So the final construction gives back the self–dissolved before, somewhat like a watercolor wash, in the midst of threat and the survival strategy of

leaving the body—establishing the outlines of the new self as contiguous with the body seen in the mirror now. The body memories reside in the midst of the story of myself, which has by its telling redefined me. (190)

In The Woman Warrior and Corregidora, the protagonists negotiate the meaning of the traumatized body they have inherited. They return to this body as the site of trauma and explore its corruption in life and language. Through this unmaking of the world, they emerge to construct a new story away from a landscape of memory that implicates the female body in her own trauma. Rising from this Coatlicue space, they reconstruct the story of traumatic experience, the testimony of their own lives as survivors, moving from fantasy forms to an address that incorporates all aspects of memory. Through Ursa's "new world song" and Maxine's word-warrior revisions of cultural myths, transgenerational trauma finds at last a form and a voice.

Chapter Four

Between Women:

The Body, Memory, and the Legacy of Interracial Rape in Robbie McCauley's Sally's Rape

ROBBIE: In 1964 at the library job a U.S. history major who'd graduated from Smith College said—

JEANNIE: I never knew white men did anything with colored women on the plantations.

ROBBIE: I said 'It was rape.' Her eyes turned red. She choked on her sandwich and quit the job

—Sally's Rape

In Sally's Rape, African-American performance artist Robbie McCauley explores what it means to 'choke' on a repressed history. Part of a series that includes Indian Wars and My Father and the Wars, Sally's Rape focuses on the connection between family and the unspeakable within personal and collective memory. Using family anecdotes and her own experience, she begins the process of uncovering the denial of sexual violence against black women and the damage caused by this denial. The white woman's¹⁴ response in the

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Although the woman's race is not explicitly mentioned in this scene, she appears to be white to the audience because she is played by Jeannie Hutchins, a white performance artist. The first African-American woman graduated from Smith College in 1909.

above scene exemplifies the kind of experience McCauley calls forth in her work; that is, a bodily reaction to what has remained unspoken within dominant collective memory.

This connection of body and memory—or refusal of memory—is linked to the complex dynamic found in cross-racial encounters that raise up traumatic histories and questions of survival in public space. In “‘The AIDS Crisis Is Not Over,’” Douglas Crimp and Thomas Keenan begin to define the psychic damage caused by societal indifference to suffering, which Crimp refers to as “socially produced trauma” (257). Keenan elaborates:

There’s a double trauma here. On the one hand, there’s a cataclysmic event, which produces symptoms and calls for testimony. And then it happens again, when the value of the witness in the testimony is denied, and there’s no one to hear the account, no one to attend or respond—not simply to the event, but to its witness as well. (258)

This chapter will focus on Robbie McCauley’s Sally’s Rape as it addresses the ‘socially produced trauma’ that is part of the legacy of interracial rape during slavery. Sally’s Rape examines the connections between socially-produced trauma, cultural inscription of identity onto the body, and the reception of testimony. Specifically, I will look at the dynamic between McCauley and Jeannie Hutchins, the white performance artist accompanying McCauley, and how the interaction between their two bodies, black and white, helps to expose the social construction of a racialized sexuality that allows for both the exploitation of black female bodies and the suppression of that traumatic history of interracial rape within collective memory.

When asked about the creative motivation behind her Obie-winning play Sally's

Rape, Robbie McCauley responds, "I did this series out of the obsession for examining my feelings of survival" (269). Centered around the rape of great-great-grandmother Sally, a former slave, McCauley's performance bears witness to surviving a traumatized personal and cultural history. Ann E. Nymann refers to Sally's Rape as "a social experiment in which Robbie McCauley, an African-American performance artist, performs the black female subject *out of victimization*" (577). Indeed, the performance focuses on the relationship between the social and traumatic histories. A movement "*out of victimization*," as Nymann puts it, requires an analysis of the way trauma causes an individual to internalize blame for her status. The witnessing encounter involves the struggle to produce a story, to create an address in language, so that the survivor can emerge from the isolation of trauma. The movement from isolation to connection is also one from silence into a testimony. What happens when the address created requires the listener to examine her own feelings of guilt in relation to the trauma of the other? Sally's Rape deals with the process of coming to terms with being implicated in a traumatic history, not only as its survivor, but as a kind of perpetrator through insidious cultural practices.

The performance articulates the differences between what Dominick LaCapra refers to as writing about trauma and writing trauma:

writing about trauma is an aspect of historiography related to the project of reconstructing the past as objectively as possible without necessarily going to the self-defeating extreme of single-minded objectification that involves the denial of one's implication in the problem one treats, . . . [and writing

trauma, which] involves processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and ‘giving voice’ to the past.

(186)

In Sally’s Rape, “examining . . . feelings of survival” entails sorting through the facts, or the ways in which the past has been reconstructed, denied, or reproduced, before moving on to the artistic expression of post-traumatic experience itself. In the case of Sally’s Rape, writing about trauma is connected to writing traumatic experience because, as the performance demonstrates, historiography can reproduce trauma if the survivor’s experience is lost or ignored within the process of recording and receiving the story of the past.

The white woman who chokes on her sandwich refuses to claim her connection to the history McCauley’s character describes. In this scene, she is not being asked to accept blame for the rape. Rather, her responsibility lies in acknowledging the history, and in not remaining outside the grasp of this history, untouched and untouchable. Thomas Keenan suggests that:

There’s a way in which the telling of the story, the testimony of the affected community, functions or can be received as an accusation, by those who thought they were uninvolved. The testimony is an address, which means it’s a provocation to a response. And that’s what they don’t want to give. They don’t want to respond to the person who has called—for responsibility. When someone says ‘I don’t want to hear about it,’ or counters with a slur, they are telling the truth. They are creating

themselves as something insulated in its generality from the specificity of address, by disavowing any involvement with one who appeals.

(Caruth and Keenan 258)

When McCauley forces the young white woman to face the knowledge of the systematic rape of black women, she disrupts the racialized transmission of traumatic memory that allows whites to forget what resonates painfully in the daily lives of African-Americans. The white woman in the exchange does more than become embarrassed or uncomfortable. She also continues to 'create herself' as the epitome of a privileged white womanhood, insulated and protected from the knowledge of our racial history, unwilling to hear its ugly truths. She quits the job, thereby removing herself as a recipient of the address. Through this failed address her identity remains intact.

In this scene and throughout Sally's Rape, performance and the performative intersect, as Sally's Rape exposes the performativity of racial difference in public spaces, specifically those spaces involved in the preservation of history, such as the archive, museum, or library. Anthony Kubiak suggests that "the forces at work in performativity are more insidious, hidden, concealed, and self-concealing"(91) than in performance in general. Sally's Rape provides an example of an artistic effort to de-naturalize the insidious forces or practices that perpetuate racist dynamics while ignoring the historical and ideological relationships underlying these dynamics.

The performance unveils that which has been concealed in plain sight through an extended focus of the moment of the white woman's discomfort. Hutchins does not consistently identify with the character she portrays, but instead allows a critical space

between performer and character to be observed by the audience. Immediately following her portrayal of the Smith College graduate, she distances herself from the character and begins a critical dialogue with McCauley and the audience to look more closely at that moment of failed address. When Hutchins asks the audience: “Was the Smith College graduate denying . . . ? lying . . . ? or dumb . . . ? Yeah she was dumb. I keep telling you that” (225), she encourages the audience to make the connection between socially-produced trauma and a kind of public forgetting linked to racial privilege.

