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This dissertation offers a critique of liberatory practices and projects that locate “voice” as the means to and sign of liberation. This work contributes to queer and trans* scholarship on emancipatory practices and offers insights for critical pedagogy. My project situates “voice,” and the liberatory projects dependent on it, within a political “economy of vulnerability” that circulates and produces vulnerable bodies. I foreground the transgender student and the quiet student as two types of queer bodies and subjects that are mutually constituted within this economy. Though the pairing of quiet and trans* may seem irregular, considering them together serves as a wedge to get at the larger regime within which the privileging of voice, specific understandings of the body, and contemporary politics of liberation and empowerment operate. I focus in particular on visual and other cultural texts to examine the complex workings of the “economy of vulnerability.” This analysis reveals the abstract surveillance machine that produces, for example, both conflicts about trans* access to bathrooms and the politics of school shootings.

DECONSTRUCTING LIBERATED SUBJECTS

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focuses on a critique of liberatory discourses that privilege the speech act as the mark of emancipation. The demand that one speak—name, define, describe, narrate—to signal liberation is phonocentric and assumes a metaphysics of presence. These assumptions undercut any mission to break from dominant ideologies and politics that dictate what constitutes freedom. Because liberatory politics has traditionally been at the heart of critical pedagogy, this critique focuses on cultural representations (especially filmic representations) of voice and liberation in U.S. education.

Within this project I have chosen to focus on the quiet subject and the trans* subject as the center of my critique. The quiet subject and the trans* subject do not intuitively go together. Though this pairing may seem irregular, when considered together they interact and play off of each other in informative ways. I do not employ the quiet subject and the trans* subject as stable identities that can be “known” or “fixed,” but as subjectivities in flux that are helpful for exploring the ways in which speech operates, its role as presence, and what possibilities exist outside of this formulation. The quiet subject, represented in this project primarily by the figure of the quiet student, for her part, has little political discourse surrounding her, while the trans* subject, represented in this project predominantly by the figure of the trans* student, is the focus

of much current, harried, political debate. Moreover, because I argue that voice-as-speech is privileged as a norm, the quiet subject becomes the subject produced as a result of and against the speaking subject. For these reasons, coupling the two offers a way to rethink both the quiet student and the trans* student while also providing a wedge to get at the larger regime of the verbal that governs the metaphysics of presence, specific understandings of the body, and critical discussions of liberation and empowerment.

Trans* students and quiet students are helpful subject positions to use as examples of the ways we can think differently about speech and presence. They are salient sites for exploring what these bodies do, what they teach us, and how they expand what we think about empowerment and liberation. What is “speaking” thought to provide access to? Is there an identifiable agent/subject behind the act who is present most fully in the moment of voice? The quiet student is linked to the trans* student in that each reveals the operation of desire—subjects that are called to identify and codify themselves. The demand to speak operates through the assumption that speaking provides access to a “true” inner self and classifiable identity.

Mary M. Reda (2009), in *Between Speaking and Silence* offers an excellent study of quietness and quiet students. As an English professor she uses her own classroom to investigate silences in her writing workshops. She asserts, “In dialogic education, student-initiated silence has often come to mean something is not working” (p. 23). She finds that often silence is interpreted as indicative of “an underdeveloped intellectual life” (p. 41). Further, in conversations with friends she found that “even close friends have

said disparaging, angry things about students or colleagues they perceive as ‘quiet’ or ‘too quiet.’ Passive, less intelligent, resistant, unprepared, disengaged, struggling, not keeping up, not contributing...” (p. 61). Her study confirms the pervasive assumptions surrounding students’ silence. She puts it bluntly, “The school based rhetoric of ‘speaking equals participation’ is so ubiquitous that it need not ever be directly said” (p. 124).

“Quiet” students are brought into being through social forces. Constructions of race, gender, ethnicity, etc. help explain how inequalities in “power” affect how and when one may speak. Yet why, in activist discourses, are silence and quietness often positioned as a deficit? For example, multicultural education and women’s studies tout “giving voice” to marginalized groups as one of the primary modes for liberation. Similarly, discourses around participatory democracy seem to privilege speech as the most authentic form of engagement. I concede that “voice” is sometimes employed as shorthand, meant to include other modes of participation. Furthermore, I am not suggesting that communication is impossible or that strategies for effective engagement are not critical. I do not, however, think that I am oversimplifying by suggesting that speech and voice are *privileged* modes of participation. As I will explore in subsequent chapters I am proposing that voice is about the exchange of signs and about claims to authenticity that problematically give certain people privilege.

But interrogating the value of voice and silence entails fundamental questions about the agent and subject of voice and silence. To think about the liberating potential (or not) of voice, one must first consider various notions of agency and resistance. One’s

ability to act as a completely free agent is always limited. This does not, however, imply that one cannot or should not act, or that ethical demands do not still call for a response. Rather we can act with amidst uncertainty. We should ask: What does it mean to speak freely? What does it mean to have a voice? Who is this speaking subject anyway? What constitutes the subject? If voice is the primary mode for the expression of agency is the subject then simply a brain and a mouth and vocal cords? What are the boundaries of the speaking or silent subject? Does the whole body matter? Can the feet, for example, speak?

Strategy

This dissertation is informed by a number of disciplinary traditions, including feminist philosophy, queer theory, postcolonial theory, and poststructural theory. As a critique of phonocentric regimes, my analysis is fundamentally informed by Derrida's deconstructionist methods. Deconstruction is not a formal method and "strategy," as Moran (2000) suggests, might be a more accurate description (p. 450). As a project influenced by deconstructionist analyses, therefore, my methodology blurs boundaries between disciplines at the same time that it aims to trouble discourses of liberating pedagogy (Moran, 2000, p. 435).

A deconstructionist approach takes as its starting point that there is no way outside of texts (p. 453). Thus, my "data" consists of written and visual texts that portray, describe, and attempt to represent quiet and trans* subjects. As an analysis informed by deconstruction and the interpretive insights of poststructural textual criticism, this project does not assume that texts (e.g., news reports, films, websites) can

be read at face value. Deconstruction suggests that meanings are always multiple and unpredictable, and therefore, reading against the grain of the text's "intention" is always possible. This type of textual analysis sees texts as part of a discursive process, informed by existing social norms but subject to the production of multiple meanings.

The texts that form the focus of this project come from news media, published school policies/webpages, television, music videos, and film. Film and popular media are particularly rich texts because they act as indicators of cultural views and ideologies (Pailliotet, 1998, pp. 124–125). I also engage with visual texts to see how they construct voice and agency using the trans* subject and the quiet student subject. When I read films and media, I am interested in looking at how these visual texts construct subjects and bodies, not simply the way they represent them. I look to see what these texts suggest about the speech act, subjectivity, and agency. I look to explore what Butler (1993) calls the "gaps and fissures" in reiterations of particular constructions of these subjects (p. 10). In short, I am not interested in what quiet and trans* bodies are, but what they *do*.

Approaching these texts from this vantage point helps to reveal what I claim is a "cult of the verbal" in discourses of empowerment and liberation. This demand brings to light fundamental questions about self-narration and the notion of opaqueness to self in general. I seek to read these texts against the grain of their own narrative, suggesting ways that these constructions undercut and undo themselves. Insofar as a subject always exceeds the restraints a text constructs for her, I look within this gap for ways to challenge the hegemony of speech as presence as the primary liberating act.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 2: Voice as Liberation

This introductory chapter surveys and analyzes several classic critiques of speech for the insights they lend to a specific critique of the privilege accorded speech in contemporary liberatory discourses. I dig at the explicit and implicit assumptions that these techniques for liberation make about the subject, subjectivity in general, and about the role the body plays in what “counts” as agency and empowerment. Jacques Derrida’s critique of phonocentrism and Michel Foucault’s attention to the confession illuminate, respectively, the metaphysical and discursive assumptions that underlie the prominence of narrative in liberatory politics. Additionally, post-colonial critiques of the politics of speech and voice (e.g. Rey Chow, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Trinh Minh-ha, Joan Scott, and Saidiya Hartman) aid in outlining the politics of speech: who can speak and what can be spoken are always already determined by a colonialist, white-supremacist, and patriarchal regime of knowledge. Finally, I draw on queer-theorizations of the body to further decenter and trouble centrality of voice in liberatory politics.

Chapter 3: Narrative and the Economy of Vulnerability

Drawing Using Jean Baudrillard, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Adriana Cavarero I mount a theoretical argument that within the phonocentric regime outlined in chapter 1, there lies an economy dependent on the production of vulnerability and vulnerable subjects. In the first part of the chapter I explore narrative as part of an economy of vulnerability that creates vulnerable subjects. In the second part of the chapter I explore subjectivity within this economy. The chapter concludes with a critical assessment of the

recent work of feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero as a scholar who would make the voice the primary site of ethical encounter.

Chapter 4: Present Subjects: A Deconstructive Reading of *The Miracle Worker* and *Speak*

In this chapter, I offer readings of *The Miracle Worker* (1979) and *Speak* (2004). In both films, the protagonist is a non-speaking subject. Both situate the move from silence to speech and from objecthood to subjecthood within the context of education as a liberatory process. Drawing on the theoretical groundwork laid out in Chapters 1 and 2, I explore the ways these texts evidence the phonocentric link between speech and presence and the economy of vulnerability.

Chapter 5: Present Subjects: A Triptych

Continuing the discussion begun in chapter 3, I offer readings of the recent French film *Tomboy* (2011), and Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) to show how both trans* students and the bodies of school shooters are produced in and through the same verbal economy. *Tomboy*, while it has been received as a film about trans*, does not adhere to the conventions of the genre. As the director suggests, *Tomboy* is a film about kids, play, and navigating gender. Interestingly, *Tomboy* only becomes a transgender narrative when the demand to speak enters. The main character, Laure, becomes legible as a *transgender* kid when the start of school year presents the demand for her to speak a particular gender identity. *Elephant*, for its part, exposes the economy of vulnerability by deploying several cinematographic techniques that call conspicuous attention to cultural assumptions concerning the transparency of image and dialogue to reveal subjects. The

film follows the events leading up to a Columbine-esque school shooting, shifting the frame to capture the events from a variety of perspectives. Where better-known cinematographic treatments of school shootings (such as Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* [2002]), take a journalistic approach that accounts for and contextualizes the quiet, reserved student-become-shooter, *Elephant* trades on the multiple absences and "outsides" to each frame and each character.

Chapter 6: Deterritorializing the Mouth: Silence, Public Restrooms, and the School Shooter

Chapter 5 deploys a Deleuzian stylistic and philosophical approach to examine the politics of public restroom access alongside cultural discourses surrounding "school shooters." This analysis shows how the economy of vulnerability functions as an abstract machine that territorializes bodies as coherent, speaking mouths. The "bathroom" within which the trans* body is felt to be dangerous and aberrant is never simply a place to eliminate and sanitize, but an abstract machine within which *identity and belonging circulate as affects*, a machine that produces neat, tidy subjects of surveillance. The formerly quiet, but become-violent body of the school-shooter (as portrayed, for instance, in the 1992 music video, "Jeremy," by Pearl Jam) helps produce bodies that do not speak as aberrant, different. I show how trans* bodies and the bodies of adolescent gunmen deterritorialize bodies as sites of identity and presence, in turn revealing the way that identity, naming, and narrative all function within the same surveillance machine. Visibility and rights, while important, might actually serve in some ways to dam important lines of flight that a radical trans* politics sets in motion. A body that is

willing to narrate itself obstructs the full potential of disruption, and may instead represent a reterritorialization of security forms.

CHAPTER II

VOICE AS LIBERATION

Student Voice

The trope of voice is often used within the discourses of critical pedagogy to signal liberatory practices aimed at traditionally marginalized groups. The classroom is a particularly salient site to examine the quiet body because of the fact that educational spaces are one of the few places where “quietness” and “voice” are conspicuously considered (e.g., how do I get my students to participate?).

My aim is certainly not to argue that efforts to give voice to marginalized groups in the classroom are unimportant. Valuing women’s voices, for example, can help to disrupt androcentric hierarchies (Culley, 1985, p. 213). De-privileging of the teacher’s voice as the only “authority” opens up room for learning processes and knowledge construction that challenge dominant paradigms in which the teacher is seen as the sole possessor of knowledge. Teachers who listen to the voices of their students have shown increased awareness of students’ needs, interests, and strengths that results in a more positive classroom learning experience. (Freire, 1970/2000; McLaren, 2003; Shor, 1987, 1992). Moreover, acknowledging social and historical power structures that oppress certain groups enables teachers to seek ways to authorize the voices of students traditionally marginalized in classroom spaces. Providing space, not simply for the loudest voices (which tend to be those who have the most privilege), results in a greater

diversity of learning; new voices become heard and gain access to the production of knowledge. (Banks 1996; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2000).

I do, however, wish to look at what happens when participation, empowerment, and subjectivity are seen as synonymous with the verbal. Current trends that strive to offer a socially just and inclusive approach often cite the goal of giving each and every student a voice (Lensmire, 1998; Thiessen, 2006, pp. 352–354). And, although modes of participation vary, the verbal is still highly desired, as evidenced by the way classroom and educational spaces have been territorialized. That is, it is difficult to think outside of the ways that participation has been normalized as “talking.” As more educational spaces move into a hands-on, get-everyone-involved approach, a resulting hazard is the inscription and over determination of the verbal. Not only do these models create an oversimplified, one-size-fits-all solution, they also suggest that privilege exists purely in speech; if all students feel like they can speak, then my classroom is just.

This verbally laden epistemology has undoubtedly been territorialized by a capitalistic economy in which the individual is reduced to a speaking commodity. It is not uncommon for job seekers to be told to “sell yourself” to an employer. The body/worker as something sell-able ties seamlessly to a market-based system dependent on supply and demand, surplus and scarcity. There is not room for silence in the marketplace. To be silent is a marketing failure.

Some scholars of critical pedagogy have begun to recognize the problem of speech’s privilege in educational practice. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1992) argues that the trope of “student voice” emerged during the late 1980s as a pedagogical tool (p. 100).

She suggests, however, that merely giving room for one to use her voice does not unproblematically result in empowerment, liberation, and dialogue; one must contextualize the history of oppression. Mimi Orner (1992) adds that seeing voice as empowerment can have the negative effect of *demanding* one to speak, which again, only reasserts positions of power. Similarly, Madeleine Arnot and Diane Reay (2007) argue that the presence of student voices does not necessarily mean that power relations have been disrupted. As Audre Lorde points out, one may choose silence because she has learned that it is not safe to speak (as cited in Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 369). Silence, then, must be part of discussions of voice and critical pedagogy (Hadfield & Haw, 2001; Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1993).

We must ask: How do speech and silence play in the construction of subjects as agents? How do formations of classrooms and pedagogical spaces participate in phonocentric regimes? What are the violences that occur in the name of liberation?

Voice in Trans* Politics

Like critical pedagogy, much trans* liberation scholarship focuses on visibility through voice. While studies of trans* issues often get written off as a narrow subfield of queer theory, as Susan Stryker (2006) notes, trans*studies offers much to that which gets positioned as outside of it (pp. 3–4). Trans* studies is an important place to consider the function of narratives, both as they relate to the production of vulnerability and alternative political possibilities. The visibility of trans* subjectivity and the emergence of trans* studies as a field owes much to biographical and autobiographical accounts of trans* persons (Califia, 1997, p. 11). The telling, collection, and production of narratives

by trans* subjects acts to resist practices that rendered trans* persons invisible in the first place. Moreover, the emergence of a canon of stories from trans* folks themselves has, for historical reasons, been an important development.

Trans* subjects have had a tenuous relationship with narrative, however. The medical field, in particular, has mediated many of the accounts of the experiences of trans* subjects. Disclosures and confessions made to medical professionals—psychiatrists whose opinions and agreement on body dysphoria were (and still are to a great extent) necessary to legitimate “biological” changes, surgeons who ultimately held the power to reshape the body into the form the trans* subject desired—made a body of work from which one was to understand trans* subjectivity. Trans* studies, as it emerged as an academic field, has had an equally fraught relationship with queer studies and feminism since the 1990s. Often marginalized, if made visible at all, trans* issues have never occupied the center stage within these fields. This tension is one factor that has led to the emergence of trans* studies as a field in its own right (Stryker & Aizura, 2013; Stryker & Whittle, 2006)

As a result, trans* studies is dominated by methods that seek visibility. Marking the beginning of trans* studies was Sandy Stone’s (1991) seminal essay, “The Empire Strikes Back: A (post)transsexual manifesto.” Drawing on the work of Donna Haraway’s (1991) “A Cyborg Manifesto” and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) *mestiza* consciousness, Stone offered a poignant critique of the transphobic direction of feminism. As a direct citation of Janice Raymond’s (1979) *Transsexual Empire*, Stone’s essay called for trans*

folks to speak for themselves and in this way helped shape the direction trans* took as an academic field (Stone, 1991, p. 295).

Jay Prosser (1998) and Viviane K. Namaste (2000) have added to the call to voice, becoming two of the leading trans* studies advocates of narrative-based research. Narratives, they assert, are essential to remember the daily, lived experience of trans* folks. Leslie Feinberg (1998) and Kate Bornstein (1994) have also been leading figures in shaping the call to stay in contact with the lived realities of trans* people. Likewise Susan Stryker (2008) has made significant contributions in accounting for the visibility of trans* folks throughout history.

Thinking about the use of trans* lives in scholarship is no doubt tricky, ethical territory. Involved is both the ethics of using trans* subjects to produce narratives and seeking the recognition of the State for the improvement of lives. David Valentine (2007) offers an important contribution to thinking about the ethics of studying trans* individuals. Valentine works within an ethnographic method yet his questions are significant for their ethical import as well as implications for particular political modes of activism. Trans* subjects are often produced as vulnerable through stories of violence. Violence is leveraged as a sign that can be exchanged for rights, protection, and so forth. He notes, “In contemporary political activism, violence has become a central ‘tool kit’ in drawing the attention of the state—and others—to the lives of gender-variant people” (p. 211). Thus, the visibility of trans* folks is often linked to violence itself. This predicament of the violence of telling and producing a subjectivity is no small matter. If everything is considered sayable and representable, we leave out the full spectrum of

difference. Law has become a dominant place for the production of narrative and consequently a place that either deems one a subject or not. But there are many possibilities that exist outside of the law as works by J. Jack Halberstam (1998, 2005, 2012) and Dean Spade (2007, 2011) show.

I think it is essential to continue narrative work within trans* studies. My goal, however, is to think about the ways that simply writing trans* subjects into both history and the present alone does not constitute “liberation.” These narratives are still susceptible to the oppressive processes to which they stand in opposition. Within this project I look to explore the ways that the failure-to-narrate can be an important political strategy as well.

Bodies

I find thinking about the trans* subject and quiet subject as types of bodies to be helpful for expanding notions of speech and silence. It can be tempting to appeal to the body as situated as outside of the discursive bind. I, too, wish to consider embodiment but locate it within this bind.

That the trans* subject is about the body might seem obvious. Trans* issues have gained greater visibility in the news media and in discussions about policy making for schools. In fact, it is largely because of the *bodily* presentation of the trans* subject that they present an “issue” at all in schools. In schools the trans* body is called to be both invisible and hyper-visible. There are overt efforts to tamp down any disruptions that trans* bodies cause. When a “known” trans* woman wants to use the women’s bathroom, for example, she is considered *too* visible. At the same time, trans* bodies

must remain hyper-visible due to the anxieties that these bodies might otherwise pass undetected. Consider, for example, the violence that many times ensues when a trans* person is “found out” in a bathroom or during a sexual encounter.

While the trans* subject seems all about the body, the quiet student seems to be about speech, the presence or absence of which signals whether a body even exists. Does a quiet student’s “silence” make one a “quiet” student, or do other ways of being outside of silence participate in creating the “quiet” student? Recall the learned practices of the quiet student: Sit toward the back of the room, don’t sit up too straight, don’t wear “loud” colors, don’t draw attention to your body. This focus on bodily comportment suggests that the quiet student’s *body* matters.

The quiet body is brought into being through these regulatory regimes but it also disrupts them. Like the trans* body, the quiet body threatens subjectivity and troubles normalized expectations of subjects. Mary Reda (2009) suggests, “Rather than seeing silence as requiring the antidote of speech, I might more fruitfully see it as a productive disruption of expectation” (p. 169). Is the silent body disruptive? Is the silent body deviant? Is the silent body queer? Perhaps, as Jasbir Puar (2007) in *Terrorist Assemblages* argues, queer theory “deconstructs not only heteronorms, but the very logic of identity itself” (p. 23).

The study to follow takes these similarities between the quiet student/quiet bodies and the trans* student/trans* bodies as a serious point of departure. Both are disruptive. Both are seen as “abnormal,” “deviant,” “queer.” Both are considered deficient in presenting clear subjectivity. In this way, both call normative subjectivity into question.

Both the trans* student and the quiet student are anxiety-producing; they are both on the cusp of expectation—about to become (but anxiously not yet) “real.” Therefore this study constructs a bricolage of the quiet student, trans* identity, silence, and speech in order to pry into an exploration into operations of subjectivity, embodiment, and agency.

Hear the demands: Come out of your shell. Cross the cusp and break the silence of expectation. Come into being as a complete speaking subject. Resolve the dissonance. Relieve our anxiety. Transition. Become a “legible” subject. The quiet student. The trans* student.

Theorizing Speech, Silence, and the Body

Derrida

The quest to find an authentic self, a truth, a “rightful beginning” marks a longstanding philosophical tradition of the West (Derrida, 1982, p. 6). This “beginning” indicates the site of origin from which access to the truth should stem. And it is this quest that drives identity politics to locate the Being within. This tradition upholds speech as the idealized form of Being, making one most present when s/he speaks; speech signifies presence. All other versions of presence (e.g. writing, dancing) must engage in signifying practices and, therefore, have the chance to be read as other than the authentic words of the speaker. Speech, alone, is seen to stand outside of this. The belief follows that when I speak this act does more than convey the meaning of the words I choose in the configuration I make; it conveys subjectivity, an authentic being there. Jacques Derrida’s work challenges this metaphysics of presence implicit in speech and will inform and motivate the theoretical framework of this project.

In Derrida's (1982) famous lecture on *différance*, he plays with the homophonic relationship between the French words "*différence*" and "*différance*" (his own creation), both based on the French verb *différer*. He argues that in delivering his talk, the audience cannot know to which word he is referring—is he speaking of *différence*, the word that signals that something is other than its neighbor; or is he speaking of *différance*, the word that signals a temporal and spatial deferral—both *sound* the same. The written word surely conveys the "a" in *différance*; however, in speech that is silent (p. 3).

Through this gesture Derrida toys with the metaphysical privilege of speech over writing. By examining the way *différence* /*différance* functions to the ear as compared to the eye, Derrida offers an exposition of the traditional Western metaphysical assumptions held concerning speech's privilege as an indicator of immediate presence while writing is considered once removed (a deferred presence). He plays around with the problem of "exposing" the "a" in *différence* in order to signal its presence (pp. 5–6).

This idea is not a mere intellectual game; it is a commentary on long-held notions of sign economies, disseminated in part by theorists such as Ferdinand de Saussure (1986) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1998). What emerges from Derrida's work is the concept of "play." "Play" describes the gap between the signifier and the sign. That gap—that *différence/différance*—is what Derrida locates at the "origin," not static essence. The "play," then, is that there is no unproblematic presence that grounds meaning or signification (Derrida, 1978, pp. 278–279; 1982, p. 22).

Take the example of students in a class that are asked to indicate their preferred pronoun usage. Rather than responses such as, "I prefer to be called 'he'" students tend

to reply, “I am a ‘he.’” This indicates the very logocentric resistance that Derrida notes. It is taken for granted that the sign “he” is indicating the putative presence of “he” in that student-subject. Derrida argues that there is a gap between the “he” and the “I” that calls himself “he.” Traditional semiotics, too, asserts this gap, but assumes that the sign is always referring back and is solidly grounded in the “I,” the subject, the inside. Derrida’s (1982) point is that the sign defers presence and is different from presence. Moreover, the presence that is assumed to ground the subject is always already characterized by *différance* and *différance*.

The primacy of speech over writing reveals the phonocentricity of logocentrism that posits this binary in the first place. Accounting for the role of the subject and its presence, writing is considered a second remove from speech, where speech is thought to give immediate presence to interiority. To hear the sonic voice of the subject is to consider that one is receiving the immediacy of the subject. It is to assume that the subject is not a signified but can have presence without the play of difference. In this economy when the subject uses writing she is considered to be using signifiers to signal presence and, therefore, less immediate access. (Derrida, 1974, pp. 10–18).

This logic extends to the privilege traditionally accorded autobiography and interviewing (e.g. documentary) as providing direct and unmediated access to subjects (DeVault & Gross, 2007). Writing as it is usually practiced in the Western tradition is assumed to be a representation of speech and connected to that immediate interiority. This type of writing still relies on the idea that we are getting at the truth inside and is thus also phonocentric.

Deconstruction

To speak of deconstruction as a method would be a misnomer. It is a strategy, an aesthetic, an approach, a political practice of reading (Peters & Biesta, 2009, p. 9).

Deconstructive tactics seek to undermine and disrupt systems that present themselves as natural and taken for granted. As Gert Biesta (2009b) describes, “The purpose of [deconstruction] is...to open up critique from its own uncritical assumptions” (p. 93).

Logocentrism also produces binary relationships. Logocentrism subscribes to a system of logic of oppositional relationships to constitute meaning. In order to define one thing (e.g. speech), what it lacks or its opposite is necessarily called into being (e.g. writing). These relationships are not neutral, but hierarchical (Brunette & Wills, 1989, pp. 6–7; Mangion, 2011, p. 121). Deconstruction challenges hierarchies by reversing and displacing them (Derrida, 1982, pp. 329–330). This is political (Mangion, 2011, p. 143).

The reversal of hierarchies is only the first step in deconstruction’s call for a double move (Derrida, 1982, pp. 329–330). The reversal places at the “origin” that which was previously subordinated. Solutions to oppressive systems that merely replace one privileged term with another, one that equally assumes an absolute presence however, is never enough (Brunette & Wills, 1989, p. 60). The process must continue by using this reversal to allow a new possibility to emerge. The possibility that comes out of the displacement of the hierarchies is not “new” in that it never before existed, but rather, it was suppressed under the previous hierarchical regime.

In my study of silence, deconstruction helps think through the possibilities that might emerge if we deprivilege and displace speech, narrative, and autobiography from

the project of liberation. What happens if we call speech's partner, silence, to the center, for the one cannot exist without the other? They are a bound pair in language. This is not to privilege silence instead but to see what might become visible when the "*undecidability* of this opposition" is brought to the fore (Biesta, 2009, p. 19). Trans* bodies are helpful because the trans* body is already troubling to logocentric notions of the body. Where logocentric ideals would argue that where there is male there is not female and where there is female there is not male, trans* bodies reveal the presence of the Other in the self-same. Nevertheless, while trans* embodiment is disruptive, the privileging of trans* narratives as an act of resistance serves to locate the flow back toward meaning and intelligibility. This is again why the trans* body's relationship with silence is an important deconstructive site for this project.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory provides important critiques that leverage an analysis of the centrality of voice in liberatory politics. Considerations of silence can be greatly enhanced by postcolonial theory because silence cannot be separated from issues of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, and so forth (DeVault & Gross, 2007). Postcolonial theory also offers a rich source from which to think about silence as a sometimes-oppressive, sometimes-subversive tacit act.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) and Homi Bhabha (1994) point to the hazards inherent in Western attempts to allow the subaltern¹ to speak. Bhabha, for example,

¹ My use of "subaltern" here is not intended to equate nor collapse the difference between the subject position of the subaltern Other that Spivak and Bhabha are referring to and identities such as "trans*." I draw on work on the subaltern precisely because of the

describes the subaltern experience as in some ways fundamentally one of invisibility and silence. Bhabha describes the subaltern experience as: “To be amongst those whose very presence is both ‘overlooked’—in the double sense of social surveillance and psychic disavowal—and, at the same time, overdetermined—psychically projected, made stereotypical and symptomatic” (p. 236). Thus, the subaltern, or the marginalized in general, is either unaccounted for or so stereotypically and monolithically presented that either way s/he is left invisible, silent. Spivak (1988) adds that even that which becomes verbal can still be a silence, can be the co-opted voice of the oppressor, or can become a speaking that cannot be understood.

Trinh Minh-ha (1989) argues, in *The Language of Nativism: Anthropology as a Scientific Conversation of Man with Man*, that anthropologists practice and perpetuate some highly problematic studies of the “other.” Studies are undertaken without critical and serious attention being paid to the positionality of the “researcher” himself. In addition, interpretations are often left as just that, rather than pursuing “the ‘nature’ of these interpretations” (p. 71). Man (read: white, privileged) gives himself the authority to speak for the other and interpret for the other. The anthropological Man uses language as if it is neutral, as if by merely learning the language of the “native,” the research about the other becomes “objective” and “scientific.” In fact, however, the language used in anthropological writings is the language of the white Man, which is imbedded in a power structure that renders the other “lesser.”

ways speech has been theorized by postcolonial theorists to question speech as always liberating

Moreover, one of the foundational pieces in postcolonial theory, Spivak's (1988) "Can the Subaltern Speak," is an essay centered on speaking and not-speaking. This piece was published around the same time that "student voice" was becoming popular in critical pedagogy (see for example Delpit, 1988; Giroux, 1986, 1988; O'Connor, 1989; Simon, 1987). Spivak (1988) asserts that Michel Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's attempts to write *about* subaltern people without acknowledging their own positionality as privileged, white, Western males merely reinscribes the very imperialist discourses that they sought to undermine. That is, Foucault's and Deleuze's efforts to open a space for the subaltern's voice in fact generate the voice of a subject who has always already been appropriated by the imperialist actors who represent her, whether through language or action, speaking for her, rather than allowing her voice to be her own.

Moreover, developing Derrida's critique of phonocentrism, Spivak's incisive work calls the reader to question the assumed agency of the speech act. Voice, she argues, is informed by a system of knowledge production of which the subaltern was never a part. What "counts" as speech and what is recognized as speech are highly involved in the interplay of imperial power. Further, Spivak argues that for the subaltern speaking is a demand not a choice. The "First-World" intellectual calls the subaltern to speak, to authenticate her subjectivity. But her voice must be recognizable to the "liberator" in order for it to be authentic. That is, she must speak *for* the Western liberator—within the space he created for her.

This demand to speak should also be situated within the phenomenon of colonial mimicry. Bhabha (1994) describes the process of mimicry as: The process of colonizing

necessitates a “look of surveillance” by the colonizer (p. 89). The colonizer demands that the colonized behave like him so that he can “civilize” the colonized. He must make this Other like himself. Difference as essence then is disrupted when the colonizer begins to see himself now in the colonized. The colonized man, who begins to act and look like the colonizer, throws into question the notion of there being an essential difference between the two. Mimicry then is a critique of difference as an essence. (Loomba, 1998, p. 178).

On the one hand, opening up a space for the subaltern to speak suggests that the subaltern subject was previously “silent,” not simply unintelligible to the Western “liberator.” She is brought into being, into agency, and into authenticity through the Western gaze. Rey Chow (1993) adds, “‘Speaking’ itself belongs to an already well-defined structure and history of domination” (p. 36). On the other hand, seeing the subaltern’s speech as mimicry exposes the problem of calling authentic that which is caught in the ambivalence of subjectivity that happens in the demand to become for the liberator/colonizer (Bhabha, 1994, p. 89).

Another problem with the fetishization of speech is that the body is lost. In *The Politics of the Veil*, Joan Scott (2007) examines the French ban on the headscarf worn by Muslim women in the public schools in the early 21st century. Scott contends that this law was in essence a way for mainstream France to attack what was perceived as a threat to French identity (p. 15). While the veil is often perceived by Western feminists as an act of patriarchy and oppression of women, Scott calls the reader to consider the complicated politics at work. The supporters of the law assert a very Western notion of

“liberation,” seeing it as their job to “emancipate” these “primitive” women (p. 164). In fact, the women who chose to wear headscarves to school were provided little to no opportunity to contribute to the debate. The notion that these women were expressing a personal choice or agency in their own lives was downplayed or ignored (p. 139). The bodies of these headscarf-wearing women were really a site on which to work out French nationalism—rooted in racist notions of Muslims (p. 90)—the ideal of abstract individualism (p. 115), and the secular nation (p. 117), leaving little room for difference. In this way we can see how a Western privileging of “voice” has its basis in fundamental assumptions about what counts as agency.

Studies of slavery in the United States also reveals agency beyond the verbal. Saidiya Hartman (1997), for example, discusses the possibilities for resistance that were available to and employed by slaves. Hartman’s methodology involves reading slave narratives against the grain. Rather than trying to uncover the lost voices of slaves, Hartman attempts to reconsider the meaning of black bodies. In this way, Hartman reads “everyday practices” by slaves for passing moments of “redress” (p. 50). The actions of redress by slaves were extremely dangerous; however, these contestations were common. Dance, theft, and gatherings were actions of transitory agency. Such acts of agency, she argues, are subversive in that they assert subjectivity for blacks, whom the law deems as property (objects). Her analysis contrasts traditional historical narratives about slavery and slaves.

Moreover, the opposition between voice and silence is also a binary. Postcolonial theorist Ania Loomba (1998) shows how colonial ideology is invested in producing

binary differences. She argues, “The definition of civilisation and barbarism rests on the production of an irreconcilable difference between ‘black’ and ‘white’, self and other.” (p. 57). The critique of binaries is a political one. Binaries produce static, essentialized groups and serve very specific interests—those of imperialism. Why does the West need to distinguish the “white” man from the “black” man? Black is in service to white; it is what white is not. Similarly silence is in service of speech; it is what speech is not. Why call one region the “West” and another the “East”? Why call voice liberating and silence oppressive? The very invocation of these terms brings into being their differences. Again, imperial history points to the hierarchical relationship between the two. Just as easily as the West conjures up the East, it suggests good/bad, civilized/barbaric, and articulate/inarticulate.

Theorizing Trans* and the Body

My use of trans* throughout this project refers to any display, feeling, or act of gender non-conformance where sex and assumed gender do not match. This includes, but is not limited to, genderqueer, transsexual intersex, agender, female-to-male (FTM), and male-to-female (MTF).

The trans* body is often perceived as unintelligible, conflictual, deceptive, and un-original. The fact that discussions must be had to address tactics for dealing with transgender students speaks to the anxiety that this body’s perceived aberrance seems to evoke. Concerns span from universities seeking to be inclusive of the needs of transgender students, such as unisex bathrooms (Tilsley, 2010), to Christian religious organizations, such as Focus on the Family (n.d.) voicing strong concern over the

perceived dangers of the “creation of protected class status for ‘sexual minorities’” and what they see as its resulting threat to religious freedom (Cause for concern). And even more extremely, the prevalence of hate crimes against transgender students, such as the April 2010 attack at California State University-Long Beach in which the word “IT” was carved in capital letters onto a student’s body (Ebentraut, 2010). The proliferation of news, policies, and workshops on how to deal with transgender students provides evidence of a cultural anxiety caused by these bodies (Shildrick, 2007).

Transgender bodies, like the mimicking colonized body or the silent body, “find” as well as emphasize the failures of binary categories (Sherry, 2004, p. 779). They trouble conceptions of what bodies “should” look like. The transgender body then is anxiously seen as incongruous and must be disciplined into a “knowable,” readable, harmonious form. Diana Fuss (1989) argues that there is a “tendency to see only one part of a subject’s identity (usually the most visible part) and make that part stand for the whole” (p. 116). This synecdoche results in the transgender body being seen as the sum of one’s being. In fact, this is one of the primary demands placed on the transgender body—to make itself known and identifiable as such.

The presence of the transgender body is also a reminder of the shortcomings of identity politics. Identity, as Fuss points out, has the effect of singularizing, bounding, and stabilizing. Fuss uses the psychoanalytic tradition to argue that we “must resist attempts to replace identity with something else, especially with a ‘new identity’” (p. 104). If we are going to talk about policies for dealing with the transgender body then we must be cognizant of these limitations and of the fluidity and unpredictability of the

relationship between the body and identity. Thinking of the transgender body in this way opens up new spaces for different possibilities. Moreover, Judith Butler (1997) poses the question, “Does ‘the body’ come to stand for a certain operation of the psyche” (p. 95). The transgender body is a site where the Lacanian real—not reality, but rather that which resists language and symbolization—ruptures our symbolic illusion of completeness or wholeness (Sarup, 1992, pp. 85, 104). That is, in seeking to symbolize the unspeakable trans* body, we confront the ruptures and gaps in the symbolic and confront that which is inaccessible and unknowable (Evans, 1996, pp. 160–161; Zizek, 2006, p. 72).

In reaction to what has been perceived as the primacy of the linguistic, to the exclusion of the “material,” within poststructural accounts of subjectivity, scholars have returned to a focus on the body. Trans theory has similarly embraced this turn to the materiality of the body. One must be cautious about viewing the biological body as a neutral site that is pre-cultural. In addition to Butler’s (1997) critical work on the construction of gender and sexuality, she points out that the material is constructed as well (1993). Matter (e.g. bodies), she argues, comes to be named as such through a process that has its own historical lineage. Butler (1993) suggests that instead of taking for granted that the body has an a priori position materiality should be subject to Foucauldian genealogical tracing. (pp. 27–91).