This connection continues to resonate throughout the performance. In a moment of dialogue with Hutchins, she explains her feelings around the selective amnesia that seems to define whiteness:

It angers me that even though your ancestors might have been slaves—because they did have white slaves . . . only made black slavery mandatory for economic reasons, so they could catch us when we ran away—that history has given you the ability to forget your shame about being oppressed by being ignorant, mean, or idealistic . . . which makes it dangerous for me. (228)

The ‘invisibility’ of whiteness that led to the marking of black bodies for slavery has also, as McCauley exposes, allowed whites to escape the mark of history. The performance suggests the collective amnesia around traumatic histories of racialized others is part of the reproduction of white privilege. The performance reveals that the dominant racial order sustains itself by using the broken memory of traumatized others and the denial accompanying perpetration to encourage forgetting on a cultural level. McCauley refers

to “These new ones with the alligators act like they wadn’t born with no memory” (233). The “alligators” suggests the label of a clothing brand worn by a certain cultural type: young, white, and affluent. Invisibility of whiteness coincides with the erasure of memory. To be born with no memory is to admit no responsibility toward the past, to deny history’s claim on one’s body. When referring to the dangerous implications of this amnesia, McCauley acknowledges that the forgetting occurs at her expense. Without understanding history, the discrepancies between black and white material reality are used to justify theories of white supremacy. Coming to terms with traumatic histories involves sorting through the painful fragments of memory and understanding their relationship to privilege and the bodies bearing their legacy.

I would like to turn briefly to another text as a contrast to the scene of denial in the public site of the library. In her essay “The Richmond Museum of the Confederacy,” writer Jane Lazarre uses another site in which history is archived and displayed for public consumption. In this case, the museum in question serves as a memorial to the Civil War, and it specifically preserves the memory of the confederacy. The fact that the exhibition on the institution of slavery only existed temporarily as a “traveling show,” causes Lazarre to refer to the museum as “a metaphor for American denial of the reality of slavery and of African-American history as a central core of American history” (19). This denial echoes the denial historically found in the curriculum of educational institutions such as Smith College, which McCauley critiques in the library scene.

When Lazarre visits the slavery exhibition, she experiences a radical shift in consciousness that allows her to see herself in relation to history as if for the first time.

Lazarre identifies the whiteness that shields her from the legacy of brutality she sees before her: “I am an ordinary American woman protected by this whiteness (which we all know, does not really exist yet is known and visible and powerful) into a precious invisibility of apparent belonging, and I am weighed down with the transforming shame this knowledge brings” (18). When she identifies this “precious invisibility of apparent belonging,” she refuses to sustain the invisibility of whiteness.

According to Judith Butler:

If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (271)

Although Butler refers to “gender identity” here, McCauley’s performance and Lazarre’s writing suggest that racial identity is constituted through “the stylized repetition of acts through time,” which they attempt to subvert within their pieces. McCauley uses the Smith College graduate to identify the “seeming seamless identity” forged by evasion, invisibility, and denial, and Lazarre refuses to reproduce whiteness in public space.

Instead of “choking” or refusing to swallow the painful truth of history, Lazarre allows this pain to enter her, and she risks control of her body in one moment of overwhelming grief when she stands before an the iron harness used to punish slaves:

As I look back at the iron harness, my knees literally bending so I have to concentrate hard in order to remain standing, I see an old man has walked

up next to me. . . . His trimmed beard is nearly all white but the tight curls which push out from his grey, felt hat are still partly black, not fully taken over by the grey. His skin is dark brown so that its age creases around the mouth, the eyes, the forehead, look dark purple or black. He leans heavily on an old wooden cane, the kind you can buy in drug stores. And he weeps. . . . No sobbing, just plentiful tears falling from his lids down his cheeks, the slightly glowing rivulets disappearing inside his pressed white collar. And beyond embarrassment, I stop fighting my knees, I let them buckle and, crouching on the floor, I weep too. (18)

Like Lazarre, McCauley's performance acknowledges that whites must not only face history but also address the way in which claims of innocence function as a form of denial that reproduces traumatic history. In both scenes, traumatic histories emerge through interracial encounters in public space, and Lazarre and McCauley identify and disrupt the patterns that allow for the pain of denial.

In Sally's Rape, McCauley uses the theater to create a new public space for the construction of the address to articulate the traumatic history and the complex cultural processes that keep this history muted. Playwright and educator Karen Malpede suggests that:

Because theatre takes place in public and involves the movement of bodies across a stage, theatre seems uniquely suited to portray the complex interpersonal realities of trauma and to give shape to the compelling interventions that become possible when trauma is addressed by others

who validate the victim's reality. (168-9)

Malpede has developed the idea of the "witnessing imagination," a strategy in theater through which:

Practitioners . . . create various contexts in which the traumatic story can be told in a manner allowing the teller to feel the impact of extreme events that may originally have been endured by the victim in a dissociative state. True witnessing counteracts the isolation trauma imposes. The witness, whether journalist or therapist, playwright, actor, or audience, offers his/her body to the one who testifies in order quite literally to help bear the tale. The witnessing experience is visceral—information resonates inside the bodies of both the teller and the receivers of testimony, and in this process both are changed. (168)

According to Malpede, whose ideas about witnessing have been influenced by Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's collaborative efforts,¹⁵ witnessing is an exchange or encounter that occurs at a bodily level. Although the scene of witnessing takes place within a museum and not a theater, the Lazarre essay attests to this aspect of the phenomenon. The "information" conveyed by the harness seems to "resonate" within her body, causing her to fall to the ground and weep. The bodily act is significant in that it marks a moment of radical reorganization, when she allows herself to become a witness, risking her former self with the transformative encounter.

¹⁵See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History, (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Her performance invokes what Dori Laub refers to as the “third level of witnessing” in which the process of bearing witness to traumatic experience is analyzed and understood. The performance itself bears witness not only to the facts of interracial rape, but also to the dynamic of denial that reproduces the traumatizing effect of the initial violence by silencing and isolating the survivor. If the response is that audience members do not wish to claim their part, which mostly entails owning a responsibility for understanding the history and its implications in daily life, then the performance forces this denial and evasion into the public space. Through the encounters between McCauley and Hutchins, the performance constructs another address. This address involves McCauley, Jeannie Hutchins, and the audience. “I want to engage in dialogue about subject matter that there are emotional barriers to,” she says. “In what we do, the audience becomes a character” (Rosenfeld D2). Through her performance, McCauley draws attention to the issue of failed witness, using the public space of the theater to interrogate the public spaces of the library, the academic institution, and the auction block, to confront the ways in which the suffering of African-Americans has been denied and even fetishized by whites in public space.

In this way, Sally’s Rape can be compared with work by artists such as Adrian Piper and Coco Fusco, and Guillermo Gomez-Pena.¹⁶ In their anti-racist performance art, audiences become characters within the performance through the creation of scenes that

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Black female body in performance or theater pieces such as Coco Fusco’s Two Undiscovered Amerindians, Breena Clark and Brenda Dickerson’s Re-membering Aunt Jemima, and Suzan Lori Park’s Venus.

re-enact the dynamic of socially-produced trauma. Their work deals with issues of the black body in public space, the experience of survival, and cultural inscription in public space. The performance challenges the authoritative centers of cultural representation: the art gallery, city squares, and the natural history museums. These public spaces are institutions where the individuals gather to receive community information and knowledge. The “knowledge” transmitted by these institutions or within these spaces is rendered suspect, as the performance dramatizes the transmission of this knowledge to expose the underlying ideology.

In Two Undiscovered Amerindians, Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña dress as members of an “undiscovered” tribe from South America. In a traveling exhibition, they live in a cage while spectators, who are not always aware that they are watching a performance piece, observe them. The point of disconnect, when the individual becomes aware of the performance, allows for a flash of recognition of one’s role within a racist history. The reactions vary from extreme rage, to laughter, to grief. For each audience, the performance resonates differently. History is not passively consumed, its meaning already determined in its documentation by some outside force. The audience participates in determining its meaning. Not simply a part of the mental world, this meaning has physical implications. Faces cringe and bodies move closer to the cage or remain at a distance, almost in a state of detachment and denial. A crying woman expresses her disgusted disbelief at the racist responses she witnesses and her unresolved guilt about feeling somehow implicated in the responses. Other audience members struggle for words to express their horror at the unacknowledged racism of other spectators. Individuals in

Spain, who also are surrounded by Columbus celebration, make connections different than individuals in New York or Ohio who seem to feel the racial issues more keenly and often react more defensively or emotionally.¹⁷

Adrian Piper's conceptual and performance art, such as Cornered, the Vanilla Nightmares series, and My Calling (Card) #1: A Reactive Guerilla Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties, forces audiences to question their deepest, least understood and recognized assumptions about racial difference.¹⁸ "Conflicts arise," Piper explains:

when another person, either black or white, has false preconceptions about who I am and how I will behave on the basis of how I look or identify myself racially. . . . I frequently provoke hostility in those whose social comfort requires my conformity to stereotyped social categories. Because they rarely question the veracity of their own preconceptions, I must be prepared to disabuse them, in order to avoid serious and irreversible misunderstandings. (4)

In "The Joy of Marginality," Piper describes the ways in which race influences her social

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See The Couple in the Cage: A Guatini Odyssey, Directed and produced by Coco Fusco and Paul Heredia, Video Data Bank, 1993 and Coco Fusco, English is Broken: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas, (New York: New Press, 1995). For a review of the video recording of the performance, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Couple in a Cage: Video Recording Reviews," TDR 42.2 (1998): 175.

¹⁸

In My Calling Card, for example, Piper present individuals who, mistaking her for white, reveal racist assumption or make jokes in her presence. The cards identify her as African-American and the actions of the recipient as racist. For a detailed description of Piper's work, see Adrian Piper: A Retrospective, (Baltimore: Fine Arts Gallery, University of Maryland, 1999).

interactions and her work:

My work is an act of communication that politically catalyzes its viewers to a target or stance that I depict. Through the work I try to construct a concrete, immediate and personal relationship between me and the viewer which locates us within the network of political cause and effect. My purpose is to transform the viewer psychologically, by presenting him or her with an unavoidable concrete reality that cuts through the defensive rationalizations by which we insulate ourselves against the facts of our political responsibility. I want viewers of my work to come away from it with the understanding that their reactions to racism are ultimately political choices over which they have control. (4)

Sally's Rape is similar to both Fusco and Piper¹⁹ in that audience members are confronted with scenes of socially-produced trauma, the failed address or denial of testimony that reproduces whiteness in public space. Each artist stages a scene allowing audiences to witness the way in which the denial of black humanity in public space is required for the construction of whiteness.

McCauley is direct about the anti-racist commitment within her work. Specifically, she defines the racism her work addresses as “White supremacy” or “The idea that white people are something special and that to identify with the white condition is a good thing that has been so much a part of European colonial thinking that so-called white people and

19

For a discussion of audience on Piper's work see Jane Desmond, “Mapping Identity Onto the Body,” Women and Performance 6.2 (1993) : 103-127.

colonized people all over the world have internalized the thought for centuries” (“Thoughts” 275). Confronting this “internalized” thought presents its challenges, McCauley, acknowledges: “People easily bristle at these statements. People who consider themselves white may be tired of being put in the role of the oppressor, and may feel there’s nothing they can do about it” (“Thoughts” 275). The performance attempts to look at socially-produced trauma without reproducing a failed address through accusation, denial, or evasion. McCauley explains her desire to create a space in which collective remembering can happen:

I am being a witness by choosing to remember. What’s important about witnessing is that the audience is doing it with me. One of the problems with modern industrial society is the disconnection from that constant witnessing of the past, of where we came from, of being with the stories, and so that’s my work. (Patraka, “Robbie McCauley” 215)

Her work involves creating a connection with the audience, to avoid alienating them and to encourage an open environment where the tough issues can be aired in public. While McCauley introduces issues of survival, she shares resources and creates a community.

During the performance, the audience is offered food as a gesture of community. The issue of food involves more than just a welcoming gesture on McCauley’s part. It becomes difficult to forget one’s body while eating. The food functions as a reminder of material reality and of the consumption of the past in the present, grounding the abstractions of history in the bodily engagement with memory. Comparing the body as lived to the body in representation is crucial to her project, and the food strategy initiates

the audience into a communal, participatory space.

As she passes out food, McCauley informs audience members that they will assist in the creation of a dialogue, and she allays possible tension by providing reassuring and explicit directions. “We’ll use hand signals,” she tells them, “lead like camp directors, divide you into groups . . . Well, it doesn’t matter what section you’re in, just matters who you are, and you can change your opinion as time goes on” (Sally’s Rape 222). Through this method, McCauley hopes to create a space for connection between the audience and the material of the performance: “Well, in this work I continually explain what I’m doing as part of the form. And I’m not trying to push people away. It’s the ritual aspect, the joining that’s important. Even though I often exaggerate difference, I make it possible to explore what I’m doing with the audience’s participation” (Patraka 212). She addresses the audience so that they can move beyond accuser/accused dichotomy while continuing to focusing on the implications of a racist history. She guides the audience through a variety of responses toward the fear involved in facing the truth: fear of being accused or called out as ignorant or inherently evil.

Jill Dolan describes the strategy employed by performance artists such as McCauley, who do not allow audience members to settle into well-worn responses in reaction to controversial material. In The Feminist Spectator as Critic, Dolan writes of:

Ideology circulated through a text as a meaning effect which can be deciphered by a spectator freed from the dreamlike state of passive receptivity. If the representational apparatus is ideologically marked, its material aspects must be brought into full view and denaturalized for the

spectator's inspection. The mystification of social arrangements is exposed and the spectator is presented with the possibility of change. (107)

Sally's Rape marks the "representational apparatus" repeatedly during the performance by bringing the audience into the process. Hutchins cues them with lines like "Let's practice with something from the context of the piece" (222). In this way, the performance is more complicated than the telling of a painful story and the release of powerful emotions. As McCauley tells Vivian Patraka:

It's fine if it's an exorcism for an audience member, but I see it more as an opening for movement, as creating a groundwork for dialogue. The idea of releasing for its own sake means that you then don't move anywhere. I prefer when people say, 'You made me think; I disagreed with you, but I was moved to think. (Patraka, "Robbie McCauley" 206)

Thinking in this case means developing an awareness of the interactions between audience and performer, which also entails an awareness of what it means to view a black, female body in public space fraught with a unspoken racist history.

The interaction between black and white female bodies in public space invokes a particular history, which has to do with female sexuality within a racialized scheme. Testimony is both found and denied in the way they reflect against or read each other's bodies and in their acknowledgment or denial of the ways their bodies are used in dominant culture. The connection between their bodies and history brings the relationship between white and black female sexuality and the role this sexuality plays historically in the justification of racist violence into relief. According to Elizabeth Hammonds "black

women's sexuality has been constructed in a binary opposition to that of white women: it is rendered simultaneously invisible, visible (exposed), hypervisible, and pathologized in dominant discourses" (170). As Hammonds suggests, the construction of racial difference is dependent on binary opposition in which whiteness embodies all positive cultural value and blackness its opposite. To understand the traumatic history connected to the construction of a racialized sexuality, Sally's Rape enacts the search for the memory embedded in the body of the other, while historicizing moments of forgetting. Cultural forgetting works with the gaps created by traumatic memory, and what is lost in those gaps is the protesting body of the black woman. Sally's Rape traces her invisibility and performs not only the recuperation of the actual story, or the actual body in history. The play also examines the way in which fractured memory, an inherent feature of traumatic experience, renders certain people invisible within a culture.