What is material, what counts as mattering, is constructed through regulatory regimes. This can be seen in the way in which materiality is a site where sexual difference gets played out and the heterosexual matrix ensures that sexual difference becomes engrained (Butler, 1990, p. 96). Bodies that matter (i.e. those that are

intelligible), Butler (1993) argues, are constructed through the positioning of certain bodies as being “outside” of intelligibility (e.g. trans* body) (pp. 187–189). Without heterosexuality, sexual difference would be irrelevant. Thus, she exposes the masculine and the heterosexual as operations of power, not originals.

Nor is the body the site of essence. Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity suggests that the notion of a core essence is created through the cyclical repetition and reproduction of actions and performances that thereby create the illusion of an essence in the first place. In this way, Butler’s work challenges the metaphysical assumption that gender can be traced back to an original. Gender, she contends, comes to be as a consequence of cultural scripts that conflate a particular appearance with *being* something (e.g. *looking* “female” equals *being* “female”) (pp. 10–17). One’s actions create the illusion of an internal essence that drives the assumption of “real” femaleness or maleness. Drawing on Foucault’s insights into the operations of power, Butler argues that the category “gender” is not simply regulated but also generated through a regime of laws and practices that help position non-normative sexuality—anything outside heterosexuality—and non-masculinist approaches as unintelligible and thus not “real” (p. 40).

Furthermore, the notion of a “felt sense” dominates phenomenological and psychoanalytic approaches to the question, “what is the body” or “how do I know my body.” Many times the body is considered as surface material. Psychoanalysis can be helpful because it adds weight to the argument that there is more to the body than what is physically present. That is, the “felt sense” of the body that one has may or may not

match the material reality of the body, and the psyche cannot necessarily be separated out as wholly distinct from the physical. Phenomenological accounts additionally support theories of embodiment in which what one “feels” and what one “is” on the surface need not always correspond. Similar to psychoanalytic approaches, phenomenological perspectives then suggest that subjectivity cannot be understood void of consideration of the body, linking again the body and the psyche. (Salamon, 2010, pp. 13–42)

Elizabeth Grosz (1994) emphasizes the materiality of the body in her book, *Volatile Bodies*. Her approach, like Butler’s, aims to avoid the pitfall of positioning the body as pre-cultural. Using a Deleuzian framework, she asserts that the body is not simply the “bounded” flesh that we see; it extends into cells, objects, machines, etc. The body (i.e., “nature”) is not separate from culture. Her rejection of the nature/culture dualism is intended to lead to the dissolution of other binaries, such as interior/exterior and male/female.

Grosz’s work on corporeality and subjectivity shares similarities with Butler. Both Butler and Grosz assert that the biological body does not offer an original and theoretically “safe” starting point for theorizing subjectivity, pre-dating its insertion into culture. Both also offer critical readings of psychoanalytic theory. Importantly, identification, (Butler, 1993, pp. 3, 89–97; Grosz, 1994, pp. 57–61) they argue, minimizes the complexity of subjectivity and both are equally skeptical of the dependence of much psychoanalytic theory on the Oedipus Complex (Freudians)/Name of the Father (Lacanian), which is fundamentally masculine (Butler, 1990, p. 38; Grosz, 1994, p. 82). They differ in where they focus their political intervention. Butler (1990)

emphasizes the radical potential of performativity, whereas Grosz (1994) focuses on the Deleuzian concept of becoming.

Becoming, Grosz (1994) maintains, is not about mimicking what one expects a subject to be (p. 173). Instead, she asserts, becoming offers a welcome change from psychoanalytic readings of subjectivity. Becoming is a process that involves more than simply the subject alone but also more than the self-Other relationship. Becoming includes contact with elements of the Deleuzian landscape (e.g. machines, assemblages, processes) (pp. 160–177).

While becoming is an important concept and a significant way of thinking about subjectivity—emphasizing process over static states, becomings as unpredictable and always full of potential—Grosz’s argument has two main problems. Although she sets out explicitly to reject an ontological starting point, through her use of biologically laden terms she inadvertently creates a hierarchical relationship between nature (biology) and culture.

The limits of theorization are particularly evident in the way Grosz thinks about the trans* body. Grosz states, “The transsexual may look like a woman but can never feel like or be a woman” (p. 207). Grosz, in effect, reinscribes the notion of a core essence. Gayle Salamon (2010) does an astute job critiquing Grosz’s missteps and counters saying, “If one thinks sexual difference in other than binary terms, the category can become unyoked from ‘natural’ materiality in a way that makes it easier to resist the temptation to posit genital morphology as essentially determinative of the self” (p.151). In Salamon’s view, transgender theory has gotten caught up in asserting the primacy of

materiality over social construction when thinking the body (p. 73). The reasons for this are often due to a debate over simplicity versus complexity (Gannon & Davies, 2007). Some (Grosz, 1994; Namaste, 2005) argue that materiality makes too simplistic what is actually very complex, while others (Butler, 1993; Halberstam, 1998; Salamon, 2010) argue that social constructionism makes too complex what is actually simple.

Further, Salamon (2010) notes the “dangers of understanding absolute agency as the hallmark of subjectivity” (p. 86). That is, subjectivity is not conferred through an isolated process; social interactions, both structurally and interrelationally, are part and parcel. Thinking about subjectivity according to these particular discourses is rigid in a way that suggests that this agency must be absolute. It makes sense, however, to open up this thinking given what is known about the structure of language and psychic operations. Bodily feeling plays a part in one’s sense of identity (the transgender person may say he “feels” like a man), but this happens because feelings, too, are structured like a language (Salamon, 2010, p. 83).

Salamon states, “Claiming that the body *feels* natural is not the same as claiming that it *is* natural” (p. 77). Thus, it is not to suggest that social factors and history are not part of the construction of the felt body but, rather, that one can feel the body as “real” while at the same time acknowledging that this “real” body has been produced; one perspective need not diminish the other. Salamon here takes a line that many scholars are not willing to walk. Often one is forced into a camp of essentialism (this “real” body) or social constructionism (the produced body), while scholarship might be better served by resting with that tension instead of trying to resolve it.

Deleuze and Guattari

The work of Deleuze and Guattari offers a novel way of thinking about subjectivity that calls into question the traditional psychoanalytic models asserted by Freud and Lacan (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Guattari, 1995, pp. 18–20). Deleuze and Guattari offer a move away from scientific models, which have largely informed Western psychoanalytic thought, toward ones that use an aesthetic approach (Guattari, 1995, p. 106). In their conception, subjectivity requires a shift from seeing a subject as an insular, bounded entity, to considerations of the subject as constantly in flux and with ever-shifting borders.

Traditional psychoanalytic models position the subject as a contained Being who is analyzable as an isolated existence. The subject is purported to “live” inside a defined body, and subjectivity is thought to emanate out of this “inside.” Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) modelisation offers a critique of positioning identity as something “real” or as one’s Being. Deleuze and Guattari’s model adopts a schema where “The emphasis is no longer placed on Being—as general ontological equivalent, which...envelops, encloses and desingularizes the process—it is placed on the manner of being...the generative praxes of heterogeneity and complexity” (Guattari, 1995, p. 109). Thus, there is more to the subject than the “self” and more than can be accounted for in social constructionist models that do ascribe importance to social, political, and economic structures. The subject—if this term is even appropriate—is also produced by and is part of what they call “machines,” for example, aesthetic machines, desiring machines, the media, and so forth (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 88, 435; Guattari, 1995, pp. 5, 9).

These machinic processes combine in innumerable ways to create a multiplicity of events (Massumi, 1992, pp. 18–20). Here it becomes important to describe the rhizomatic process that Deleuze and Guattari use to explain the interaction between the subject and machines. In the field of botany, a rhizome is capable of reproducing infinite numbers of new shoots and root systems at any point along its nomadic underground stem (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). In a similar way, a rhizomatic existence implies that there is not a structured self, one is never fully done, one is always becoming. There exist always an infinite number of possibilities and opportunities, points of interaction and border redrawing, ways of being. Thus, what constitutes the self moves outside of the confines of the traditional “body” to encompass a multiplicity of possibilities. Subjectivity is focused outward and toward increasing complexity and multiplicity (i.e., becomings) in contrast to the inward focus of much traditional psychoanalytic theory (Guattari, 1995, pp. 22, 31).

Deleuze and Guattari consider borders as a material space *and* as a space of consciousness. Their work is invested in the material reality of borders, the violence that can result over the assertion and maintenance of them, and the lived experiences of those who inhabit borders. Additionally, they reveal the way Western philosophy tends to use borders as places to confine difference. By seeking new understandings of borders, they both complicate and problematize identity and subjectivity.

As a way to challenge and critique borders, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) began working with the notions of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization. On one level, to be territorialized means to be part of a culture, community, and land. To

be territorialized also means to be enmeshed within an ideology, a biologic process, a machine, and so forth. Being uprooted from one's "homeland" and placed somewhere "foreign," for example, is a *deterritorializing* process. *Reterritorialization*, which typically follows a deterritorialization, involves becoming "reprogrammed" with a new identity (e.g. national identity, cultural identity, sexual identity) (Massumi, 1992, p. 51). The treatment of Native Americans in the United States was a de/reterritorializing process. During the 19th and 20th centuries, many Native Americans were forcibly moved from lands they had made home (deterritorialized) and placed onto reservations. Here they were "educated" under a non-inclusive, Protestant schooling system (reterritorialized) (Spring, 2005, pp. 184–185, 211–413). This re-territorialization, although violent, also can be disruptive. As Native Americans became part of the Western school system, they disrupted the very notion of the West.

These processes (de/re-territorialization) also happen between systems, organizations, organisms, and/or machines. For example, most people growing up in the United States in the 21st century have been territorialized by capitalism. Normalized ways of thinking are limited by the ideological processes of the capitalist machine (Guattari, 1995, pp. 103–107). What is considered possible is always-already delimited by the borders that capitalism demands. For example, one can cite numerous instances of schools deciding the solution to woeful budgets is partnering with local corporations, and thus, the capitalist machine territorializes the school.

To territorialize is to perform an act of violence. Territorialization involves controlling by defining and bounding something. Deterritorialization and

reterritorialization are processes that can be positive disruptions of this violence, though these processes are also violent (Guattari, 1995, p. 27; Massumi, 1992, p. 51).

Identifying someone as “gay,” for example, could be considered a territorialization. The identity marker in this case is leveraged as an act of power (not necessarily to be read as an overt and intentional act) that seeks to limit and singularize what that person “is.”

Deterritorialization then could be an act of freeing the subject from this confining being and allowing for a reterritorialization. That is, performing outside of what is “gay,” in this example, yet simultaneously claiming “gay,” could be considered deterritorializing.

Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari offer a deterritorialization of traditional psychoanalysis by offering an alternative approach called schizoanalysis (Guattari, 1995, pp. 58–76). Schizoanalysis parallels psychosis, in effect creating the experience of “crossing...the barriers of non-sense which prohibit access to a-signifying nuclei of subjectivation” (Guattari, 1995, p. 68). Schizoanalysis offers a way around problems of signification (p. 87). Where traditional psychoanalytic thought claims that one’s beginnings leave holes and gaps that are forever unfillable, Deleuze and Guattari assert that these “lacks” only serve the interest of fields of power and are not helpful for thinking about subjects (Massumi, 1992, p. 85). Where in traditional psychoanalysis one seeks analysis in order to explore past relationships and experiences, exposing gaps and attempting to work through them, Deleuze and Guattari want to expand the dimensionality of what is possible (Guattari, 1995, p. 12). And, where traditional psychoanalysis presents a somewhat pessimistic view of the agency one has in the world to live differently and be other, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that liberation comes

through increasing creativity and possibility (Guattari, 1995, pp. 116–117). Expanding the boundaries of what we consider the subject to be and what subjectivity can produce creates infinite new opportunities. Opening up new spaces is, for Deleuze and Guattari, the hope for political change.

Schizoanalysis offers a challenge to linear systems. Signification is a linear process that influenced the ways Freud and Lacan conceived of subjectivity (Guattari, 1995, pp. 72, 87, 107). Deleuze and Guattari argue that linearity restricts possibility. Linearity produces hierarchies and suggests that “improvement” is always teleological. To remain linear something must adhere to the governances of the line, subject to the powers that control it (Guattari, 1995, p. 101). If we think of capitalism as a path, a mode of living, then we can see how what we think is possible is always and already informed by this ideology that has set the line. Deleuze and Guattari’s work is similar to the way evolution is theorized. The evolution of species, for example, is not a teleological process of “progress” or “improvement,” but is about variation itself. Variation is valuable because it increases the number of possibilities that exist to deal with situations that may arise. That is, humans do not exist because they are the end point of the evolutionary line (i.e., the goal) but are merely one point of variation along billions of years of speciation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 238–239). I turn to Deleuze and Guattari’s work in Chapter Three as a way to look at speech, silence, the body, and space as all connected in non-linear ways.

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE AND THE ECONOMY OF VULNERABILITY

...but while the silences in discourses of domination are a site for insurrectionary noise, while they are the corridors to be filled with explosive counter tales, it is also possible to make a fetish of breaking silence. It is possible as well that this ostensible tool of emancipation carries its own techniques of subjugation—that it converges with unemancipatory tendencies in contemporary culture, establishes regulatory norms, coincides with the disciplinary power of ubiquitous confessional practices; in short, it may feed the powers it meant to starve. (Brown, 2005, p. 84)

I begin with this quote from Wendy Brown's (2005) well-known essay, "Freedom's Silences," because many contemporary liberation projects, both within the academy and in activist circles (for some recent examples see Bell, 2010; Nagle, 2001; Nash & Viray, 2013; Sewell, 2006) trust the power of telling one's story, of narrating a life once silenced as indicative and productive of emancipation. Research that focuses on the lived experiences of marginalized peoples is named as a way for "research" to come in contact with "real life." In other words, narrative research engages in a double move. First, narrative research claims that this type of work brings into visibility the experiences of those who have been historically omitted, overlooked, and diminished (DeVault & Gross, 2007, p. 183; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007, p. 503; Nash & Viray, 2013). Fields such as educational studies, women's studies, and queer studies have at their core a commitment to social justice. Narrative research has become an avenue by which academics and activists challenge oppressive historical structures that disregard the

experiences of particular groups, groups whose daily lives are frequently met with prejudice, oppression, and even violence. Second, narrative research posits that by focusing on the lived realities of oppressed peoples one can escape the insularity of the ivory tower that is positioned in contrast to “real life” (Gannon & Davies, 2007, p. 96). Narrative research positions this work as a reaction against perceptions of poststructuralist nihilism and relativism (p. 90). At the root of narrative research is the belief that through the telling and retelling of stories, through their documentation, through their entry into academic space, through their liberation from silence, social progress will happen.

It is this “telling” through speech and the access to experience that is thought to be gained through this process that I seek to explore. Brown (2005) notes that within discourses of freedom implicit is, “the assumption that when an enforced silence is broken, what emerges is truth borne by the vessel of authenticity or experience” (p. 83). The “enforced silence” is the silence of an oppressive history created by the West that moved to the fringes the visibility and representation of those who were seen as showing problematic difference. The antidote to this silence, however, has come to be understood to lie in bringing out the voices of these peoples. Legibility, subjectivity, presence, then, are conferred primarily through speech. Brown argues that on the one hand “voice” projects, when leveraged by those within an oppressed group, have possibilities for disrupting the status quo. For example, the reappropriation of the words “queer” and “nigger” by groups against whom those words were used as tools of hate, challenges the dominant meanings of those very words. “Queer” and “nigger,” when reappropriated in

this way, can be contextually deflated of the power to do the harm they were originally intended to cause. On the other hand, “voice” projects can be taken up by the dominant group and end up being a way to bring marginalized groups under further regulation (Brown, 2005, pp. 89–90). Discourses revealed in order to break silence also contain intimate vulnerabilities that can be exploited to cause hurt. This process marks what Brown calls the fetishization of silence-breaking (p. 84). Liberating the voices of the oppressed serves not simply to rectify historical inequalities, but it also produces new subjects. The once-silenced object becomes speaking-subject. This is a significant move; identifying and liberating these “oppressed” groups serve Western ideologies of progress.

To help examine the role of narratives in liberation I have thought much on a recent conversation with a friend. It was not so much the details of what we talked about that have sat in the back of my mind so much as a pesky feeling that I could not put my finger on. My friend and I were talking about his grandmother, an independent, Southern, white woman who lived her whole life in rural North Carolina. As he and I canned fruit, replicating a tradition that she had also been a part of, we mused about what life must have been like for her, a woman who as a child often played the role of adult, filling the spot her father left when he was out of town doing jobs to make money. My friend recounted the way she would chop the head off of a copperhead snake while leaving the big black snakes alone, as the former were dangerous and the latter simply scary looking to the faint of heart. We thought about how in many ways her life must mirror the lives of many other rural, white women of the time, women who in certain

feminist contexts are cast as poor souls who were dependent on husbands and uneducated. And from this I think about the potency and potential of stories for our understandings of who we are and where we come from. At the same time, I wonder: what if the story of my friend's grandmother was "lost?" To seek the narration of a life is to assume that all life exists in speech and that all of life is speakable. What "truth" is revealed when this woman's story is told? For whom must these stories be told in the first place?

My friend also talked about the fact that the university he works at—a private, Southern college—encourages students to go out into the field and gather the stories of people like his grandmother, people whose lives would be invisible unless their stories are told. These experiences are thought to be a pedagogical tool that benefits both the students and the people with whom they interact. For the students, it expands their horizons, showing them a world outside the one they grew up in. For the people students work with, it is a chance to be heard. I hear Brown's (2005) questions here:

Are we compelled to reiterate the experience of the historically subordinated: to be without a room of one's own, without a zone of privacy in which lives go unreported, without a domain of creativity free from surveillance—this time by our own eyes? Are we so accustomed to being watched that we cannot feel real, cannot feel our experiences to be real, unless we are watching and reporting on them? (p. 95)

Speaking serves to promote a narrative of social progress and advancement. It cannot allow for a private inner life that is not "translated" into some larger meaning for the "greater good." And again, I wonder, do we assume that this woman's life is of less value if not a single person ever heard her story? Her life *was*, regardless of its retelling.

And even for those aspects of this woman's life that were legible to those around her, there is still always an excess beyond the narrative: thoughts, feelings, moments that do not lend themselves to words but are no less meaningful and meaning-making. And, what of lives that cannot be acknowledged or exhumed because they remain illegible to the discourse of liberation?

As a caveat, I acknowledge that seeing silence as primarily an act of resistance to speech would present too romanticized a picture. Silence requires speech for its constitution and speech requires silence. As Brown (2005) argues, silence is not different from speech but an equal player in the dance of discourse. In other words, silence is not more free from discursivity than speech. Instead, silence can "function as that which discourse has not penetrated yet, as a scene of practices that escape the regulatory functions of discourse" (p. 88).

In what follows I have several aims. In the first portion of this chapter I consider the way liberatory narratives circulate in what I describe as an economy vulnerability. In order to show this, I use Jean Baudrillard's work on general economy and the rise of signs in the circulation of value. Second, I situate my examination of silence and the production of vulnerability in the context of Judith Butler's work on speech, narration, and subjectivity. Finally, I look at the role of the embodied voice in the work of Adriana Cavarero in order to show the way speech and narrative are excused from the uncomfortable situation of discursivity.