The testimony that Sally's Rape creates involves what Joseph Roach defines as *genealogies of performance* that "attend not only to 'the body,' as Foucault suggests, but also to bodies—to the reciprocal reflections they make on one another's surfaces as they foreground their capacities for interaction. [They] document—and suspect—the historical transmission and dissemination of cultural practices through collective representations" (25) and "that also attend to 'countermemories,' or the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences" (26). The body, memory, and the "reciprocal reflections" function in several ways in Sally's Rape. McCauley deals with the traumatized black female body in historical and psychological terms.

Frantz Fanon's writings on the fractured, racialized memory evoked in public encounters between black and white bodies support Roach's 'reciprocal reflections' argument and provide an important theoretical insight for understanding McCauley's work. In Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon describes a scene in public space when a terrified child points at him and yell, "Look, a Negro!"(111). The young child's words force Fanon to feel alienated from his own body:

Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by the racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in the triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places . . . It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triple: I occupied space. I moved toward the other . . . and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared.

Nausea (112)

His history, both as it was lived by the bodies of his ancestors and as he inherited it through colonial discourse, bears its full, violent weight on him in that moment. Fanon's experience of his own body in public space is altered when he is confronted by a "historico-racial schema" constructed not by the "residual sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character,' but by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" (111). The encounter with the white child disrupts and distorts the experience of his own body, which "existed triple," with each component of his fractured self at an unreachable distance from

the others. The historico-racial schema creates and reproduces these fractures within the subject's psyche, shaping the perception and experience of the body.

Fanon's discussion of the 'historico-racial schema' and its relationship to the body corresponds with Foucault's genealogy, which "as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history" (Foucault 148). "History," Foucault suggests, "becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being—as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instinct, multiplies our body and sets it against itself" (154). The "task" of genealogy, according to Foucault, "is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (148). "The body," according to Foucault, "manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors. . . ." and "is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self" (148).

Fanon's response to this disorienting assault reveals the urgent need to reclaim his body from a dissociative state and to address the "discontinuity" that the historico-racial schema has created within his own bodily experience: "I thought what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations" (111). His desire to "balance space, to localize sensation," stems from the dislocation happening within that moment. The encounter between Fanon and the white child reveals the way history is enacted through what Roach refers to as the "reciprocal reflections they make on one another's surfaces as they foreground their capacities for interaction" (25). In the encounter, whiteness is represented by a child, signifying the way whiteness is constituted by a kind of innocence in the face of history's terror. The scene reflects the ability of

whiteness to remain new, untainted and free from history's consequences, by always projecting the horror away from itself, like the child pointing at Fanon's body.

Fanon's discussion of the historico-racial and the physiological bodies suggests a connection between the individual and cultural responses to traumatic histories. For individual survivors, trauma involves a delay in response. The emotional and physical responses not experienced initially are raised when the survivor perceives a potential threat in a new situation, causing the survivor to relive on a physiological level the terror of the original experience. The embodied memory is experienced without a direct link to the 'story' of the original experience. In this way, the experience of memory has been fractured. Traumatic memory exists in two distinct forms: the relentlessly recurring image, stereotyped and static, and the unconscious bodily response to conditions that bear psychic resemblance to the original experience. The division occurs between memory as expressed through language and as enacted by the body. This division seems strikingly similar to the sense of fragmentation occurring with the historico-racial body, which has been defined by a language never free from the oppressor's ideology and its effect on the experience and perception of the body, and the physiological self, which emerges outside of language, evading conscious understanding but perpetually seeking expression. Encounters such as the one described by Fanon reenact this break, forcing a self-alienation upon him, so that in the shock of the moment, he must leave his body and look at it from the outside, diminished and dehumanized. The "socially produced trauma" enacted in this scene entails a lack of recognition of the survivor's story, reinforcing shame in survivor and denying the implication of others in the history of the trauma.

The analysis of the body done by Roach, Foucault, and Fanon proves useful when examining Robbie McCauley's attempt in Sally's Rape to confront the "historico-racial schema" or genealogy of the black female body within the dominant white culture. The attempts to "balance space, localize sensation," represent a desire to find a means to articulate her own experience and the bodily response to the traumatic history she has inherited. The performance exposes the construction of these bodies, bringing psychic processes into public space and exposing the phenomenon of socially-produced trauma, which leaves survivor's voices unheard. Theatre in this case reproduces the social space in which original traumas occurred, making visible the denial or evasion that silences testimony.

Returning to the body as a site of information related to pain, McCauley must work through the way bodies have been constructed racially and sexually in the public sphere. She distinguishes the "historico-racial" body from the experience of pain associated with traumatic history, while also making it clear that the reproduction of the "historico-racial" scheme perpetuates the failure of testimony. If the distinction between these two bodies is not addressed then McCauley risks that the audience will not recognize the suffering she tries to convey. The performance strives for accountability that moves beyond a sense of cathartic release during the performance. Raewyn White suggests that McCauley uses her body as "as a register of history, a means by which Others can share the connections that she has made between skin color and slavery, servitude and survival, resistance and redemption" (291).

At a crucial moment in the performance, McCauley stands naked on a auction

block as Hutchins coaches the audience into bidding for her. “I wanted to do this,” she tells them after, “–stand naked in public on the auction block. I thought somehow it could help free us from *this*. (*Refers to her naked body*) Any old socialist knows, one can’t be free till all are free” (231). Washington Post reporter Megan Rosenfeld describes the different responses triggered by McCauley’s audience:

Last year in Louisville, McCauley says, an African-American who identified herself as a cultural anthropologist protested that the nudity reinforced the stereotype of black women as sexual objects. Black and white women alike objected to the nudity, but one woman responded that audiences were intelligent enough to separate McCauley’s nakedness from sexual exploitation, and another said the experience was a catharsis necessary for healing the scars left by slavery. . . . At a different performance, a young black man said that he did not see a black woman on the auction block, but his own great-great grandfather. Another young woman said she couldn’t feel anything during the play because black women must not allow themselves to be vulnerable. When McCauley replied, ‘Yes, you can,’ she burst into tears. (Rosenfeld D2)

Rosenfeld’s collection of responses makes clear that McCauley’s body elicits a response that re-connects audience members with a sense of their own body in history. Her vulnerability to the pain of that history becomes contagious and allows her audience to transcend their roles as passive observers, involving and implicating their own unspoken relationship to the horrors of the past, particularly in relation to the spectacle of the

suffering McCauley embodies.

During the auction block moment, McCauley travels to the site of a specific historical trauma, the point at which white supremacy enacted its claim to the black female body in public space. She returns to reclaim what was lost in this moment, the subjectivity that was denied, and what Bibi Bakare-Yusuf refers to as “the possession of a voice” in public space. According to Bakare-Yusuf:

The possession of voice becomes significant for both torturer and tortured. For the torturer, the awareness of voice confirms his power, his existence, the presence of a world; for the sufferer, the absence of a world, the awareness of his/her corporeality, the limits of his/her extension in the world. This has been precisely the claim of feminist and black theorists, who have pointed out that the association of blacks and females with corporeality excludes and debars them from the public sphere that makes subjectivity possible. (316)

In the transformation from silent object to the speaking subject, McCauley confronts the history of her body as possession. She must deal with the issue of possession from within as well, as she confronts the overwhelming effects of trauma on the body. Telling the story, creating a narrative from the seemingly unspeakable, undermines the process of silencing bodies. McCauley’s performance reveals how memory has been buried in the body, outside of language and without a sense of space in cultural imagination. This burying of memory is linked to the isolating affects of trauma that erase collective subjectivity and isolate survivor. The performance attempts to make audiences conscious

of their perceptions of racialized body and the way these perceptions reproduce the historico-racial schema Fanon describes.