Economy of Vulnerability

Hennessy

In “Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture,” Rosemary Hennessy (1994–1995) outlines the ways queer sexuality is implicated in capitalism. Much queer political action, she asserts, is insidiously linked to the ideological stronghold of capitalism. For example, she offers a sharp critique of buying and selling “queer” commodities (e.g. rainbow flags and sweatshop-made tee-shirts) and the opening up of markets (e.g. marriage) to queer populations as a form of activism. This activism, Hennessy argues, is designed for the bourgeoisie. Poor queers, that is, are rendered invisible through their paltry buying power and inability to participate. If more dollars equals more voice, class privilege becomes invisibly elevated. In light of Hennessy’s arguments, I want to consider the ways that vulnerability (or vulnerable subjects) operates as a commodity, with speech functioning as the means of production for this vulnerability.

Hennessy asserts that while the politics of visibility contributes in some helpful ways to progressive politics, visibility also functions as a covert agent of capitalist ideals. Vulnerability, I contend, is a byproduct of this economic system. The speech act, when taken up by liberatory politics, is a major throughway, advised as the quickest and most effective road to visibility. The campaign by the non-profit organization Autism Speaks, for example, brands promotional materials, “Autism Speaks” (Autism Speaks Inc., n.d.). A characteristic of autism is speech and language difference. Some folks with autism are not verbal. Some use speech in “unconventional” ways. Yet Autism Speaks, too, understands the speech act as the route to visibility. So, in addition to Hennessy’s

critique of visibility as a problematic tactic, I would extend this to include the specific use of speech. The notion of speaking is seen as synonymous with visibility, which is always the aim of marginalized groups, according to this type of politics. Speech becomes one of the ways that “visibility” is achieved and, as such, is part of the economy. Speech, then, becomes fetishized as a privileged form of visibility.

Economic theory is a helpful tool for thinking through the way that vulnerability operates (is produced, circulated, and capitalized upon). Neocapitalism, for its part, relies on the circulation of commodities. Commodities produce profits, and profits fuel the economic system. What constitutes a commodity can always be manipulated. While commodities in early capitalism were marked by their produced, physical materiality (e.g. a car, a house), in neocapitalism, objects produced by nature, such as water, and even non-tangibles, such as the data that runs through the fiber-optics of a networked world, are sold as commodities. Commodities can be as diffuse as an idea or as concrete as a food.

Vulnerability circulates through an economy that fetishizes speech. Speech (or “voice”) is often employed as a method to increase the visibility of marginalized subjects. If the voices of those who have been historically silenced are brought to the fore, a liberating project is understood to have begun. But the “silent”/“unvoiced” subject occupies a space that is decidedly queer. If what Hennessey (1994–1995) argues is true, that “politically, the aim of queer visibility actions is not to include queers in the cultural dominant but to continually pressure and disclose the heteronormative” (p. 36), then speech demands interrogation as a heteronormative construct.

According to Hennessy's argument, visibility is fetishized in many renderings of queer politics (p. 36). What better way to be "visible" than to speak? The angry customer who makes his complaints known to the manager in the store tends to get his way (in a perfect, heteronormative, unclassed, unraced utopia). Young children are encouraged to, "use your words," when wrestling through visceral emotions. Speech, in this way, is rendered a mode of visibility. But speech, too, has been set up in a hierarchical, binary relationship to silence. One is supposed to, "speak up for his rights." "Well, you should have *said* something," the concerned teachers exclaims. If you "say something" you are more likely to get attention, more likely to be noticed, more likely to be taken seriously as a valid subject. In this way, speech commodifies the subject, makes him buy- and sell-able in the marketplace of rights and privileges.

Education and academic work provide another useful example of how commodity fetishism begins to spill over into areas previously thought to lie outside the marketplace. Universities have no doubt become a marketplace where education is commodified. This is evident in the way Deans think about the utility of a department in terms of how many students a department teaches, the quantity of majors a department maintains, and the marketability of a department's graduates in a narrowed realm of what the "real world" is. What has happened to the labor of education? The labor of education—the discussions that happen in class, thinking, mentor-mentee relationships, reading and writing, the process of learning— have been alienated from the commodity that is education. Students are seen in terms of the money they can provide to businesses, ways they can bring money back into the school.

We can use this example to think about how economies in general operate. The cultural hegemony of capitalism spills out into other aspects of life. Mass consumption means translating ever more things into commodities. Institutions and practices become reified in order to create new commodities. The gay marriage debate is no small example. Hennessy points out, “Commodification structures much more than the exchange of goods on the market; it affects even as it depends on the knowledges that mediate what and how we see” (p. 66). In other words, what gets commodified has implications beyond the marketplace. It structures how we read things.

Problematically, Hennessy explains:

When the commodity is fetishized, the labor that has gone into its production is rendered invisible. Commodity fetishism entails the misrecognition of a structural effect as an immediate property of one of its elements as if this property belonged to it outside of its relation to the other elements. (p. 53)

Extending this to the way speech functions for producing capitalist subjects, there is still much to the subject that exceeds the bounds of the spoken word that is never accounted for but is rendered even further invisible by the idea that speech does indeed capture reality, truth. If speech has become fetishized, the reason is in part due to the fact that vulnerability is a commodity that gets produced through speech. Students who reveal “personal” stories or confess the vulnerability of their lives are often seen as more authentic. Papers are written based on interviews with subjects that we want to *know*. We want to consume these stories. Speech becomes part of Butler’s “matrix of intelligibility” that undergirds a capitalist economy (as cited in Hennessy, 1994–1995, p. 37).

Hennesy states that a political economy of the sign is not effective for creating the kind of political change she sees as necessary to fight the commodification of identities: “when the commodity is dealt with merely as a matter of signification, meaning, or identities, only one of the elements of its production—the process of image-making it relies on—is made visible” (p. 54). While I agree that sign is utilized as part of commodity culture, we nevertheless need to engage the general political economy of the sign.

Baudrillard

Baudrillard draws on Georges Bataille’s (1991) notion of general economy to break from traditional Marxist thinking about economy solely in terms of a capitalist economic system. For Baudrillard, while Marx’s ideas were relevant for the conditions of the industrial capitalism of modern society, primitive societies, by contrast, relied on an economy of symbolic exchange in the form of the gift and the counter-gift. Primitive societies saw the gift and counter-gift as a critical element of social life . One was expected to give, receive, and reciprocate in gift-giving practices as a form of exchange. In many ways gift and counter-gift relied on subjective experiences of objects rather than use-value and exchange-value that would come to be the characteristic features of capitalism (Baudrillard, 1981, pp. 30–31, 64–65; Kellner, 2013). But Baudrillard saw postmodern society as representing another significant break in the social transmissions of economies. Postmodern society, he argues, is subject to the rise of simulation and sign-value as the unit of exchange (Baudrillard, 1981, pp. 65–66; 1993, pp. 6–7). Because there is no “real” upon which signs depend for their meaning, it is impossible to

differentiate reality from simulation; all things simulate a hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 1–3). In postmodern societies signs and codes take the place once held by commodities in modern forms of exchange. The postmodern break—the break from modern society into a new era—for him, represents a radical shift in the way society functions and demands alternative modes for revolution and disruption (Baudrillard, 1993, pp. 36–38.) No longer is Marx’s dialectical materialism sufficient, rather the postmodern situation demands a semiological analysis and intervention (Baudrillard, 1981, pp. 143–163).

Baudrillard has been critiqued as extolling primitive society as closer to “the real” than subsequent formations (Kellner, 2013). He can be read as privileging primitive societies of having access to “the real” while demonizing the postmodern world as having “lost its roots” (Kellner, 2013). Moreover, it is unclear if Baudrillard is suggesting that there is an actual “real,” one that is unmediated, nondiscursive, and simple. Whether Baudrillard’s historical periodizations and the metaphysics of his reality are “correct” are not of primary interest to my analysis; his typology of economic formations in terms of units of exchange remains useful. The production and consumption of vulnerability in liberatory discourses can be understood and critiqued in terms of his insights concerning the primacy of sign-value and the rise of simulation and hyperreality.

Vulnerability as a System of Exchange

I suggest that vulnerability is a sign-value that functions as a unit of exchange when reality becomes simulative. Disneyland is Baudrillard’s oft-cited example of what simulation looks like in practice. He (1994) postulates:

Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the “real” country, all of “real” America that is Disneyland (a bit like prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, that is carceral). (p. 12)

In other words, although people like to think of Disneyland as a “fantasy” world, the conditions of postmodern society are such that what is most exchangeable is that which *seems* real. Disneyland is no more or less, neither the same as nor different from, not inside of or outside of the “real.” There is no way out of this conundrum. What is exchangeable is any sign that represents the longed-for “real,” or as Baudrillard terms it, the “hyperreal.” This, I argue, is why narratives and storytelling are so potent. They conjure up a “real” when in fact they primarily function to circulate signs.

Within the economy of the sign, stories and narratives are no longer linked to any signified—to an oppression or an “I.” Instead, signs become useful for that for which they can be exchanged. Vulnerability is a token that one decides if she should bring forth and can be exchanged for fair treatment. This is what happens, for example, in political campaigns. The story of “Joe the Plumber” from the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign was used as a sign, simultaneously signifying middle America, anti-socialism, the vulnerability of the middle class, hard work, and the myth that the United States is white and male. Similarly, President Obama often told the story of his mother and her battle with insurance companies during her fight against ovarian cancer. This story simultaneously circulated (a) the notions that individuals are suffering, and perhaps, it is time to offer some social programs to help people; (b) a perception of Obama as “just like you or me;” and (c) a reminder to racist America of his white mother, yet also, a reminder

to us that he is black. Later the “facts” of Obama’s story were called into question (Bruce, 2011). Read in terms of Baudrillard’s theory of sign economies, the sign need not relate to a “truth,” it does not need to be grounded in any “real” signified; what matters is if the story elicits the right story-effect.

Hurricane Katrina, for example, after its landfall, struggled to produce the right story-effect to elicit immediate public and government attention. No doubt, the “truth” of that story was that many people were experiencing significant suffering. It was also not the case that people were not aware or lacked knowledge that people were suffering. It was not invisible. The Katrina event, however, never prompted a sign exchange that would alleviate the realities of the storm’s effects. What did get activated were sign exchanges that legitimated the careless and tortoise-paced response in the immediate aftermath. For instance, George W. Bush’s Undersecretary of Emergency Preparedness and Response (Director of FEMA), Michael Brown, was advised by his press secretary to roll up his sleeves in press conferences “to look more hardworking” (CNN, “Can I quit now,” 2005). Here, “hard work” and rolled-up-sleeves were collapsed into the same sign. No longer is the labor of hard work necessary to constitute the sign, “hard-work,” rather rolled-up-sleeves do an equally sufficient job. Furthermore, numerous reports from New Orleans focused on accounts of looting, shooting, rapes, and gang activity in the early days after the storm made landfall. Despite the fact that nearly all of these reports were later discredited (Rosenblatt & Rainey, 2005), these racist sign economies had no problem flowing with little resistance, tapping quickly into well-worn paths of U.S. race hatred. Later, people found ways to craft stories of vulnerability that resulted in action.

Specific stories became more palatable, such as “we need to help the musicians” or stories that focused on individualized accounts—stories where one produced herself *as* a “vulnerable subject.” It remained acceptable, however, to discount a whole class of people rendered object and abject. Stories revealed to be effective were ones that could be used and consumed in order to create a sense that “we” share a reality. In other words, the stories that functioned well were not those with the greatest “truth-value,” but the ones that activated the right signs.

The more that signs become unhinged from the real, the more we insist upon the real. Most disciplines are still searching for the “real,” despite asserting postmodern and poststructural standpoints. One way to search for the “real” as Baudrillard (1994) argues, is through the “escalation of the true, of lived experience” (p. 7). That is, postmodern thought argued for the death of the truth, yet through that very venture gave rise to truth-seeking discourses. The death of truth, in consequence, produces the social demand for the proliferation of narratives. The rise of narrative research and storytelling, like Disneyland, helps conceal that there is no truth (Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 26–27).

What is significant about how Disneyland operates is not how close it comes to simulating the real; rather, “the imaginary of Disneyland is neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp” (p. 13). In other words, deterrence machines are productive in that they keep positing the real. Narratives function similarly as a deterrence machine. They need not be anchored in anything real, rather their function is to circulate signs in order to hide the fact that there is no ultimate real or knowing to be had.

Much narration is about the desire to be recognized, to be visible in a society that continually ignores, erases, and minimizes those it deems unintelligible. Narration and storytelling are a way to gain recognition; however, in the telling of stories, subjects get positioned in very particular ways. Difference is collapsed in order to understand a subject and make her intelligible. Narration relies on understanding as the grounds for rights. This is a system destined to fail many.

What is particularly notable about Baudrillard's conception of the sign economy is that the sign precedes the subject (pp. 2–3). Identities are not produced out of oneself; they do not depict something "real" or proceed from or point back to a signified. Racial belongings and sexual identity belongings, for example, are often understood as being constituted by something "real." But "gay" or "black" come to mean something before the gay subject or the black subject even uses that name. Identities are produced within local and temporalized contexts but take on a sign-life of their own as they circulate and hold significant sign-exchange value. Students know well that narratives that have good sign-value can be exchanged for accommodations for coursework. For example, "grandma dying" is known to be a socially significant story to use. In the telling of these stories, however, one has to be willing to "become" the story. The student whose grandma dies, must become the student-with-the-dying-grandma. While getting what he wants/needs, the student begins to define who he is in relation to that story (Kellner, 2013). Again, this is not to say that grandma is not actually dying and that this is not actually injurious to the mental well-being of the student, but rather, within the economy of the sign, the person with the "actual" grandma dying does not function differently

from the student deploying the sign and inhabiting the subject position of the student with the dying grandma. In the student-teacher exchange, the signs function the same.

What, then, are the political possibilities within this economy? Baudrillard (1994) discusses the way children face the world in order to describe the difference between subject and object status. He argues that children are met with two contradictory demands: (a) be a subject (b) be an object. They respond to each with its opposite. To the call to be a subject, they act as an object. To the call to be an object they demand subjecthood. Baudrillard argues that neither is qualitatively better than the other; however in postmodern society, assertions of full subjecthood—often seen as the necessary, direct resistance to the demand for objecthood—are held up as the superior form of political action (pp. 84–85).

The subject-resistance is today unilaterally valorized and viewed as positive—just as in the political sphere only the practices of freedom, emancipation, expression, and the constitution of a political subject are seen as valuable and subversive. But this is to ignore the equal... impact of all object practices, of the renunciation of the subject position and of meaning—precisely the practices of the masses—that we bury under the derisory terms of alienation and passivity. (p. 85)

In other words, resisting the call to subjecthood and taking the position of object is demonized. This fact results in the multiplying of opportunities for “voice” and other ways of producing narratives as a way to declare subject status. Speaking is part of what is considered to constitute one as a subject. Silence, then, is granted object status.

Baudrillard also recognizes the dominance and privilege of particular kinds of liberatory projects. His challenge is to say that these projects actually reinforce the status quo of the sign economy.

All the movements that only play on liberation, emancipation, on the resurrection of a subject of history, of the group, of the work based on ‘consciousness raising,’ indeed a ‘raising’ of the unconscious of subjects and of the masses, do not see that they are going in the direction of the system, whose imperative today is precisely the overproduction and regeneration of meaning and speech. (p. 86)

Baudrillard, instead, calls for a “strategy” of resistance that plays the system against itself. In a format similar to postcolonial mimesis, he suggests a “hyperconformist simulation” of the system (p. 85). Furthermore, he suggests that silence, the “[refusal] of the spoken word,” (p. 85) is also a technique of opposition. In these processes the system is reflected back on itself (pp. 85–86). In subsequent chapters I consider how refusals of speech might function in some specific contexts.

Subjectivity and Vulnerability

Narrative not only plays in economies of vulnerability, but as a consequence, it also helps to produce particular types of subjects. The economy of vulnerability not only posits a “real” but also a “real,” knowable subject. The roots of this predicament, in the context of the Western philosophical tradition, are based in a metaphysics of presence. According to Evans (1991), Husserl, for his part, asserted that “purified speech is present to itself in a completely unmediated manner” (p. 5). While many poststructuralists have subsequently critiqued this notion of the possibility of full presence, nevertheless, phonocentrism still governs the ways subjects are thought to make themselves known as such as well as the primacy of the subject position as one of agency in general. The “voice” emerges, with a quick elision of the contradiction, as a site of agentic subject possibility.

Butler

Psychoanalysis has been a key player in the idea that narrative can reconstruct and account for a life. As Butler (2005) points out, however, “It does not follow that, if a life needs some sort of narrative structure, then all of life must be rendered in narrative form” (p. 52). Psychoanalytic theories and theorists of subjectivity argue that speech and narration are linked to the formation of the subject itself. Subjectivity necessarily recalls the primary encounter between self and Other. It is through this primary encounter that one begins her life as a subject. Thus, subjectivity is a social condition and one that requires the presence of another. (Butler, 2005, pp. 86–87)

This entry into subjectivity is not a peaceful one, rather it is one that is “traumatic;” subjectivity is a complex process. One has no control over the terms of the “primary trauma” between self and Other (pp. 86–90). As the psychoanalytic explanation goes, the Other calls the self to account for its existence by asking her to give a narrative of herself (pp. 65–101). This relational process affects all subsequent life interactions. Because we need the Other to bring us into subjectivity, we are vulnerable. The vulnerability that is produced and sustained through the formation of subjectivity is lasting.

Adding to the challenge of entrance into social life, the ability to narrate oneself is always-already flawed. We are called to give an account, yet this is an impossible task. Establishing a self comes to be through operations of power over which one lacks control. Rules and social contracts pre-exist the subject’s entry into the world, yet nevertheless intrude. As a result, the social norms already present when we come into

being play a role in shaping our relationships with others and the sense of self we develop (pp. 84–101). Additionally, as Butler argues, narratives cannot provide a full account of one's self. If I tell you about myself, for example, I am creating a story that appears to be linear, coherent, and without ruptures; yet, in the psychoanalytic tradition, which Butler draws on and troubles, the subject is burdened with an unconscious. One's ability to have free will is partially limited by parts of herself of which she is not fully aware. There is always a level to which a subject is unknown and unknowable to herself (pp. 53–54, 88). Narrative, then, is merely a social instrument, not capable of providing the truth of self, but one that allows one to enter into relationships with others (pp. 63–64, 79).

We face a bind when trying to resist the social and political marginalization of certain subjects, for it is at these times that the call for speech seems greatest. Narration is a process that gets reproduced not only psychically on the individual level but also socially as groups demand to be seen and recognized as subjects. Within discourses of liberation, speech is considered an agentic act but one that Butler rightly calls a “fictive agency” (pp. 83–84). One must be wary of any project, then, that suggests that speech is the privileged source and sign of subjectivity and agency.