To reconstruct the memory fractured by trauma and culture there exists a need to perform those bodies in their moments of reciprocal reflection, specifically between the Black and white woman, performed by McCauley and Hutchins. To stage their interactions and dialogues around issues such as sexuality and the construction of femininity is to allow insight into the way these constructions have worked within history and how they have exposed the black female body to sexual trauma.

whitegirls stowed
 passengers
 on the underground
 railroad
 cheered the imposition
 of
 jim crow laws
 were burned as
 witches
 at the stake
 packed picnic baskets
 for the family to take
 to alabama
 georgia mississippi nigger
 lynchings
 have been trophy and
 punching bag
 of anonymous white
 and black men
 and ones everybody knew
 ---Marita Golden

As Marita Golden's poem reminds, white women have participated in the spectacle of black suffering, packing picnic baskets for the family to eat and consuming the

resources they have gained at the expense of black labor. Golden's poem invokes images of Scottsboro or the Emmet Till trial when preserving white womanhood became the central focus of public attention. These trials stand in stark contrast to the images of cross-racial solidarity suggested by the first line of the quotation, when "whitegirls stowed/passengers/on the underground/railroad." Historically, the relationship between African-American and white women has been most complicated around the issue of interracial rape.

Nellie McKay refers to rape as "the most direct common threat" faced by all women and continues by asking, "How then do we account for the fact that the most irreconcilable angers, jealousies, and hostilities plaguing relationships between women of color and white women have their genesis in the politics of sexuality and, to a large extent, in those of rape?" (249). The dissonance McKay refers to played itself out most visibly during the second wave of feminism in the U.S. when women writers of color, most notably Angela Davis, criticized the anti-rape movement for scapegoating African-American men. In Against Our Will....., white feminist Susan Brownmiller refers to interracial rape as "a national obsession" (216). Brownmiller's chapter on interracial rape criticizes anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells for discrediting white women. Wells, according to Brownmiller, "subordinates sexual to racial" (279), and in doing so, conforms to the misogyny within the larger culture despite her radical intentions. Angela Davis argues that Brownmiller and other white writers in the anti-rape movement subordinate racial to sexual, stating that "If Black women have been conspicuously absent from the ranks of the contemporary anti-rape movement, it may be due, in part, to that

movement's indifferent posture toward the frame-up rape charge as an incitement to racist aggression" (173). According to Davis, white feminist such as Brownmiller invoke stereotypes about African-American sexuality, both male and female, and "historical myopia further prevents them from comprehending that the portrayal of Black men as rapists reinforces racism's open invitation to white men to avail themselves sexually of Black women's bodies" (182). Davis argues that the stereotypes work together within a collective unconscious shaped by the racist ideology that marks Black sexuality as wild, dangerous, and animalistic.

Sally's Rape participates in a dialogue around interracial rape with other creative representations and cultural positions. In the years following the Black Power and Women's Movements, several fictional depictions have attempted to address the complex cultural phenomenon of black on white rape. One fictional portrayal of the black male rapist from the period of second wave feminism discussed by Davis is in Marilyn French's The Woman's Room. The scenes following the rape of a young white woman provide an interesting example of the kind of representation that McCauley must implicitly engage in her work on interracial rape, specifically when trying to create a dialogue with Hutchins.

When Chris, the daughter of Val, a white activist, Harvard graduate student, and central character in The Woman's Room, is raped, the narrative turns to issues of race and social justice. The courtroom scenes work through an analysis that would seem, as Davis describes, to "subordinate the racial to the sexual":

Val sat there remembering that downstairs she felt sorry for the black boys in the lineup, knowing that such sympathy was gone in her, and that it

would never return. It didn't matter if they were black or white, or yellow, or anything else for that matter. It was males against females, and the war was to the death. (620-1)

Later, Chris tells her story to her former boyfriend Bart, an African-American student, who told her "in dire tones how black men felt about white women, how white women were the only vehicles of their revenge against white men" (622). The fictional representation on the sentiments expressed by Bart call to mind provocative statements about the rape of white women as revolutionary action made by Eldridge Cleaver in Soul on Ice.²⁰ This conversation seems to justify Val's earlier reaction to the relationship between racism and rape. In this scene, however, the history of lynching, in which a white woman's word or even the hint of sexual impropriety meant certain death for a black man, fails to surface. It is the white woman who is doubted here, perhaps because she has no connection to a white man, and she lives independently in a time of growing sexual and economic freedom. Although the rape section of the novel in many ways reads like a manifesto for the feminist anti-rape movement, it offers little space for a dialogue about the deep ambivalence expressed by African-American women scholars such as Davis and McKay on the issues of race, rape, and justice. The specific history of interracial rape as a tool of oppression, against black men who were denied due process and black women who were violated without any recourse against white male offenders, is either ignored or inadequately addressed.

²⁰

Eldridge Cleaver. Soul on Ice. New York: Bantam, 1968.

Alice Walker's "Advancing Luna— And Ida B. Wells" has drawn the attention for its treatment of interracial rape during the Civil Rights Movement.²¹ In the short story, the narrator, an African-American young woman and a writer, describes the conflicts she faces when her white friend Luna tells her that she was raped by a black man while working in the South. Both women are graduates of Sarah Lawrence. They are both involved as activists in social justice movements. Yet, the differences between them are too significant to ignore. However committed she seems to fighting racial injustice, Luna is always able to return to her father for economic support, and her family blames the narrator for Luna's current living conditions. When Luna chastises the narrator for sleeping with a white man, because "in a politically diseased society to 'sleep with the enemy' was to become infected with the enemy's 'political germs,'" the narrator responds, "coming from Luna it was amusing, since she never took into account the risk her own black lovers ran by sleeping with 'the white woman,' and she had apparently been convinced that a summer of relatively innocuous political work in the South had cured her of any racial, economic, or sexual disease" (96-7).

Luna tells the narrator about the rape and her inability to defend herself from the rapist, Freddie Pye, because if she had screamed rape he would have been tortured or murdered, and the rape would have been used to undermine the social justice movement.

²¹

See Valerie Smith, "Split Infinities: The Case of Interracial Rape," Conflicts in Feminism, Ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox, (New York: Routledge, 1990) 271-287 and Nellie McKay "Alice Walker's 'Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells': A Struggle Toward Sisterhood," Rape and Representation, Ed. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver, (New York: Columbia, 1991) 248-260.