These insights concerning the limitations of narration have implications for disciplines invested in the liberation of marginalized subjects as the basis for scholarship. Women's studies and educational studies, while some of the few places in the academy founded in part on explicit commitments to social justice, are often dependent on the production of service (and someone serviceable) in order to legitimate their existence. Due to the way these departments have been institutionalized and the demands of the

corporate university, they are forced to show “evidence” of social justice work, community engagement, public relevance, and so forth, evidence that requires the production of particular signs (Bouchard, 2012, p.101; Brown, 1997; Weigman, 2002, pp. 20–21). Stories and narratives provide evidence of a social problem through the bringing forth of vulnerabilities. The person who fails to or opts not to tell her story is a problem subject for a discipline needing “evidence.” This subject is not doing her liberatory duty. The “story” is necessary to enforce the “realness” of the justice-injustice binary. Telling is privileged over not-telling. Telling is considered originary—true human nature—while failing to tell becomes a sign of shame, failure, and so forth.

Enacting “saving” projects works to produce subjects who need to be saved and demands academic departments that are in the business of “correctly” saving. Gender studies needs subjects whose gender is seen as the cause of unfair treatment, for example. Educational studies needs subjects whose educational experiences have been diminished because of historical oppressions. Without these subjects, these very departments would lose their function. Therefore, these subjects can never really be “saved” ultimately (that would result in department dissolution), so one must “save” while producing the subject in need of saving.

Silence is a complicated possibility given the privilege that is granted to speech in liberatory projects. On the one hand, silence can perpetuate a history of oppression. That is, visibility is at times a mark of existence within social life. To be addressed, for one’s concerns to be heard, often requires the elemental fact of being seen to exist in the first place. Students with disabilities, for example, were historically ignored (and in some

cases still are) until there was enough of a call to see these students as in need of and deserving of particular accommodations. Hence, it is important here to see my call as one of increasing complexity as opposed to a change of course or reactionary method. Rather we must reconsider the place and power of silence due to the privileging of speech, visibility, and representation.

Some of the potential of silence is suggested by this psychoanalytic moment described by Christopher Bollas and summarized by Butler (2005):

One patient speaks and then falls silent, leaving Bollas with a sense of aloneness and disorientation. When he finally gives voice to this sense within the session, it is to suggest that for and with him the patient has effectively recreated the environment in which she had felt suddenly isolated and lost as a young child. He asks whether she has asked him to inhabit the experience through her long pauses so that he can know what it was that she then felt. What she offers, then, is less a narrative than a recreated scene of suddenly abandoned communication and a disorienting loss of contact. (pp. 56–57)

This paragraph is significant for several reasons. Bollas, the psychoanalyst, is made uncomfortable with the silence his patient has left him to inhabit. The patient's move is effective because it both disrupts the psychoanalytic space—one based on the belief that talk-therapy is productive—and “speaks” volumes without words. If this person had narrated, told the story of her abandonment, would she have as effectively made the past present? Speech often marks the end of oppression, the moment where we all get to move on. This psychoanalytic moment can be seen as a phenomenon that happens more broadly in cultural practices of liberation. We seek speech and voice because silence makes us uncomfortable. But, we cannot talk ourselves out of the reprehensibility of oppressions that have and continue to happen. Speech actually, in this

way, silences and obscures certain things. Voice projects work to position oppression as past or to position oppression as in the process of being undone. Are we trying to avoid the fact that people have been abandoned? Are we trying to minimize and rectify things we do not want to feel? Voice projects foreclose this type of address. Silence—and the power that goes with it—is killed the name of liberation.

Cavarero

Finally, I would like to consider the recent writings of Adriana Cavarero (2000, 2005), whose work on narrative challenges psychoanalytic notions of “trauma” while reintroducing and recentering the importance of the voice. In *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Cavarero (2000) presents a challenge to traditional, canonical modes of thinking about self-other relationships. Mounting an argument based on Hannah Arendt’s notion of “uniqueness,” she is invested in the political and ethical possibilities of narratives.

As a challenge to identity politics, which she sees as reinforcing the “what” of a person, Cavarero (2000) calls for a method to address the unique “who” of each of us. She argues that everyone is utterly unique and born with a desire to hear her story told during her lifetime (pp. 32–33, 41). This, according to Cavarero, is a universal desire and one that can only be achieved with the help of an other. Narrative emerges as the instrument that delivers and discovers the “who.” In contrast to the psychoanalytic tradition that considers self-other relationships to be built upon a primary trauma, Cavarero (2000) would argue that this relationship is not necessarily violent (p. xii). She looks to friendships and love relationships as places where people navigate their who-

ness. Because one comes into the world without language and memory of her birth, in order to fulfill her desire for her autobiography, she requires the assistance of a biographer to help fill that gap (Cavarero, 2000, p. 37). These two come together, not necessarily as fully intelligible to each other or with the goal of intelligibility; rather two come together based on the ethical assumption that each is unique (Kottman, 2000, p. x).

Breaking also with strong textualist, poststructural traditions, Cavarero does not see life as merely textual. Cavarero (2000) states,

Taking writing as a paradigm—making every language into a text—also turns every “real” existent into something definable as “extra-textual” or “extra-discursive.” In this way the text, or the traditional form of the biographical and autobiographical genre, wins out over life. (p. 42)

Cavarero locates the self as something outside of textual presence and situates the discursive and the lived self as at odds with one another. In other words, Cavarero intentionally rejects the notion of the subject, as she sees this as part of philosophy’s stronghold and in conflict with the unique (Kottman, 2000, p. xiii). The subject and considerations of subjectivity in general take discursivity to be a given, while Cavarero suggests that possibilities might be located elsewhere.

Butler (2005) considers Cavarero’s argument as she works through the question of how one can come to narrate an account of oneself (pp. 20, 30–35, 43, 55). Butler asks: How much agency does one have? How opaque can one be to oneself? How does one account for norms outside of one’s control? Given these limitations to our ability to narrate, for what can one be responsible? Butler complicates Cavarero’s argument by considering the temporality of any account that one may give. We all are subject to

things outside of our control—we come into being in a time and place where we cannot be responsible for what constitutes intelligibility, and we cannot control what will be intelligible in the future. Thus, we all perform within uncontrollable norms that have not any one person as their friend or foe. This, from the outset, shapes the way we encounter one another. Despite some critiques of Cavarero, Butler sees Cavarero’s argument as presenting a more altruistic possibility of sociality than the more violent, interpellative postulations of Hegel and Nietzsche (Butler, 2005, pp. 13–14, 31–32).

I think, however, there are some additional and important critiques that could be leveraged against Cavarero. Cavarero’s argument throughout assumes that speech and voice are fundamental media for the task of narration. Her subsequent book, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, which develops the argument put forth in *Relating Narratives*, makes this explicit. She (2005) argues, “Nothing in fact communicates uniqueness more than the voice” (p. 197). The human, embodied voice, in Cavarero’s estimation, is the location of one’s uniqueness. The voice, delivered by the mouth of one to the ear of an other sets the stage for the encounter between two unique individuals (Cavarero, 2005, pp. 173–182). Cavarero’s argument relies on the phenomenology of the voice, and within that phenomenology, sound is the essence of voice. She argues, “Speech, in its acoustic essence, has at its heart a rhythmic soul. This means that there is an intrinsic and substantial link between voice and speech, between the rhythmic embodiment of the voice and the expressivity of saying” (p. 180). Her argument, however, positions the verbal as something to which people universally have access, yet we know this not to be true. The sonic voice is absent, for example, for

people with particular forms of autism. What roles are they invited to play in Cavarero's ethics? And those who use sign language? It does not necessarily fix the problem to suggest that Cavarero would include American Sign Language (ASL) as another type of embodied voice. It would be difficult for her to extend her philosophy to other forms of voice if she believes it to be so embodied. Beyond the materiality of the voice, then, this privileging of the sound of human speech takes along with it the assumption that voice presents a more purified version of the self than other modes. Therefore, people who do not speak through the sound of an embodied voice nor hear through the ear, lack the human qualities that she views as fundamental to this ethical site.

Although Cavarero notes that full narration is not possible or even necessary—the ethical task, for her, lies in trying to engage in this encounter with the other—she still locates the exchange of speech between two people as the scene where one comes closest to being able to show her uniqueness (p. 197). Moreover, she locates this exchange as outside of traditional accounts of subjectivity. In this way speech is assumed to reveal a more absolute presence than other forms of encounter. So privileged is speech, in Cavarero's estimation, that it can stand outside of discursivity.

While Cavarero's attempt to locate an ethics that relies on the engagement of two people in their uniqueness is an important one, by attempting to escape discursivity, she makes discursivity the location of ethical problems. That is, she is suggesting that if we can get outside of discursivity, outside of thinking about subjectivity as part of an interpellative process, we actually stand a chance to appreciate uniqueness. What happens if there is not access to a pre-discursive self or the existence of a pre-discursive

self in the first place? Is there not still a chance for ethics? I think here the insights of Gayle Salamon are helpful. In *Assuming a Body*, Salamon (2010) argues that feelings, too, are the product of discursivity (p. 83). Attempts to locate a more real self through claims of “feeling like a man” versus “feelings like a woman” (in her case she uses the example of trans* bodies) do not actually reveal a greater truth—I must really be a man if I feel like a man—as these feelings are constructed as well. Salamon, however, is not suggesting that therefore feelings are not “true” or worthwhile. Instead, she is making possible an ethics within the inescapability of discursivity. She extends the challenge: What if attempts at talking about embodiment and bodily feeling do not get us out of the discursive bind? How, then, do we ethically engage? Likewise, I am not suggesting that narrating oneself is not worthwhile or that the feeling of the uniqueness of one’s voice is not consequential. Instead, I wish not to get involved in the debate between the material and the discursive, but to offer some different possibilities for political gestures within—not without—the discursive.

In subsequent chapters I examine the way the economy of vulnerability reveals itself in particular contexts. Specifically, I consider alternative possibilities to narrative—challenging traditional accounts of subjectivity, presence, and visibility—through the play of object status adoption and silence. Moreover, I consider the political implications for these various options.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENT SUBJECTS: A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING OF *THE MIRACLE*

WORKER AND SPEAK

In the famous final scene from the 1979, made-for-TV version of the *Miracle Worker*, young Helen Keller stands at the well, running her hands under the water from the pump and cries out, “WA-WA.” This critical moment not only harkens back to the days before Helen became ill and spoke at an early age this sound for water, but it also ends the silence and confusion that has been Helen’s relationship to the world of language up to that point. As Helen stands on the lawn of Ivy Green, the viewer is signaled that Helen has made, for the first time, the connection between the sign for water that Anne Sullivan has been teaching her and its meaning. Helen *understands*. While the narrative suggests that Helen has been liberated from the world of darkness and silence, one might wonder why Helen, who is deaf and mute, conveys her understanding by *speaking* the word. In fact, Helen’s understanding would be more meaningfully captured in the movement of her fingers in connection with the object she is describing, for that is where language lives for Helen. But the film intentionally provides a gut-wrenching display of Helen bursting those words forth into the world. This links Helen’s understanding of the meaning of words with the speech act. The speech act is not for Helen; it is for everyone else. This scene is predicated on the idea that when one comes

out of silence and enters into speech, she also enters into liberation. This is a powerful moment in this film and an example of a way that film can be used to think about philosophical and theoretical questions concerning speech, silence, and presence.

In this chapter, I offer readings of *The Miracle Worker* (Aaron, 1979) and *Speak* (Sharzer, 2004). In both films, the protagonist is a non-speaking subject. Both situate the move from silence to speech and from objecthood to subjecthood within the context of education as a liberatory process. Drawing on the theoretical groundwork laid out in Chapters 1 and 2, I explore the ways these texts evidence the phonocentric link between speech and presence and the economy of vulnerability. I engage with visual texts to interrogate how they construct voice and agency. I look to see what these films overtly suggest about the speech act, subjectivity, and agency, while revealing the political economy that undergirds it.

Common Approaches to Film

Film theory has traditionally been dominated by formalist approaches (Brunette & Wills, 1989, p. 52). Formalist approaches, which are structuralist, examine the elements that make up a film including the lighting, the frame, and so forth. According to Brunette and Wills (1989), the dominance of formalism and structuralism has meant that film history and film interpretation “rely on the assumption that both the body of films to be classified historically and the individual films to be interpreted are in some way comprehensible whole, complete unto themselves” (p. 33)

Among the elements most often discussed by film theorists is the importance of examining the various roles the viewer may take. The role of the viewer can be seen as

that of a passive recipient, vulnerable to the film's manipulations (Nelmes, 2011, p. 105). Antonio Gramsci, along with other neo-Marxists, for example, argued that the film played a role in shaping dominant ideologies and making them seem natural (p. 105). In this way the viewer is a passive recipient void of consciousness and agency in the interpretation; she sits back and receives what the filmmaker intended. On the other hand, the viewer can be seen as an equal constructor in the meaning of the film (p. 109).

In a groundbreaking article from the mid-1970's, the Camera Obscura Collective (2003) elaborated a feminist critical approach to the study of film. The Collective argued for approaching film through textual analysis, explaining that "textual analysis considers the text (the film) as a dynamic process of the production of meanings, inscribed within the larger context of social relations" (p. 236). Unlike formalist and structuralist critics, the Collective argued for semiological and psychoanalytic approaches that understood the text "not as a closed work, but as a discourse, a play of signification, dynamism and contradiction" (p. 236). Psychoanalytic readings have often focused primarily on the image and the audience rather than on the filmmakers intentions (Rose, 2007, p. 141). Psychoanalytic theory, especially Lacanian theory, has remained one of the most prominent approaches to film among feminist and queer scholars (Philips, 2006; Silverman, 1988).

The Camera Obscura Collective (2003) also emphasized "the points of convergence of ideology and representation, of ideology as representation" (p. 237). In this the Collective echoes other scholars who also emphasize the importance of reading texts in order to critique ideology. Stuart Hall, for example, a leading cultural studies

scholar argues that there are three main readings to a text. One possibility, the dominant reading, is a reading that accepts the writer's intentions. An oppositional reading, on the other hand, directly challenges the intended meaning. In between those two extremes lies the negotiated reading in which aspects of the film's intended meaning are accepted and others are rejected (Nelmes, 2011, p. 256).

I find all of these theoretical insights helpful for my reading. I am in part interested in the ways visual representations of quiet students and trans* students are constructed by particular ideologies. Visual representations of quiet students and trans* students are most certainly "not ideologically neutral, but reproduce specific ideological predispositions: codes of movement, of iconic representation, and perspective" (Camera Obscura Collective, p. 239). However, because I seek to investigate these visual representations in order to expose and critique an economy of vulnerability that is predicated on logocentrism, the readings that follow are informed especially by a deconstructive methodology.

Deconstructive Approaches to Reading Film

My reading of film, in the present chapter and the chapter that follows, is linked to those of poststructuralists such as Barthes, Foucault, and in particular, Derrida. Despite the prevalence of Derrida's influence in literary studies, deconstructive approaches to film are rare (Brunette & Wills, 1989, p. 3). Therefore, while my primary goal is to consider these representations of quiet and trans* students in order to disrupt and challenge the logocentric economy of vulnerability, I am at the same time challenging the ways in which films are usually read. Deconstructive film readings start

from the assumption that no representation can be viewed as given (Brunette, 1986, p. 56). All readings produce constructed meanings. Meaning comes from a viewer's interaction with the film (Nelmes, 2011, p. 109). What is seen as structured meanings of words and symbols are not the result of "naturalness," but instead an *effect* of hegemonic operations that create shared social constructions that look pre-given (p. 109).

Similar to the way that speech gets interpreted as the locus of authenticity in logocentric regimes, film is often viewed as providing more immediate access to "truth" than writing (Brunette, 1986, p. 56; Brunette & Wills, 1989, p. 9). The visual image is often thought to be more "real" than even speech (Brunette, 1986, p. 61).

My intentions in taking a deconstructive approach to these films are distinctly political. The work of deconstruction is often viewed as mere elitist theorization. I do not seek to minimize the privilege one must have in order to work within such a space; however, this work is critical to creating what Butler (2004) would term "liveable lives" (p. 39). The work of interpretation and critical reading is political and engages the very ethical labor that is necessary to improve the material conditions of people and to produce meaningful political activism.

Reading films in a deconstructive manner can help challenge institutionalized thinking (Brunette, 1986, p. 26), and reveal deeper philosophical structures at work in texts. As Brunette (1986) points out, "Metaphysics is the infrastructure of ideology" (p. 60). The intended meaning of a text by the creator is not static, does not derive from the author alone, and is not the only meaning that counts. Deconstructing texts intervenes

politically to produce new meanings, unhinging the “mainstream” one (Mangion, 2011, p. 145).

Films are often read as providing more direct access to the real than written texts. This grounds a particular type of politics. Images, like speech, are assumed to have a liberatory power that in effect disavows the gap that exists between hearing and being heard, seeing and being seen. Films as visual texts, however, are no less subject to the play of difference. As Brunette (1986) points out, “What is particularly interesting about the cinema is that the absence or endless chain of undergrounded signifiers which deconstruction considers to be ‘inherent’ to representation is both more and less blatant here than it is in purely verbal signs” (p. 61). But it is for this precise reason that I think the use of films for my purposes is important. Disrupting the taken for granted—looking to see what films that are traditionally read in terms of the liberating power of speech and narrative might reveal when we look for these “underground signifiers.”

The Miracle Worker

The Miracle Worker, at the very least, provides a blunt example of how un-present the non-speaking subject is. Her body is present but “Helen” is not there. Helen Keller is positioned as being “absent” from the world due to her inability to speak, hear, and see. This impedes her ability to communicate effectively with those with whom she lives.

Her mother exclaims of the growing tension due to Helen’s silence, “Everyday she’s further away.” There is a sense that Helen is without presence because she cannot *be* present in a way that is meaningful to her family.

Helen

As the credits roll at the beginning of the film, Helen is shown running through the fields with two of the Keller's servant children. The audience is introduced to the pattern of motions and behaviors that will distinguish Helen's actions from those of a "normal" child. As the three children run together, in contrast to the servant children's motions, Helen flails and stumbles. As they run down the hill approaching the house, Helen ends up tangled in the laundry hanging outside on the line. After being set free, it is only a matter of seconds before Helen is tangled in the next mess. She is caught with a pair of scissors, tumbling with one of the servant children, "almost taking his eyes out."

Helen's actions throughout the beginning of the film are often abrupt and violent. She is portrayed as having a body that lacks control of its adjoining limbs. No sounds come from her mouth and in the place of verbal communication, she throws things, bites, breaks things, and acts out in order to get attention. Within the first day of Anne Sullivan's arrival, she slaps Anne, slams a doll in her face causing Anne to bleed, locks Anne in her room without the key, and finally stabs Anne with a needle.

While *The Miracle Worker* is typically read as a narrative of Helen's journey into language, it is also a film about bodies. Long segments of this film take place void of dialogue. Instead the viewer must read the scenes through the movement of bodies. The viewer watches Helen as a body that does not behave. Her body is unruly. It is not cleaned the way a proper body should be. She moves when one should sit. She pinches when one should use words. Helen's lack of communication in a way that is intelligible to her family leaves the family members regarding Helen as simply a body, an object.

Within the economy of vulnerability, objects are silent, *subjects* speak. The way to make Helen's body more orderly, to bring her into subjectivity, is to make her communication legible to her family. Turning Helen into a "speaking" subject brings an otherwise unruly, illegible body into order and into control. To recall Baudriallard's insights discussed in Chapter 2, it turns an object into a subject.

Helen's object status is evidenced in her depiction as an animal. This is revealed in the language that is used to name Helen, the description of her behaviors, and the approach used to bring her into speech. At the beginning of the film the family discusses their options for care of Helen. The Captain, her father, remarks that it is "not safe to let her run around loose." Helen's behavior is likened to a creature that should be kept captive and contained. Helen's half-brother, Jimmy, regards her in similar terms. When Helen and Anne first begin working together, Anne starts to sign letters with her. Upon seeing this, Jimmy remarks, "She imitates everything; she's a monkey." Helen's behavior is seen as something other than human. The expectations and hopes for Helen focus on things one would hope for out of an animal. The Captain remarks after the two weeks Anne and Helen spend together that he is "more than pleased" because now Helen is "cleaner" and "more manageable."

Anne's first formal meal with the family depicts Helen as a wild horse whose spirit needs to be broken. As the Keller family is gathered together at the dinner table, Helen exhibits her usual mealtime procedure of walking from plate to plate, grabbing what she wants. While the family members sit on chairs, use napkins and utensils, eating in a "civilized" manner, Helen takes food freely from plates using her hands. As Helen

continues to erratically feed herself dinner, peppered with swaying hair, Anne intervenes. She requests that the family leave. Although the family seems accustomed to Helen's behavior and resistant to Anne's objections to the meal's format, they acquiesce and leave Helen and Anne alone.

Anne locks the doors to the dining room and together an elongated scene of a power struggle ensues. Anne insists that Helen can sit, eat with utensils and fold her napkin just like everyone else. Anne's attempts to get Helen to sit in a chair resemble that of trying to saddle a wild horse. The scene goes on, without dialogue, for over seven minutes. The scene is also very physical. The viewer witnesses Anne and Helen wrestling and slapping each other, Helen throwing spoons across the room, and Helen spitting on Anne's face the food that Anne fought hard to get into Helen's mouth.

The scene of struggle and exertion goes on for some time, and finally, Helen and Anne emerge. Anne proclaims that Helen "sat in her chair, ate with a spoon, and folded her napkin." The specificity of these accomplishments is telling. The audience sees the irony: If Helen can be brought into order and into control—if she can eat like a "normal" person, using the right body part for the right action—she will actually be liberated. Helen needs to be brought into order, into control, and therefore, into speech.

Here one is compelled to draw the parallel between Helen's experiences and the process of education. This is a classic portrayal of education. Education in the United States demands the discipline and control of bodies. The history of U.S. education is the story of efforts to maintain the dominant social order (Nasaw, 1979). Schools are sites like prisons that, as Foucault (1977) argues, are organized to manage bodies through

disciplinary power. Thus, Helen must sit in a chair. She must learn how to use her tools. Finally, she must learn etiquette. Sitting in the chair, for Helen, not unlike the unruly kid at school, is about her preparation for entry into education.

It is easy to assume the naturalness of this disciplinary scene. Seen another way, however, one is left to wonder why Helen would even logically use a spoon. Given that Helen cannot see and the tips of fingers are full of nerve endings providing necessary information for the successful path of food from plate to mouth, the use of hands seems to make more sense. The end of a spoon, where the food would sit is void of any tactile sensation that Helen could use to eat. A utensil seems much more likely to end up missing her mouth, hitting her face or teeth, knocking food from its flight.

The folding of the napkin is a similarly curious achievement. Of all those things that Helen accomplished, it is the napkin on which Katie Keller fixates: “My Helen folded her napkin.” Folding a napkin, then, is even a step beyond civilized, it demonstrates Helen as capable of accomplishing correct etiquette for her pedigree. Therefore, the viewer can see that Helen’s entry into language also has a class and gendered dimension. Disciplinary power controls bodies to normalize and naturalize behaviors that reinforce class and gender differences (Foucault, 1977). A controllable Helen will be more capable of fitting into the family’s social position. An unruly male child would probably not be as problematic because of his behavior.

Anne Sullivan

Anne Sullivan comes to the Keller home, Ivy Green, as a recent graduate of the Perkins School for the Blind. She comes to Helen not simply with teaching skills she has

learned, but with the added experience of having been blind herself. Although it is not mentioned in the film, historical records show that Anne suffered from trachoma, a bacteria of the eye, when she was five years old. This infection resulted in blindness. As the result of numerous surgeries, Anne regained a substantial amount of sight but needed to wear tinted glasses to protect her eyes from harsh light as her eyes were never what they were before the trachoma (McGinnity, Seymour-Ford, & Andries, 2004).

At 14, Anne was still illiterate, a consequence of her visual impairment but also her social class position. When Anne was eight, her mother died, leaving her and her brother, Jimmie, with their father. Their father decided he could not care for the children alone, and Jimmie and Anne were sent to an asylum in Tewksbury, Massachusetts. It was here that her brother Jimmie died due to the poor conditions of the facility that left many sick (McGinnity et al., 2004). In the film Anne describes how she came to the Perkins School, likening her own presentation to that of a pitiable vermin: I “crawled in here like a drowned rat.” Anne, then, links her poverty and blindness; both position her as an animal, an object. She casts Dr. Anagnos, the teacher with whom she had her most important relationship at the school, as a liberator who brings her into subjectivity. As she puts it, “He gave me more than my eyes back.” Anne was accomplished in her work at the Perkins School, becoming valedictorian. When the Keller family writes asking for help, having learned that Dr. Anagnos has experience with children like Helen, Dr. Anagnos selects Anne for the job.

Throughout the film, Anne is asked, sometimes demanded, to produce accounts or narratives about her trauma and her vulnerability. By examining these instances, we get a

sense of the ways narrative and speech function within the economy of vulnerability: For whom does Anne produce her vulnerability? What does she choose to tell? At the same time we must consider what she does not produce, what is left silent. Telling the truth of one's story promises to set a person free and prompt the hearer to understand. In what ways does Anne confirm or trouble this economy?

Early in the film, as Anne and Dr. Anagnos say their goodbyes, Dr. Anagnos tells Anne that the family will know nothing of her history. He adds that it might do some good to let them know "so that they will understand when you have trouble." Anne is advised to produce her vulnerability for the Keller family. While Dr. Anagnos is referring to "trouble" that Anne might have with certain skills (e.g., writing, her need to wear special glasses), Anne understands that "trouble" refers both to the difficulty she has with certain tasks and to the troubling ways her behavior breaks codes of class and gender.

The ambiguity of the dialogue in this scene is significant:

Dr. Anagnos: I know how dreadful it was there. But this battle is dead and done with. Why not let it stay buried.

Anne: I think God must owe me a resurrection

Anagnos: What?

Anne: Well, he keeps diggin' up that battle.

Anagnos: That's what I mean. That's not a proper thing to say, Annie.

Anne: Yes.

Anagnos: Annie, I wrote them no word of your history. You will find yourself among strangers now who know nothing of it.

Anne: We'll keep them in a state of blessed ignorance.

Anagnos: Perhaps *you* should tell them.

Anne: Why? I have enough trouble with people who don't know.

Anagnos: So they will understand when you have trouble.

Anne: The only time I have trouble is when I'm right. Is it my fault it is so often? I won't give them trouble Mr. Anagnos, I'll be so ladylike; they won't notice I've come.

Revealing her former blindness, he suggests, will make them understand her better. Anne is called to produce specific signs of specific vulnerabilities, while simultaneously obscuring traumas that remain unhealed. Here, an operation of the economy of vulnerability is revealed: telling assumes understanding. It is assumed that if Anne shares her past and her traumas that (a) the family will understand the meaning and consequences of what she has faced; (b) the family will treat her better, more fairly—her needs will be made present; (c) that what Anne reveals in language has the ability to capture what it is that Anne went through; and (d) producing vulnerability is an empowered position. The narrative of her healed blindness will demonstrate her similarity to Helen, will likely produce sympathy from the Kellers, and will be legible as something that has been overcome (i.e., the ability of sight has replaced the disability of blindness). Indeed, later in the scene, Dr. Anagnos calls on her to “bury” the trauma of

her brother's death and her time at the asylum. Dr. Anagnos tries to convince her that these signs are no longer relevant, because he knows (as she does) that they are not useful for any exchange. These are signs one does not really overcome, but instead, they leave a permanent tarnish to her character.

The way Anne reads and responds to his comments suggests that Anne recognizes that Dr. Anagnos means that she should reveal her blindness specifically. In the moment, Anne's answer to Dr. Anagnos's advice shifts the "trouble" he refers to from that which Anne might experience with writing to the trouble she might cause the Kellers: "I won't give them any trouble. I'll be so ladylike they won't notice I've come." What is especially significant about this answer is that Anne rebuts his guidance, expressing a tacit knowledge of what really counts. Her gender performance and social class performance yield more powerful sites of leverage that may help her escape the close watch that would detect her disability.

Anne Sullivan's initial reception and treatment by the Keller family are tied to race, class, gender, and ableist and heteronormative assumptions. Anne is subject to similar expectations of obedience as Helen. The Keller family is a formerly well-to-do Southern, white family in the U.S. South in the 1890s. The war left them with more modest means; however, they still maintain certain behaviors and expectations of antebellum plantation culture. The film portrays Anne and Katie Keller in stark contrast. Katie arrives at the station to pick up Anne wearing a dress with a white background and small floral print. Her hat resembles a lace doily, and she shields herself from the sun with a white parasol. Anne, by contrast, looks more rugged. She is dressed in dark,

practical, unadorned fabrics. Dark, tinted glasses block her eyes. Even the cadence of Anne's voice is different from Katie's. While the regional differences between a proper Southern woman and an Irish "Yankee" account for some of their speech differences, Anne's spoken voice is curt, sharp, and loud in comparison to Katie's sing-song style.

Anne comes to Ivy Green as a young 20 year old, not the "desiccated spinster" Katie says she had expected. To counter Katie's concerns about her youth and lack of experience, Anne produces her vulnerability. Left with an uncomfortable silence after Katie's comments about her age, Anne proclaims that she has "three big advantages that money can't buy." First, she has "read all of Dr. Howe's work;" Dr. Howe being the first director for the Perkins School for the Blind. Second, her youth provides her with energy. Third—and here she pauses—she reveals, "I've been blind." Upon arriving at Ivy Green, the family is again skeptical that someone so young could have something of value to teach their daughter. Katie defends Anne's youth by recounting the details Anne shared on the ride. The Captain exclaims, "They expect one blind child to teach another!" The scene ends with the Captain unconvinced, saying, "Here's a whole house full of grown-ups can't cope with the child. How do you expect an inexperienced half-blind, Yankee schoolgirl to manage her?" Jimmy adds a final punch line, "Now we have two of them to look after."

When Anne arrives, the Captain, wanting to be a gentleman, offers to take her suitcase. Anne objects, to which the Captain replies, "You'll find in the South we view women as the flowers of civilization." Additionally, they are confused by why a female of her age would want to dedicate her time to a child that is not her own. More typical, in

their estimation, would be if Anne was focused on finding a husband and having children. The Captain also questions Anne's family background when he wonders how a family would allow someone of Anne's age to travel alone and live with an unfamiliar household. Significantly, Anne does not leverage her vulnerability as: a woman who came from a state asylum; an orphan, having never had a hairbrush or a nightgown, having never learned to thread a needle; or one who at 14 was still illiterate. What Anne shares and what she does not reveals the politics involved in producing one's vulnerability. Anne intuitively knows that acting like a proper lady is more important than accounting for her aberrant behaviors. Here, producing these signs has no exchange value. Although telling her personal history would explain many of the Captain's concerns, Anne is silent here because she knows that it will not produce understanding, if "understanding" means recognizing and questioning normative expectations about gender and class performance.

In effect, Anne Sullivan's telling the "truth" of her blindness provides ammunition for the dominant males to resituate her in object status. Like Helen, she is infantilized and animalized—something that must be looked after. By calling Anne a "schoolgirl," the Captain positions her not as the skilled adult she is, but as the cultural object that a southern woman ought to be.

When Anne first arrives at Ivy Green, the Captain is perturbed by Anne's tinted glasses. When Anne fails to take off her glasses upon meeting the Captain, he scolds her saying that she is in "part of the country where women take off their glasses." In an aside to Katie, he remarks, "I like to see a person's eyes when I talk to them." Katie explains

that Anne wears the tinted glasses to protect her eyes from light because Anne has had “nine surgeries” to repair her sight. During her initial tenure, the Captain fixates on Anne’s glasses as something that prevents him from looking her in the eye, getting to see her soul, her essence. He also reads the glasses as a sign of Anne’s uppityness and as something that may conceal her questionable character.

Later, the glasses figure prominently in a confrontation between Anne and the Captain. Anne comes to him requesting that she be allowed to teach Helen away from the family and the house. The Captain is frustrated and left off balance by Anne’s boldness and her failures to meet his expectations for female behavior. The Captain aims to make Anne apologize for her behavior and agree to correct herself. Anne, however, is not passive in the face of his criticisms. As a result, he gets flustered, remarking, “I’ve made allowances for you because you come from a part of the country where peop... [he fails to finish], well, where women are, I should say, come from, uh, who...,” he is unable to complete his sentence. When Anne again fails to back down, he attacks her glasses: “I find it difficult to talk through those glasses! Why do you wear them? The sun has been down an hour!” Anne answers, taking off her glasses, “Any kind of light hurts my eyes.”

She is left squinting at the Captain, implicitly calling his gentlemanliness into question. She places him in the position of having to allow her to put her glasses back on. Quietly, and with a tone of frustration, he orders her to “put them on.” His tone reflects both his frustration (and perhaps embarrassment) at having failed to act like a

gentleman towards this vulnerable woman and his irritation that Anne has disarmed him again.

This scene shows that only certain vulnerabilities can be revealed, while others must be left silent. Her disability is the only sign for which she can be excused. The Captain does not excuse other aspects of her uppityness. Thus, reading the film through a reversal and displacement of speech as fundamentally liberating exposes the underground logic of the economy of vulnerability. Here, the idea that it is universally helpful and liberating to speak is shown to be false, and the political dimensions of leveraging vulnerabilities is revealed. Within the economy of vulnerability what gets spoken is assumed to capture what is most true and most relevant. Anne's disability is speakable and exchangeable. Anne, however, also successfully disrupts the Captain's assumptions about female comportment throughout the film. Speaking the truth of her vulnerability, however, is not the disrupting event, rather her silence is. The hierarchical privilege of speech as liberating is disrupted when she refuses to do so.

One way of reading Anne Sullivan's behavior is that she is speaking truth to the Captain's power. But she is forced to produce herself as a vulnerable subject in order to maintain her need to keep her glasses on due to her eye condition. Anne has to decide whether or not to leverage her own visual impairment, to deploy it or not. It is the only way to possibly keep her glasses on, but it also doubly oppresses her.

During the same scene in which the Captain objects to Anne's glasses, Anne realizes that the family considers her the last hope for Helen. If she fails, they plan to send Helen to an asylum for "mental defectives." Katie Keller describes the horrors she

saw at the asylum on visitation day. Anne responds by recounting her own experience of asylum life; she means to scare them into giving her more time and greater control over Helen's education.

Anne: The asylum? I grew up in such an asylum. Rats. Why my brother Jimmy and I used to play with the rats because we didn't have toys. Maybe you'd like to know what Helen will find there not on visiting days. One ward was full of the old women. Crippled. Blind. Most of them dying. But even if what they had was catching there was nowhere else to move them. That's where they put us. There were younger ones across the hall. Prostitutes mostly with TB and epileptic fits. And a couple of the kind who keep after other girls, especially young ones. Some insane, some just had the DTs. The youngest were in another ward to have babies they didn't want. They started at thirteen, fourteen. They'd leave afterwards but the babies stayed. We played with them too, though a lot of them had sores all over from diseases you're not supposed to talk about. But not many of them lived. The first year we had eighty, seventy died. The room Jimmie and I played in was the deadhouse where they kept the bodies until they could dig the graves.

Katie: Oh my dear.

Anne: No. Made me strong. But I don't think you need to send Helen there. She's strong enough.

This is the first time that Anne describes her life in the asylum in detail. This history that she reveals is the very history that Dr. Anagnos had advised her to "bury."

In this gesture, Anne marks herself as something other than the "defectives;" she is not of the same sort as the unwed mothers and prostitutes she grew up with. Moreover, Anne is not of the sort that "keep after other girls, especially young ones." Anne's narrative is able to convince the Kellers (and the viewer) that she knows what deviance looks like, yet the viewer is distracted from the fact that both Anne's comportment as a female and Anne's relationship with Helen are quite queer.

Anne is outspoken, opinionated, strong willed, or as the Captain exclaims, “immodest.” She fails as a heteronormative female because she dedicates her life to a child that is not hers. The historical Helen and Anne, moreover, go on to spend most of their lives living together. For communication, their relationship involves a great degree of intimate touching: Anne teaches Helen to spell by making signs with her fingers into the palm of Helen’s hand; historical films show how Helen would press her fingers to Anne’s lips, mouth, and throat to “hear” Anne speak (Keller & Sullivan, 1930s newsreel footage). Despite this, Anne and Helen still do not register as queer in the American imaginary—two disabled women touching fails to be read as queer.

By recapitulating the difference between asylum women and liberated women, Anne secures subject status for herself against the object status of the animal-like asylum women. What helps mark Anne as liberated is to mark others as more deviant. The worst kind of deviants are those who deceive, who do not speak (like the women who keep after other girls). Queerness, within this economy, is the place of the unspeakable, the unspoken, that which is as yet without language. Being brought into speech is imagined to liberate because it takes one out of that silence.

But the deviant silence is always a precondition of liberation, one that must always be reasserted in order to have the liberated subject. Bringing-into-language always reinforces again the deviance of queer silence. Speaking becomes the way to tell who is deviant. The more the formerly-queer becomes intelligible and speakable, the more other modes of queer deviance are made abject. By acquiring language Helen is liberated into heteronormativity.

Speaking, then, is the way to proclaim one's normativity. If one speaks, one has emerged from the realm of deviance into the market. This market is one in which one speaks for others—one's products are judged. One's situation can be assessed for its pitiable value. In Anne's account, who, then, is the pitiable subject? Even though Anne tells of other vulnerable beings—prostitutes, the mentally-ill, the old, alcoholics—her story produces pity for herself for having had to experience this trauma and for Helen because she might have to experience it. Her story is made more legible and less queer by widening the gap between herself and these others. The value of her narrative comes from establishing this opposition.