However, the narrator is unable to receive Luna's testimony because the history is too complicated. There was no clear position for her to occupy, and she ends up resenting Luna for causing her to question or to acknowledge that she had a degree of ambivalence about the issue of interracial rape. Yet, it does become strikingly clear that as a African-American woman, she had been left out of the drama of interracial rape. The history of the rape of Black women had been overshadowed by the triangle of black man/white woman/white man:

Who knows what the black woman thinks of rape? Who has asked her? Who *cares*? Who has even properly acknowledged that *she* and not the white woman in this story is the most likely victim of rape? Whenever interracial rape is mentioned, a black woman's first thought is to protect her brothers, her fathers, her sons, her lover. (93)

In the postscript to the story, set in Havana many years later, she discusses the Luna experience with a male friend, a muralist and activist, who is also African-American. The artist believes that the narrator is missing a component that would be key to understanding the story. He claims that Freddy Pye, the alleged rapist, was probably hired by the government to rape white women to undermine the Movement, a phenomenon with which he had firsthand experience, although the artist refused the offer to become a rapist-for-hire. At the story's close, the artist looks at the narrator, and his "look clearly implied that I would never understand anything about evil, power, or corrupted human beings in the modern world" to which she responds, "But of course he was wrong," ending the story with her perspective. The artist had clearly underestimated her and her ability to see the

obsession with the interracial rape of white women, which left the brutal history of African-American women unexamined and unspoken. The story's end also draws attention to the use of the female body as currency in a political struggle between men. The white woman's body still has value in this struggle, a dubious honor but one that does distinguish her from the African-American women, whose history and body remains marginalized.

The questions and concerns raised by these fictional representations of interracial rape reveal a complex, often contradictory dynamic that Robbie McCauley attempts to address with Sally's Rape. Valerie Smith suggests that "interracial rape operates as a site where ideologies of racial and gender differences come into tension with and interrogate each other" (273). Sally's Rape focuses on this site and examines the point at which cultural constructions of identity connect with trauma to make and unmake subjectivity along racial, sexual, and class lines. Within the aesthetic space of performance, the connections between identity, history, and subject positions are uncovered as a process, one that is linked to the perception of gendered/racialized identity in public space. In "Feminism as a Persistent Critique of History," bell hooks has remarked that "Given the way in which sexism continues to shape the way women thinkers are seen, the moment women disagree, conflict is reduced to pure spectacle" (78). McCauley and Hutchins attempt to move beyond the spectacle by first acknowledging and confronting it directly. McCauley and Jeannie Hutchins engage in a dialogue on the representation of racialized bodies and the way this representation has contributed historically to socially-produced trauma caused by the failure to validate the place of the witness and survivor.

McCauley expresses frustration about trying to create a performance when the vehicle of transmission—language—remains saturated with an ideology hostile to her testimony. Hutchins worries that she will be unmasked by playing these roles, exposed as naive, indifferent, and self-absorbed in her whiteness:

ROBBIE: What upsets me is language. I can't win in your language.

JEANNIE: You're going to win anyway. What upsets me is there's an underlying implication that you're gonna get underneath something and pull it out. That you can see it and I can't. (228)

In the San Diego performance, when Hutchins tries to articulate a connection between women around the general issue of sexual assault, McCauley tells that her comparison does not work: “‘It’s just different, man. It’s like having the language without the experience’” (Welsh C6). In the performance recorded for Conjure Women, McCauley and Hutchins sit across from each other during a dialogue about the limits of language. As they speak, they hold each others hands and push back and forth between right and left sides in a continuous rocking motion. There is a sense that their bodies are laboring under the words, struggling to commit but in need of the repetitive motion to quiet any defensiveness that may seek to protect them from each other.

Yet, despite the piece’s repeated emphasis on the problems with finding a language to express the experience of survival and to connect across temporal and racial boundaries, McCauley remains intent on forming a dialogue in her work. When discussing her Boston piece, Turf, which deals with the controversial issue of busing in Boston, McCauley explains, “‘I’m interested in keeping the dialogue going. People want to be

healed, but it has to hurt first. And they have to talk about it” (Hartigan 61).

McCauley and Hutchins open the performance with the “Prologue: Talking About What It Is About.” In this opening Jeannie tells McCauley that “Well, that one person said it was about you and me. And I know it’s not about me, but it’s about you and I’m in it.” McCauley responds, “It’s my story, and you’re in it because I put you in it” (219). McCauley describes Jeannie Hutchins concerns about being objectified by the performance (i.e., “Look, a white girl!”). “One of the good jokes about Sally’s Rape,” McCauley explains, “is that Jeannie Hutchins and I had a long talk about whether or not she was playing ‘the stupid white girl.’ And it’s not that, it’s the two of us enjoying the dialogue about my stuff” (207). Hutchins’ concern that she will be the ‘stupid white girl’ contrasts with the story in 1964 segment. She is worried about being revealed in public, or that there is only one space for her to occupy as a white woman in a play that deals with the legacy of white racism. Her concerns do not seem unwarranted at times. During a performance in Brooklyn, the predominantly Black audience booed each time Hutchins attempted to speak before McCauley asked the audience to listen to her words (Conjure Women).

For McCauley these experiences with audiences have provided a deepening sense of the work’s purpose, which she explains, is about talking and *listening* (Conjure Women). Understanding and developing the relationship between teller and listener, or between witnesses, around issues of trauma and memory surfaces as an important goal within the work. McCauley tells her family story to the audience, but Hutchins is the first witness, the one who heard the story behind the scenes, and then becomes part of the

process of telling it. In the 1964 segment, she dis-identifies with the white woman who denies interracial rape of black women and the sexual violence of slavery. Hutchins participation invokes the history of the relation between white women, race, and rape and yet they make a conscious effort to de-center the white woman's body. When McCauley reminds Hutchins that the performance is not *about her*, but that it is McCauley's story that Hutchins performs with her, she makes clear that whiteness will not be allowed to claim "center stage," even if it is in an attempt to understand white racism. The performance takes a stand against the reproduction of narratives that convey personal experience without affirming a sense of commitment and responsibility to an ongoing dialogue. In this way, Sally's Rape contests the usefulness of consciousness-raising formats, which according to Kimberly Christenson has its limits in a multicultural feminist movement: "The CR [conscious-raising] mode of knowledge production, while appropriate and accurate for people seeking to understand and challenge their own oppression, often simply replicates rationalizations for inequality when used by oppressors to understand their own experience" (619). The performance does not allow Hutchins to remember her experience with racial difference as apolitical or innocent. Instead, she is constantly reminded of her privileged position and its direct relation to African-American history. She cannot tell story that allows her to understand her experience outside of this context.

For example, when Hutchins wants to claim her desire to be Billie Holiday, she is immediately reminded that her understanding of what it means to be Billie Holiday comes from the idealization of suffering and the erasure of her connection as a white woman to

Holiday's specific history. Her desire to be Billie Holiday seems naive and reveals more about the way white mainstream culture can make pain romantic and appealing. If she expressed her desire to be Billie Holiday outside the performance, she may have been met with a more receptive response, with the tragedy of Holiday's life seeming beautiful and somehow glamorous. When read within the historical context and the lingering presence of raw pain evoked by the performance, the idealism about Holiday seems self-centered and naive. It reveals more about Hutchins' desire and the consumption of black female suffering. McCauley also tells the story of an uncle who was forced to eat "the whole bucket of fatback and greens," in front of a white audience "until he commenced to rolling on the floor and passing gas, and they laughed and laughed . . . and the ladies too" (235). The stories about the uncle and the allusion to Billie Holiday each suggest white culture's propensity toward fetishizing black suffering. However, Sally's Rape explores the perception of black suffering in public space, shifting the focus from the spectacle of the body and toward the white spectator's role in the creation of the scene.

One must examine Hutchins role within the context of a growing movement of racial consciousness involving whiteness. In White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness, Ruth Frankeburg writes:

white women's senses of self, other, identity, and worldview are also racialized, for they emerged here as repositories of the key elements of the history of the idea of race, in the United States and beyond. The white subject and the white imaginary thus by no means confine themselves to the present in their construction, but rather draw, consciously and

unconsciously, on the moments in the racial order long past in material terms. One is reminded of Antonio Gramsci's often-quoted comment on human subjectivity in general: 'the consciousness of what one really is [entails] 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory.' (240)

In her work as a teacher and director, McCauley recommends that individuals reconstruct this inventory and "encourage[s] white actors to take the material of how their families participated in, or received privileges from, the horrors of racism and take time to think about it" (275). This critical self-reflection is necessary for the kind of dialogue and social change McCauley's performance promotes.