Recalling the origins of sign language reinforces how speech normatively comports the body. Fingerspelling, the technique that Anne uses with Helen in the beginning of their work together, was first developed by Benedictine monks who had taken a vow of silence (Meier, 1994). Although it is used for those outside of speech to enter into speech, it originated among speakers who chose a life of silence. It queers communication. Just as it is assumed that a disabled person would want full ability, if it were possible, one is to assume that of course Helen wants to speak, if she could. The economy of vulnerability assumes that our desire moves uni-directionally. The monks, who are silent speakers, who choose a life of silence, queer this assumption. Their story is unreadable as liberatory.

Speak

The 2004 film, *Speak*, is adapted from the widely recognized young adult novel of the same title by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999). Often the book is cited for its portrayal

of rape and its message to female teens concerning the importance, both for the victim and others, of speaking up for oneself. The film tells the story of freshman high school student, Melinda Sordino, who decides to quit talking to adults after experiencing a traumatic event over the summer. Through a series of flashbacks we learn that, on one evening the previous summer, Melinda was raped by an upper-class school-mate, Andy. What started out as friendly banter and mutual flirtation at a house party turned into a night of forced rape. Panicked about what just happened and how to handle it, Melinda called the cops. The police broke up the party and arrested several of Melinda's friends, but Melinda did not confess to the police the reason for her call. Because no one outside of Andy and Melinda is aware that the rape happened, Melinda gets labeled a "squealer" at school and is shunned by her friends and classmates, in particular by her best friend, Rachel.

Much to the frustration of her teachers and parents, Melinda is largely silent at school. Melinda makes the decision to stop talking, stating:

All that crap you hear on TV about communication and expressing feelings is a lie. No one really cares what you have to say. I wonder how long it would take for anyone to notice if I just stopped talking.

While some may be inclined to read Melinda's actions as part of typical teenage angst or evidence of clinical depression, I think such a move tries to ignore the political dimensions of her actions. The film's presentation of Melinda's relationship to silence is uni-directional. Her silence is presented as the result of an oppressive force that is acting upon her. The narrative plot suggests that in order for Melinda to move from oppressed,

silent object—rape victim— into liberation, into subjecthood, she must speak. This recalls Baudrillard's (1994) point concerning postmodern society's emphasis on the resistance of subjects as the utmost form of political action. Occupying object status is, in turn, rendered a-political and, moreover, emphasizes the object as that which needs the liberatory agency of others to bring out its voice. Such a politics ignores the way voice moves within "the direction of the system" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 86). Driving this is the implicit assumption that the way for Melinda to become present to herself and to others is through speech. It is through her transformation into a fully present, speaking subject that the viewer recognizes her as liberated from her trauma.

Melinda's character transforms during the course of the school year. In the beginning of the film Melinda is a stormy, quiet kid. Melinda is pegged by the new kid on the bus, Heather, as needing antidepressants. As Melinda appears to move through her grief, she gradually begins to speak to more people. She smiles more. Her eyes start to lose the dark circles around them. By the end of the school year she is accepting invitations to outings with school-mates and has mended her relationship with Rachel. Melinda's transformation concludes when she shares the story of her rape with her mother. In the film's final frames, the camera fades away from mother and daughter. The audience is now invited to cast their eyes somewhere else, free to view and consume someone else's trauma.

A bonus feature titled "A Message from RAINN" (2004) is also included on the *Speak* DVD. In case there is any mistaking how the film expects to be read, this feature functions to provide a succinct moral of the story. The viewer is again provided with a

close up of a rape victim. A teenage woman of Melinda's age is dressed in a tank top and underwear, hunched on the end of a bed. Her lip is cut; this rape has happened recently. As the camera slowly zooms-in, she holds back tears as she describes the rape. After recounting the details, and saying that "I wake up every morning with that haunting image," her story takes an interesting turn. "But I realized it was my silence that was hurting me and the other potential victims. Don't be afraid to tell. Speak out. Your story will be heard."

A deconstructive reading of *Speak* that aims to reverse and displace oppositional hierarchies also offers a way to contrast the ways in which the "liberator" both differs from and fails to differ from the "oppressor" when examined through their relationship with speech and silence. Watching *Speak*, the viewer *knows* Mr. Neck, Melinda's U.S. History teacher, as the "oppressor." Mr. Neck's physical appearance is severe; he sports a military haircut, has sharp, angular features and stands with a tall, paternalistic presence. His face never cracks a smile and his speaking voice is stern and joyless. Mr. Neck's attitudes and behaviors only reinforce that he is the "bad" teacher. He is intolerant, spouting his distaste for immigrants. He seems to revel in the power afforded to him as teacher. He orders his students with curt authority. He expects students to obey his orders without question, tossing a student, Dave Petrakas, out of the room for disagreeing with his position on immigration.

In contrast to the oppressive Mr. Neck, Dave Petrakas is positioned as a "liberator." Dave is one of the few characters to whom Melinda is willing to speak. Dave is a youthful, smart, well-spoken, white student. Dave passionately defends the

rights of immigrants, verbally standing up to the xenophobic Mr. Neck. Dave is also the character to whom Melinda goes when she needs help with an oral project she is required to produce for Mr. Neck.

This seeming contrast between the “liberator” and “oppressor” is further illustrated through a diptych of scenes. This pair of scenes begins when Melinda has to write a research paper to get extra credit in order to improve her history grade. When Melinda has completed her research paper, she attempts to hand it in to Mr. Neck. As she turns her project on the women’s suffrage movement over to Mr. Neck, he barks that she must present it to the class orally to receive credit. Melinda complies with Mr. Neck’s request for an oral presentation; however, when she gets up in class to begin her speech, she brings fellow student, Dave, with her. While both students stand in front of the class, Dave speaks. Dave declares that, in solidarity with the suffragettes, Melinda is speaking out against her coerced presentation by having him speak instead of her.

Dave: The suffragettes fought for their right to speak. They were attacked, arrested, and thrown in jail for daring to do what they wanted to do. Like them, Melinda is willing to stand up for what she believes: that no one should be forced to give speeches.

Mr. Neck: What is this?

Dave: Melinda has to deliver her report to the class as part of the assignment. She made copies everyone can read.

Outraged by what he takes to be Melinda’s insolence, Mr. Neck reacts violently. He rises out of his chair, speaking aggressively. He snatches the papers that Melinda has handed

out to the class, saying, “When I say oral, I mean oral.” He thrusts his finger at Dave, “Now you, sit down!” Then, to Melinda:

Mr. Neck (glaring and pointing at Melinda): And you, read that report! Open your mouth, Sordino. (Inches from her face now) Open your damn mouth!

(Melinda stares back, holding her ground.)

Mr. Neck (grabbing Melinda by the arm and dragging her from the room): I am so sick of your attitude.

There is no mistaking the ways that Mr. Neck utilizes power. He wants Melinda to present an oral presentation, not for Melinda’s educational benefit or for the education of her classmates; rather, he assigns the oral presentation to enact his dominance over her. Melinda’s lack of speech in school is viewed as defiance. Mr. Neck resents this behavior and wishes to “break” her spirit of rebelliousness. Mr. Neck lords over Melinda the fact that he assigns the grades as a way to coerce her to speak.

In the second scene, Melinda talks with Dave as they sit together on the edge of the empty, dimly lit school auditorium stage. Together they reflect on the failed presentation:

Dave: Listen. The suffragettes were all about speaking up. You can’t speak up for your rights and be silent. I thought what you did was cool, but you can’t make a difference unless you speak up.

While the viewer easily recognizes Mr. Neck as the oppressor, one is lulled into the charm and believability of Dave. Dave is seen as “reasonable” and “nice.” Dave helps Melinda out when she is in a bind with her presentation. Dave is the “good guy.”

Despite the fact that the film juxtaposes Dave and Mr. Neck as polar opposites, in fact both characters are requesting of Melinda the very same operation. They both demand that Melinda speak. They both assert that silence is not Melinda's choice to make.

Dave represents the ideal "neoliberal" student: He stands for a politics that would support individualism and many free market ideals. The figure of the "liberator," captured in the character Dave, tells Melinda that, in a sense, it is her own fault that she is being treated poorly. He is not afraid to challenge authority figures, like Mr. Neck, but does so in a manner that resonates with the liberal intellectual. Although the viewer is left feeling more sympathetic to the tactics of Dave, he, too, speaks from a vantage point that does not acknowledge Melinda's position. Dave assumes that problems are easily nameable, and solvable through "speaking up." His model of resistance is to speak back at Mr. Neck, suggesting that all have the same ability to bring their concerns into the free market, and the market will determine what is most viable. Dave uses the example of the suffragettes to argue for the normativity of speech, erasing the historicity of the suffragette's radical actions. The history of radical action (chaining one's body to the White House fence for instance) is rewritten as a story that equates speech with equality and freedom.

Throughout the film there is great power in Melinda's silences. Her silences speak to the fact that often times no one is actually listening. The opening scene of the film provides a telling example. Melinda is sitting in front of her bedroom mirror and has jail bars drawn over her lips with a sharpie marker. Her mother enters the room and says, "I don't want to know." In many ways this offers a symbolically blunt but potent

example of the way Melinda appears to feel about the possibilities of speech. Melinda has a tacit knowledge that not only is she not ready to talk about what happened, the people around her are not ready to listen. What is notable is that people are not so much concerned about Melinda's well-being so much as they are interested that she produce herself as a "normal" speaking subject. In a social system that is about consuming signs, Melinda withholds her trauma from that economy of exchange.

One must wonder for whose benefit Melinda begins to speak. Although the argument the film presents is that speaking leads to liberation, much of the working through of the rape takes place alone and internally for Melinda. When Melinda starts to speak she has in many ways already worked through the trauma at that point. The viewer has a desire to see Melinda liberated from her trauma, but not for the sake of Melinda necessarily. It makes the viewer feel good. It eases anxiety.

Foucault's (1978) work on confession is helpful for showing that the demand to speak is not a neutral process but is engaged with operations of power. In the confession, one must reveal her "actions and thoughts" (Foucault, 1978, p. 58). The confession is often portrayed as an act of freedom, a liberating process; however, it is also an act of surveillance and control. That is, confession happens not necessarily because one wants to share; rather, one is obligated. This act of "agency," then, is also an act of subjugation. The verbal confession is both a violence (in that this speech is the result of a demand) and a restrictive process (in that it is not always liberating).

Reading against the grain of the film, when Melinda "speaks up for her rights," as Dave calls her to do, she initiates herself into the process of confession. She speaks for

the interest of others. The function of Melinda speaking the truth of her rape, like “coming out of the closet” or similar speech acts, is to produce vulnerability for consumption. Within this economy, one cannot remain silent. A silent subject is not a marketable subject. The economy works in a way such that vulnerable subjects are produced so that liberators can do the work of liberation upon them. Melinda is brought into being through this economy. She must speak her vulnerability as a rape victim for others. This is how she makes herself present.

The film’s investment in speech as presence is especially evident in Melinda’s relationship with art. If we trace her art as she moves through the school year an inverse relationship is revealed. In the beginning, when Melinda is cast as silent, her art is especially expressive. As she begins to speak more, she uses her art less. Art, then, is cast as the place where a pre-liberated subject speaks. But it is an imperfect sign of presence. At the end of the film, when we are to assume she is finally fully “liberated” into speech, she leaves the art room and takes down her artwork from the janitor’s closet that she had hijacked for the year. It is as if she will not need art anymore now that she has moved through her trauma and can speak. Now she is “free” to go back to her “complete” self—the normal, high school girl.

The film wants the viewer to see that art is speech that is waiting to happen. At the beginning of the school year each art student randomly selects a slip of paper that contains the name of an object that will focus her art for the year. Melinda selects “tree” and tries to toss it back for another object. Mr. Freeman, the art teacher, resists, saying, “Whoa! You just chose your destiny. You can’t change that.” She claims that she

“learned to draw a tree in, like, the second grade.” Mr. Freeman hands her chalk and asks her to show him. Melinda delivers with a childish sketch of a tree. Mr. Freeman says, “That’s a pretty good start.” Melinda’s work on trees gets progressively more complicated. The viewer learns later, through a flashback, that Melinda stared at the branches of a tree during her rape. As she approaches speaking, her artwork also becomes more representational and less abstract; her final art project is an almost exact representation of the tree from her memory.

Art is uncomfortable because its meaning is assumed to require an interpretive process, while speech is assumed to contain the full presence of a subject. There can be no excess that lies outside of speech. Yet, despite the fact that the film would have the viewer think that Melinda is never fully present to others or herself, that she is lost somewhere—in her thoughts, her depression—she is, in fact, very present with the world. But her “thereness” does not register. She never speaks in Mr. Neck’s classroom, but her silence makes her hyper-present to Mr. Neck, and he must remove her. Additionally, at the film’s climax, when Andy, the rapist, tries to attack her again, she confronts him physically—cutting him with a saw and throwing a chemical in his eyes. This, again, is not a verbal confrontation.

Melinda is known through her internal monologue and her art—not her speech. The closest Melinda comes to saying, “I was raped,” is writing that sentence and showing it to her friend, Rachel (who does not believe her). In a film that drives towards her speaking the truth of the rape, the final scene is significant. Sitting in the car with her mother, Melinda is about to tell her mother what happened. Instead of hearing Melinda’s

voice, the viewer sees Melinda's lips moving, while the soundtrack crescendos over her. In this moment, the audience *feels* that Melinda has voiced the truth, though she never, in fact, does. Moreover, if the film *did* allow the viewer to hear Melinda's words, it would feel redundant. Speech is not necessary to accomplish that which speech is supposed to accomplish.

The film is titled *Speak*, an imperative, signaling that this is an operation that is commanded of Melinda. The film is about her response to that demand. The film reveals itself not to be about speaking, but the inadequacies of speech. Speech fails to capture Melinda's trauma. So, Melinda's answer is process. Her art resists making static that which is a complicated working-through. This shows how the economy of vulnerability substitutes the fetish of speech for the labor that makes speech possible. Speaking is an epilogue to the labor and process that is unspeakable. Speaking is an obituary to the lived work of working-through.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered *The Miracle Worker* and *Speak* as two films that overtly deal with speech in relation to trauma (both physical and psychological). Both of these films base their narratives on the relationship between speech and liberation. Helen and Melinda fail to be read as full subjects until they begin to speak. A deconstructive reading of these films shows how speech fails as a liberatory tool. The call to be a subject is revealed itself to be traumatic: Subjects must speak, they must use their bodies in specific ways. Melinda and Helen are most powerful when they assume object status. To those around these characters, there must be a subject hiding inside Helen's erratic

body or inside Melinda's vacant expression. Viewed another way, however, one can see that there is more "room" in object status—more ways of being, of using the body—possibilities that the demand to speak constrains. In the next chapter I will extend this exploration to two films that do not appear at first glance to be about the centrality of speech. *Tomboy* (2011) has been hailed as a positive depiction of trans* youth, while *Elephant* (2003) is known for its use of innovative cinematography to explore school violence in the aftermath of the Columbine shootings of 1999. I use *Tomboy* and *Elephant* to consider the ways the demand to speak operates and how pervasive its demand is. These cultural artifacts offer a way into understanding how the economy of vulnerability determines contemporary trans* politics as well as the politics of the school shootings.

CHAPTER V
PRESENT SUBJECTS: A TRIPTYCH

Continuing the discussion begun in chapter 3, this chapter offers readings of an ABC special on transgender kids, the recent French film *Tomboy* (2011), and Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) to show how both trans* students and school shootings are produced in and through the same verbal economy. The ABC special provides a launching point to consider common narrative techniques. Presenting the stories of several different trans* kids, the episode is an example of "mainstream" depictions and epistemologies surrounding transgender issues. *Tomboy*, while it has been received as a film about trans*, does not adhere to the conventions of the genre. As the director suggests, *Tomboy* is a film about kids, play, and navigating gender. Interestingly, *Tomboy* only becomes a transgender narrative when the demand to speak enters. The main character, Laure/Mikail, becomes legible as a *transgender* kid when the start of school year presents the demand for her to speak a particular gender identity. *Elephant*, for its part, exposes the economy of vulnerability by deploying several cinematographic techniques that call conspicuous attention to cultural assumptions concerning the transparency of image and dialogue to reveal subjects. The film follows the events leading up to a Columbine-esque school shooting, shifting the frame to capture the events from a variety of perspectives. Where better-known cinematographic treatments of

school shootings (such as Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* [2002]), take a journalistic approach that accounts for and contextualizes the quiet, reserved student-become-shooter, *Elephant* trades on the multiple absences and "outsides" to each frame and each character.

My Extra(Ordinary) Family

On August 31, 2011, ABC's *Nightline* aired an episode in a series, "My extra(ordinary) family," that dealt with transgenderism. The hour-long episode told the story of four "boys" who either wanted to become "girls," had transitioned to full-time females, or were expressing gender performances deemed incongruent with their sex. The fifth story was the lone adult representation, Charles Kane, an MtF that transitioned back to male. I will only focus on the stories of Dyson, a young boy who enjoys wearing dresses and whose mother, Cheryl, has written the popular children's book based on Dyson, *My Princess Boy* (2010); Jackie, a pre-teen whose family decides to allow her to transition from Jack to Jackie; and Charles Kane.

Cynthia McFadden, the interviewer from *Nightline*, asks one family, "Why did you decide ultimately to let us into your lives and the hardest decision, into Jackie's life?" This is a question often left unasked when it comes to the sensationalized news stories of such programs—a question that probably always lingers in the heads of viewers as they guiltily watch. Jackie's mother replies, "We don't think we should have to hide. We don't think this is a topic that should be hidden and swept away behind a closed door. I think the lives and the quality of life for transgender people can be enhanced if more people just know about it." And Jackie's mother is right in many ways. Her daughter

should not be forced to feel ashamed and the family deserves a community of supportive people. But this idea holds that certain people have to be produced as vulnerable in order to cure social ills. Certain lives must be *spoken*. This is the heart of the politics of visibility. McFadden seems to mean that privacy is being violated or that the private is being made public. But her question also illuminates speaking as a demand. That is, Jackie and her family must speak to be good political agents. The normalcy of these explanations—that someone must speak out—indicates a belief that speaking changes things politically.

While news media depictions may seem to be a less obvious choice—as their stories are usually hyper-familiar and even routine in their predictability—this episode actually depicts narratives quite common within current trans* politics. Although *Nightline* stories often seem pedestrian, lacking the nuance that an educated viewer would hope for, they are in fact only more blunt than other depictions; more “academic” narratives fall into the same trap.