The 'reciprocal reflections' between McCauley and Hutchins that reveal the "historico-racial schema" often involve exposing the class distinctions used to define white and black femininity. Connections between material conditions, exposure to trauma, and issues of survival resonate powerfully in Sally's Rape. References to class mark the distinction between the consumption of material resources and labor of female bodies according to race. The Smith college graduate represents a privileged position, and the moment when she chokes on her sandwich marks a break in her conspicuous consumption of the resources she has inherited at the expense of others. Robbie and Jeannie invoke socialism to discuss white women's relationship to the material resources gained through their position:

JEANNIE: Rosa Luxemburg had no patience for bourgeois women who

didn't work. She called them—

ROBBIE: Co-consumptive

JEANNIE: More parasitic than parasites. (226)

The white woman in the library seems to demonstrate a parasitic relationship to the past as her ignorance of history allows her to maintain her status. Although she works, the Smith woman also has the ability to quit the job and remove herself from the space, refusing the testimony she has received within it. The encounter takes place within a library, the repository of information, a public place in which particular kinds of knowledge have been archived. In this public space, the black woman labors while white woman consumes, or rejects, knowledge. When the black woman voices an alternative to the dominant historical narrative, one that contradicts the version taught at Smith College and archived within the library, she challenges the white woman's consumption of knowledge and resources.

In another scene McCauley and Hutchins discuss comportment and "lady-like behavior." As McCauley tells Vivian Patraha that "So much of it has to do with sexuality. Black women particularly struggle to deal with the image of the saint and the whore, or the church lady and the slut" (216). The struggle to define themselves against the stereotypes of promiscuity resulted in close attention to "proper" behavior. The scene undoes the association between white women and a kind of naturally pure femininity. McCauley has to correct Hutchins on the placement of her legs. The scene also demonstrates McCauley's struggle with the internalization of shame. She needs to adhere to rigid protocol in an attempt to avoid danger. The white woman appears to enjoy a

greater sense of security, protection, and safety in the world due in part to her perceived fragility. This safety is an illusion, of course, because white women must deal with the threat of rape as well, but Sally's Rape forces into focus the ways in which race and class affect the experience of this threat.

The critical difference between the two women in relation to the legacy of trauma and public space is most evident at two specific moments within the performance, which also mark the limits of the testimonial encounter between witness and listener. The first critical moment occurs when Hutchins refuses to stand naked on the auction block (212). In this refusal, she acknowledges the limitations of cross-racial solidarity and her position of privilege in social and emotional terms. Hutchins does not have a connection to the violated body on the auction block. McCauley, however, cannot avoid the inheritance that the public nakedness represents. The two women do not share the history and this profound difference influences their experience of their bodies in the present as well. Instead of smoothing over these differences, Sally's Rape forces them to the surface, so that attempts toward women's solidarity do not erase the specific testimony of African-American women.

Another moment of critical difference occurs when Hutchins and McCauley describe the experience of rape:

JEANNIE (*Curled up on bench*)

To be raped is not to scream

but to whimper and lock and never to remember

but feel the closing in the thighs

between the legs locking up everything

biting lips, the teeth bleed.

ROBBIE:

On the plantation you hafta stay tough and tight

no matter how many times they come down there.

Sally stayed down there with us in the quarters

and at night they pulled us out in the dirt. (232)

Hutchins follows with “In a rape crisis center, your wounds are fresh. They can put warm clothes on you, tell you it’s not your fault” (232). McCauley later responds that “ain’t no rape crisis center on the plantation” (233). As horrible as the experience of rape is, as Hutchins describes it, there is a moment when the survivor, at least today, can find some connection to a community in a rape crisis center. However, it would have been more historically accurate to note that there were no rape crisis centers until recently, and in that way, women, whatever their race or socio-economic status, were furthered traumatized by the isolation imposed on them through the problematic, victim-blaming, cultural response to rape.

When trying to lead the audience into an active engagement with history and the importance of considering the impact of that history on the material lives of all individuals bearing its legacy, McCauley does allow herself distance from the character of Sally, as seen in moments such as the one described previously, when she alludes to her naked body as an issue that must be moved beyond. However, when she explores the tricky emotional territory involving the multi-generational aftermath of trauma it becomes difficult not to

“lose herself in character.”

McCauley turns to her own inner experience to reconstruct a psychic self that has been left outside dominant representations but is part of the legacy of the traumatic history of interracial rape. “There are places in extreme,” she explains:

places in between, there are places around, but we get stuck in the inside of sexual images and the way we internalize what we’re supposed to do and what we’re not supposed to do. Part of my struggle is around those issues of having been raped and silent about it. I know that information, I’ve dealt with it and I carry it with me. But in Sally’s Rape, I found out more information about the tightness between my thighs. (Patraka, “Robbie McCauley” 216)

In Sally’s Rape, McCauley and Hutchins come together to create a new public space and a new kind of interracial encounter in public space. This new encounter acknowledges the complex interface between the bodily experience of traumatic memory and the cultural inscription of identity onto the body. Within the performance, it becomes crucial to distinguish the trauma-induced silence from the silence imposed by the reproduction of stereotypes that suppress the expression of the traumatized subject. McCauley joins writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Trinh Minh Ha, and Meena Alexander²² who

²²

See Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, (New York: Vintage, 1975), Trinh T. Min-ha, Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989), and Meena Alexander, The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience, (Cambridge: South End Press, 1996) .

reconstruct female ancestors from memory, imagination, and desire, and in the aesthetic space of multicultural writing and performance, the body and voice of the female ancestor and the contemporary woman join together to create a new form of testimony. This testimony attests to the paradox of traumatic memory, a memory that is both constantly present and absent within a survivor. The writer addresses the threat of violence felt by subordinated subjects and the way this threat operates at the level of memory, particularly traumatic memory that seizes or possesses the living body and testifies to violence against bodies in the past. The source of these bodily memories has been elided within dominant representations. Recovering the stories behind the residual sense involves a process of reconstruction and invention, reuniting the original body with a voice in which to speak her experience.

In “Focus on the Body: Pain, Praxis, and Pleasure in Feminist Performance,” Jeanie Forte suggests that pain and live performance are “two cases when the body must be acknowledged, when it becomes visible/palpable through inhabiting temporally a process that depends fundamentally on its presence” (251). As McCauley stands naked on the auction block, she begins to describe the experience of being raped on the plantation and her feelings of deep, visceral connection to that history. She refers to “A TIGHTNESS BETWEEN HER THIGHS . . . (230), bringing together the corporeal that has been denied a subjectivity with a voice that speaks out and presenting a consciousness where there once was only an object. She describes the dreams in which Sally’s pain haunts her, overcomes her:

In the dream I. I am Sally being (*An involuntary sound of pain*) b’ah.

Bein' bein' I . . . I being bound down I didn't I didn't wann be in the dream,
 bound down in the dream I am I am Sally being done it to I am down on
 the groundbeing done it to bound down didn't wanna be bound down on
 the ground. In the dream I am Sally down on the ground being done it to.
 In the dream I am Sally being done it to bound down on the ground. (231)

McCauley describes nightmares that function as traumatic intrusions, interrupting her sleep in the present and forcing her into the violence of the past. At the site of the traumatic encounter with the “historico-racial schema” she releases the pain belonging to a physical self, one that in Fanon’s words will “balance space, localize sensation” so that both levels of traumatic memory, the image denied its own voice, defined from outside itself, and the bodily expression of powerful emotions, can meet in public space.

McCauley uses her body as a source of information, tapping into a forgotten history which has left only the residue of complicated emotions. Shame and guilt, the emotions most frequently associated with traumatic histories, are according to McCauley “distortions of information and of the materials that we are living with. When the material of our past turns into shame and guilt, we stop talking about it, and it gets bigger and bigger and more distorted” (207). According to McCauley, these overwhelming emotions become manageable when they are identified as information to be understood within a particular historical and social context:

In the piece, I say, ‘There’s a tension between her thighs. When it lets go. She screams with terror.’ So there’s no good sex in there. Knowing that, the discovery of that power is something you can take with you as

information, and let go. What ever you want to do with what you let go is your business. (Patraka, "Robbie McCauley" 216)

The terror does not remain in the isolated realm of traumatic reenactment. Instead, the mystery is named, and the bodily memories are placed within the context of the original traumatic experience.

In an interview with Vivian Patraka, McCauley suggests that "the mind and the body have to work together in order to create political theatre" (206). Later in the interview she elaborates on the body as a resource for performance material: "We carry in our bodies unspoken sadness and anger and resentment. It is bigger and harder to carry it than to release it. And when we realize it, we find out more information about it; we help our ability to move with it. You don't get rid of it, but you're able to handle it, take it with you, and to transform" (214). She goes on to say that "Pain is full of information. It exercises my mind to deal with that information. Again, it goes back to the body, the release. What you know is something you can carry with you rather than be burdened by" (216). Listening to her body, McCauley's performance tries to find a language for the voice she hears. It involves the struggle for the translation of traumatic experience that requires more than a single speaker.

McCauley is also interested in the process of forgetting or refusing to remember, in cultural amnesia and the price we pay for it in our daily living. Elin Diamond describes this focus:

In her 'history not remembered,' McCauley follows Benjamin and Proust in demonstrating that voluntary memory—memory at the service of

consciousness or intellect, whose function is to filter out disturbing memory traces—always falls short. It is only experience as it arises *involuntarily*, through mimetic associations, through unguarded correspondences, that can deliver the meaning of unremembered shocks. It's the historical richness of experience, of history *as* experience, that McCauley longs for. (168)

The 'history not remembered' is the traumatic experience that haunts the body. Memory goes 'underground,' submerged in the body as the self loses its solid boundaries.

Although traumatic memory initially becomes buried in the body to protect the survivor, it ultimately undermines. The same is true for the cultural memory of violence that becomes embedded in black and white bodies, only to be triggered or reenacted through interactions between those bodies.

In McCauley's performance, the voice that has been long silenced through trauma erupts:

I I I become others inside me, standing at the bus stop with my socks rolled down screaming things I shoulda said, 'Just because people are crazy don't mean they can't think straight!' Hollering periodically at white men 'YOU RAPED ME! GODDAMN MOTHERFUKA! YOU RAPED ME!' (223)

McCauley's body is taken over by the voice of the unspeakable as she experiences the rage that has been denied an outlet. At this moment, her performance testifies to the delay in bodily response that is a fundamental feature of the traumatic experience. As Bakare-Yusuf points out, there is an "erasure of human voice," but perhaps it is more accurate to

state that the voice becomes displaced, it loses its claim within the moment of experience and exists in search of another moment to express the pain. Cathy Caruth describes this phenomenon: "The event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (*Trauma* 4). In the scene, the past takes possession of McCauley's body. Yelling at an indifferent crowd, she finds herself taken over by "others inside." The voices come forward at a moment of waiting in public space, trying to move forward and to have their impact on contemporary and future life.

Judith Lewis Hermann describes a phenomenon known as *traumatic countertransference* in relation to the role of therapist as witness.²³ Herman describes this phenomenon in terms of the therapist. But what about the artist, especially one such as McCauley, whose material emerges from history's neglected wounds? By claiming the pain left out of the pages of historical record, the pain for which there has been no words, McCauley places her own body at risk, revealing the vulnerability of the witness. As an artist who is also deeply engaged with political issues, particularly around race relations in the U.S., McCauley exposes the damage. By speaking through "vicarious traumatization" in public space, McCauley counters the isolation of these post-traumatic symptoms.

23

Herman explains that "Trauma is contagious. In the role of witness to disaster or atrocity, the therapist at times is emotionally overwhelmed. She experiences, to a lesser degree, the same terror, rage, and despair as the patient. This phenomenon is known as "traumatic countertransference" or "vicarious traumatization." The therapist may begin to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Hearing the patient's trauma story is bound to revive any personal traumatic experiences that the therapist may have suffered in the past" (140).

Michel de Certeau's observation that "memory is a sort of anti-museum: it is not localizable" (108) finds resonance in Sally's Rape. There is no easy transition between the pain of history and the pain of today. The "pain [that] is full of information" transcends boundaries, including the boundaries of the body as it erupts forth, spilling over at unpredictable moments. McCauley moves continually between historical contexts to scenes like "Trying to Transform" in which she becomes overwhelmed by the weight of the pain she carries and begins to yell at strangers at a bus stop. The bus stop figures as an interesting place within U.S. history of race relations. The site of a rebellion that spurred on the Civil Rights Movement, it provides a connection to the other moments of awakening to and confrontation with white supremacy. Just like the library in 1964, the year the Civil Rights Act was enacted, the bus stop is a public space in need of transformation. McCauley takes these moments, icons, or sites of resistance and prevents them from remaining static representations of resistance. Instead, she inserts the unspeakable history of sexual violence within these spaces, altering them with the presence of the body and voice rising out of traumatic experience.

Standing at the bus stop, screaming about rape, McCauley forces into light the issue that trauma, like de Certeau's comment on memory, "is not localizable." Even the more recent understanding of the post-traumatic condition fails to account for the complex interplay between struggles in a hostile present environment and a past that keeps resurfacing. Maria Root suggests that the current understanding of traumatic stress:

does not necessarily reflect the reality of White women or women of colors' lives wherein many of the traumas affecting women are common,

repeated, and current. These traumas include contextual threats through the interplay of domination by gender or race or ethnicity that threaten the safety, limit the mobility, and denigrate the self-worth of an individual by virtue of a status she is born into. Even the notion of “post”-trauma responding largely originates in the White male experience of time-limited events, often singular in nature versus the prolonged, everyday effects of rape, and sexual and physical assault. (373)

Gerda Lerner refers to the rape of black women as “a weapon of terror”(172). In an interview with Vivian Patraka, McCauley describes the lasting effects of this chronic assault on the psychic integrity of African-American women. Patraka compares the way in which “abused children become careful readers of people, responsive to the slightest shift in their behavior and mood, all of which are actually unpredictable” with McCauley’s discussion of racism, which “is full of unpredictable violence, and one has to make up a code of behavior, of having papers, of giving the right signals to ward off the dangers when ultimately,” in the words of McCauley, “there’s nothing you can do.” (213-4). It is this reality addressed within Sally’s Rape.

This sense of overwhelming helplessness in the face of the legacy of racism as it is reenacted in the present is recognized in McCauley’s performance, validating survivors and countering socially-produced trauma. In Sally’s Rape, McCauley produces what Julie Salverson speaks of “A climate of witnessing,” which she says “involves not only listening to someone’s story, but allowing our attitudes and behaviors to be changed by it” (183). The performance allows bodies come together to process information that can only be

understood as within an intersubjective dynamic, a relationship, or a 'reciprocal reflection' between women.

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