The telling of Dyson’s and Jackie’s stories clearly involves tropes that implicitly assert the unquestionable status of gender as binary and demand that gender must match biological sex. One can be a boy or one can be a girl. And, to *be* a boy or to *be* a girl necessarily means acting according to natural inclinations that derive from one’s sex. Dyson’s mother becomes alarmed, for example, because Dyson, who is supposed to be a boy, wants to wear dresses. A parent is outraged when Dyson attends a playgroup wearing a pink butterfly backpack. Dyson wants to be a princess for Halloween, not a ninja. These stories are nothing new and are what a viewer would expect to see.

Nightline employs narratives that can be read easily to reaffirm a stable gender binary. They do not question or seek to disrupt this binary; they are instead considering whether people should be allowed to move from one gender to the other.

Jackie is *supposed* to be a boy, but presents what are considered atypical behaviors for a boy. *Nightline* describes her as adoring the color pink, liking frilly, sparkly tutus, and wearing wigs. *Nightline* highlights Jackie's statement that she wants breasts one day to suggest that Jackie *should* be a girl. Breasts act as the universal signifier of woman-ness. Jackie belongs on the other side of the binary. Because Jackie desires breasts she must *really* be a girl; Jackie was born into the wrong body. Jackie needs breasts because without them she would have a trans-body that lies "outside" of the historical lineages she has been born into and therefore outside of intelligibility (Butler, 1993, pp. 187–189). Jackie wants to have female sex characteristics and that is why she prefers "feminine" behaviors. *Nightline* edits Jackie's story to highlight her ability to successfully perform ideal femininity in order to secure the audience's understanding that Jackie *naturally* belongs in a female body. The audience is asked to be compassionate and allow for this boy to become a girl—the place where she rightly belongs. Once she achieves this, the narrative assumes that Jackie's narrative becomes stabilized and legible. Jackie's vulnerability—her gender dysphoria—is revealed to make the case that being allowed to be a full-time female will actually result in less disruption.

Jackie's story is contingent on the ability to produce her as having full agency. Narratives produce and affirm agents. This is why her grandfather, Richard, is hesitant about her transition—he does not buy the fact that agency exists in the young. Were she

18, she would be an agent capable of making her own decision. Richard states, “I cannot accept that a nine or ten year old can make decisions for himself or herself that will be life-lasting. I cannot accept that.” Jackie’s father, however, disagrees with the idea that Jackie is too young to know. Jackie’s father believes that Jackie has the agency necessary to decide what she wants.

Dad: I knew I was a boy when I was two years old. I think everybody knows what gender they are at a very early age.

Cynthia McFadden: You don’t see this as one of those childish, kinda, whims?

Dad: I certainly don’t see this as a choice.

Mother: I think she was born that way.

Dad: She was born that way.

Jackie’s narrative helps make her bodily performances speak to an inner truth. Agency, in her parents’ mind, is installed at birth—a function of the core essence, regardless of body.

Installing this binary relates to speech in that this binary is driven by the speech act. At a basic level, viewers have been trained to want to hear the narrative—good TV relies on it, especially “reality” TV. We need to hear the narrative. The person must be placed within a schematic in order to be legible. The narrative also plays a critical role in determining the worthiness of a life. The justice system, for instance, is built on the belief that such narratives can produce a truth that makes determinations ethical.

In *Nightline*'s narrative, when one performs gender behaviors that deviate from the "proper" sex, one of two explanations arises. The first, he must be in the wrong body. This affirms sex as "natural," *not* a construction. Butler's (1993) work, however, forces us to recognize that bodies, too, come to be named as such through a process that has its own historical lineage (pp. 187–189). We can see play out in Jackie's story.

When Jackie is finally allowed to transition at school, her teacher notes that Jackie immediately becomes more "spunky, silly and sassy," all characteristics generally ascribed to pre-teen femininity. Jackie's father notes how it now takes her longer to get ready for school, following the narrative that girls require more preparation before going out. Jackie's parents mourn the loss of raising a son, suggesting that this experience would have been vastly different from the experience of raising Jackie. They seem reassured, however, to think that their daughter was always there, she was just "born in the wrong body." Jackie's narrative is constructed, both by *Nightline* and those around her, to present a congruous and natural tale of self-discovery.

Narratives about bodies are always also about how those bodies will interact with other bodies. In addition to "being in the wrong body," gender incongruence often leads to the statement, "he must be gay." Jackie's parents recount how as early as first grade Jackie was called "gay boy" in school. Dyson's mother explains that people say, "He must be gay." How bodies fit into heteronormative patterns of bodily relation are quickly asserted. Jackie's parents worry whether "Jackie will find a mate or someone to love." Jackie was born in the wrong body; therefore, her body can never be a "real" girl body, no matter the surgeries or hormones. In the same gesture it is assumed that Jackie wants

or needs a mate or that family consists of the nuclear family. The parents' comments erase the existence of a trans* community, positing that there is no one else like Jackie (Salamon, 2010, p. 118). Breasts, mates, and sexuality matter because of regulatory regimes that dictate sexual difference in service to a hegemonic matrix that is heterosexual (Butler, 1990, p. 96).

In order to disrupt the hegemonic heterosexual matrix, one must not attempt to locate a *source* from which gender emerges, whether the body, or as Jackie's parents assume, the soul. To assert a "real" feminine subject grounded in the body or the soul in opposition to a "real" masculine subject is also to assume a metaphysical difference between the two. (Butler, 1990, pp. 13–17; 1993, pp. 35–49) Speech makes this source of gender visible. The role of speech is to explain the body, to make the body a speaking object. Speaking objects can be evaluated and thus the ambiguity of a body is erased by language that solidifies the body as something real.

But bodies can feel real. Bodily feeling most certainly plays a part in one's sense of subjectivity (the transgender person may say she "feels" like a woman), but this happens because feelings, too, are structured like a language (Salamon, 2010, p. 83). That is, the body does have material consequences while simultaneously being constructed. Jackie may indeed *feel* like a girl, but that is still different from her saying that she *is* a girl, it is different from anyone claiming to *be* anything (Salamon, 2010). Moreover, Salamon (2010) states, "Claiming that the body *feels* natural is not the same as claiming that it *is* natural" (p. 77)

Butler's theory of performativity aims to highlight the fact that people are under constant pressure to *be* something when what we see as *being* something is in fact a narrative well acted in the world. What it means to *be* something is performative, always. For Jackie, to remain in her current body and claim "girlness" is an aporia for the sex-gender match. But in Salamon's model, this could be different. Resisting seeing gender as something that must be narrated may open up other possibilities.

In Dyson's story, hegemonic narratives about proper boy performances are placed onto Dyson's body. When he fails to properly perform, he is met with resistance, even initially from his mother. Before Dyson even enters into the social world, it has been pre-decided how he should behave. His assertion that he is a "princess boy" is troubling for people because he is breaking the implicit contract that sex and gender must match, which thereby exposes sex and gender as constructed. Perhaps Dyson feels like a boy while it also feels right to him to express gender in the feminine.

But to argue that perhaps Dyson's sex and gender *do* match is only to install a different narrative in the place of the narrative that Dyson is a proper boy or a should-be female. Dyson's claim that he is a "princess boy" could be taken as his claim to a genderqueer identity. Salamon (2010) suggests, "if one thinks sexual difference in other than binary terms, the category can become unyoked from 'natural' materiality in a way that makes it easier to resist the temptation to posit genital morphology as essentially determinative of the self" (pp. 151–155). Dyson's behavior exemplifies this task. But claims to a genderqueer identity, however, function as a different narrative within the same system. While expanding the possibilities for gender, it still locates identity within

a narrative and a subject who speaks. Thinking sexual difference in other than corporeal terms does not necessarily entail thinking gender beyond a binary nor does it necessarily challenge the distinction between body and soul, inside and outside.

Salamon astutely argues that transgender theory has gotten caught up in asserting the primacy of materiality over social construction when thinking about the body (p. 73). She argues that a strictly materialist perspective encourages “understanding absolute agency as the hallmark of subjectivity” (p. 86). Jackie’s story is predicated on this notion of absolute agency through her statement that she *is* a girl. Her parents affirm her absolute agency when they say that they never had a son, but a daughter born in the wrong body. Jackie, then, *knows* without a doubt that she *is* a girl. Her desire for breasts is seen as stemming from inside of her alone.

The final story in *Nightline*’s special is about Charles Kane. Kane, who became wealthy as a businessman, transitioned to a woman, Samantha, and seven years later, transitioned back to a man (Weathers, 2010). His story, which was part of the initial airing of the special, has since been cut from the version available for purchase on Amazon.com, and the video is not locatable. The inclusion of his story drew criticism from many blogs (North, 2010), in part because he is known for regularly speaking out against transitioning. It is not clear whether or not ABC’s deletion of the original scenes was an explicit response to these criticisms, though one could guess that they may have been. In contrast to the stories of trans* youth in the episode, his is the only narrative about an adult. Significantly, his story is also presented as a counter-argument against transitioning. Kane is against all forms of transitioning—he argues that all he had ever

really needed was counseling. *Nightline* includes Kane because his story is a trans* narrative; he is not an “outsider,” and therefore, his story aids *Nightline* in constructing a “fair and balanced” report. Within *Nightline*’s narrative, however, Kane’s story is a cautionary tale set over and against the other stories that, on balance, present various forms of trans* in a fairly positive light. “Good” trans* narratives are about finding one’s essence and figuring out whether one is in the wrong body. They rely on the idea that trans* is real—that is, grounded in a metaphysics of presence—and that therefore individuals should be allowed to transition (by parents, doctors, the DMV, etc.). In the original broadcast, the inclusion of Kane’s story actually undoes what *Nightline* sets out to do. His story shows, in fact, that there is no crisis if the “wrong” decision is made about transitioning. Despite the linear, unidirectional demands of trans* narrative, one *can* transition again. Kane’s story is inconvenient because it suggests that perhaps there is not a true, final essence to be located. The segment’s deletion was probably prompted by trans* activists who objected to it as a gross mis-representation of trans* adults; ABC ignores the vast—and vastly positive—majority of trans* adults’ stories. Deleting him reaffirms the necessity that these stories have a particular, linear trajectory. But despite the negative reaction to Kane, his account fulfills the traditional requirements of trans* narrative.

It is my argument that much trans* narrative focuses on a politics rooted in these narratives. Too often particular narratives are demanded—“I would kill myself if I couldn’t do this”; “I feel like I am in the wrong body.” These feelings are significant and the experience is real. But what is problematic is the forcing of the production of those

narratives as the only means to access transition or the visibility of these narratives as a sign that as a society we have moved forward. The very politics that drive the binary and create the “crisis” also structure and are reinscribed in the narratives. Read another way, Kane’s story actually affirms the possibility that trans* embodiment is viable in its multitude of manifestations.

I started out this chapter using an example from ABC’s *Nightline* series in part because their storytelling technique is familiar. Viewers are well aware of the cadence, questions, and narratives of such programs. To parallel *Nightline*’s story, then, I use the recent film, *Tomboy*. *Tomboy*, a French realist film, cannot be mistaken for adopting the tacky style of U.S. popular media storytelling. Interestingly, however, this film, too, participates in and reveals the demand of speech and narrative for trans* bodies.

Tomboy

Tomboy tells the story of a nine year old who moves to a new neighborhood in a suburb of Paris. Because no one in her new town knows her, she passes between being a girl, “Laure,” at home and a boy, “Mikail” among new friends. In contrast to her sister, Jeanne, who exhibits a more familiar femininity in the form of tutus and an abundance of pink, Laure’s/Mikail’s room is painted blue, as her mother says, “Just the way you wanted.” Laure/Mikail wears her hair short, and wears loose fitting t-shirts and long-length shorts. Laure/Mikail makes friends with the neighborhood kids as a boy and continues “playing” a boy the whole summer. Laure/Mikail seems to use gender instrumentally. By being a boy, he gets to play soccer, while the girls have to sit on the sidelines. In this depiction of gender, however, Laure/Mikail never makes a point of

asserting, verbally, “I am a boy” or “I am a girl.” Throughout the summer, her family thinks her a girl and his friends think him a boy. The majority of the film consists of scenes of play and interacting with her sister, shot from Laure’s/Mikail’s perspective.

Tomboy begins with only the sounds of wind bending and yielding its path to a moving vehicle. The first long images are that of Laure's/Mikail’s hand deflecting the wind through the sunroof of her dad’s car. This is the first hint that this, by and large, is a movie about bodies.

Laure/Mikail practices the presentation of her body in front of the mirror. She displays the skill of spitting by using the mirror and sink to capture and catch the activity. She checks out her chest in this same mirror, making sure that its profile is just as flat as the face-on image. She and Jeanne display moustaches on their upper lip in front of the bathroom mirror. The full length mirror aids in the first display of her artful bulge made out of children’s Play-Doh to affect her bathing trunks correctly.

Laure/Mikail watches closely the way the boys use their bodies. A scene of soccer is broken up by a pee break. As the boys move to the sidelines of the field—still visible, merely backs turned—they take care of business. Laure’s/Mikail’s trip to take care of the same mandatory bodily function takes her further away from the field of play. She takes her body into the woods and squats. Surprised by the boy who finds her, she stands and faces the consequences of been plumbed differently; she ends up with wet pants and the embarrassment to match. These scenes occur with very little dialogue. The viewer witnesses through the presentation of bodies, not an account delivered in speech.

Voices in the film are often disconnected from bodies. While Laure/Mikail and Jeanne play in the tub during bath time, their mother's voice is heard chiming in from a different room in a manner reminiscent of Charlie Brown's teacher. Despite the fact that we hear Laure's/Mikail's mom's words, in contrast to the "wah, wah, wah" of Charlie Brown's teacher, Laure's/Mikail's mother's words are no less foreign and interruptive to the children's world. That is, Laure's/Mikail's mother's voice comes in without the presence of her body and speaks for what Jeanne and Laure/Mikail are supposed to do with their bodies—remember to wash their hair. This tub-time is not supposed to be simply playtime. This is the same scene in which the viewer comes to see Laure's/Mikail's body as female. Up until this moment we have not heard her name or gendered pronouns. We meet Laure's/Mikail's gender through the visual of her body.

Read another way, bodies are the children's world, speech is the adults' world. Laure/Mikail manipulates her body in creative ways throughout the film. She does this with very little consequence and very little reaction by the friends with whom she plays. There is not verbal commentary on these bodily appropriations. It is the adult world that interjects—most evident in the demand to speak—that makes these bodily configurations seem confused.

The Confrontation with Speech

Laure/Mikail is confronted as being devious and disingenuous in her gender presentation when her mother finds out she has been passing as a boy. During a day of play outside, Laure/Mikail gets in a fight with one of the neighborhood boys who picks on Jeanne and pushes her down. Defensive of his sister, Laure/Mikail sends a message.

Later that evening the boy and his mother show up at Laure's/Mikhail's door. The boy's mother, clutching her wounded son, tells Laure's/Mikhail's mother that *her* son beat him up. In this moment Laure's/Mikhail's mother realizes what has been going on all summer.

Notably, speech and its demands enter the scene as a result of the boy breaking "boy code" and tattling on Laure/Mikhail. Here, for the first time in the film the adult world and the children's world collide and in so doing reveal verbal interrogation of the role of speech, narrative, and vulnerability. It is with this entrance of speech that the questioning of Laure's/Mikhail's bodily choices begins. Several reviewers compare this film to the well-known film account of Brandon Teena, *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). Because the only "violence" they see in *Tomboy* is this minor tussle between ten-year-old boys, several reviewers have described *Tomboy* as a welcome contrast to the better-known film (Ebert, 2012; LaSalle, 2011; Stewart, 2011). But the moment where the demand for speech enters in fact signals its own violence.

When the door swings shut, Laure's/Mikhail's mother faces her and says, "What did you do? Why did you do that?" For a moment, the viewer is not certain what is the "that" that Laure/Mikhail "did." Initially, the viewer might believe that she is upset with Laure/Mikhail for getting into a fight. But the real crime is soon exposed: "You told everybody you were a boy. Why did you do that?"

Two things are immediately interesting here. First, Laure's/Mikhail's mom is not upset so much about the fight, but about the gender play. She is also not concerned about why Laure/Mikhail got in a fight. She is worried that Laure's/Mikhail's gender play might inhibit the family's ability to fit in in their new town. Instead, this seems like an

experience that the family has faced before. Being new in this town it seems that the family wants to be able to settle. They cannot run from Laure's/Mikail's deed. Second, Laure/Mikail never *told* anyone she was a boy. Laure/Mikail used a male-gendered name and adopted male behaviors, but he never told anyone anything. What "spoke" was his body. The narrative his body told was that he was a boy. Because her body was not telling the truth, Laure's/Mikail's mother uses verbal speech to correct it.

The next day, Laure's/Mikail's mom forces Laure/Mikail into a dress and takes her to her friends' houses. Laure's/Mikail's mother physically thrusts Laure/Mikail, grabbing and dragging her by the arm, out into the world to tell the "truth."

Laure's/Mikail's mother makes Laure/Mikail confess to her friends and their parents—really Laure's/Mikail's mother does the confessing for her as Laure/Mikail stands on the sidelines in her awkward jersey dress. Laure's/Mikail's mother speaks with the parents off-camera in muffled tones—like the adults of *Peanuts* cartoons—while Laure/Mikail and her friends stand silently by.

But the physicality and aggression is not really just the mother's doing. Soon it will be time to go to school. The demand to speak creates the necessity of revealing Laure's/Mikail's vulnerability. Laure's/Mikail's mother and she are tangled in a world of speech that needs Laure/Mikail to make sense. The following dialogue shows Laure's/Mikail's mother's confusion as to how to navigate the demand to speak.

Mother: What's your plan then? Are you gonna pretend to be a boy all year? School starts in two weeks time. We have no choice. We need to tell. Listen. I'm not doing this to hurt you or teach you a lesson. I have to, understand? I don't mind you playing "the boy." It doesn't even make me sad. But this can't

go on. Got an idea? Cause if you do, please say so, I can't think of any. You got a solution?

This is part of the response to the demand to speak and exemplifies the violence of this demand. In this scene of confession, Laure/Mikail and her mother both act as if this naming—boy or girl—is being forced upon them. One of the popular ways to read this film is as being about transgenderism and “letting kids be who they are.” But what if nothing had to be said? Speaking here is not liberating for Laure/Mikail or her mother.

This film need not be read as *about* transgenderism until this critical moment. *Tomboy* only becomes a movie about transgenderism when the demand to speak comes in. This film, as the director suggests, is also about kids, play, and navigating gender. Laure/Mikail becomes legible as a *transgender* kid when the start of school year presents the demand for her to speak a particular gender identity. While Laure/Mikail has been able to live the summer, at times *becoming* boy and at other times *becoming* girl, it is only when school starts that she needs to pick one. This restriction is felt both by Laure/Mikail and her mother; possibility has become circumscribed for both of them. Laure/Mikail can *be* a “girl.” Or the audience could read it that she should really be allowed to *be* a “boy.” Or Laure/Mikail could even resist and *be* transgendered. But, all the same, these choices are much more limited than the possibilities she had (and used) before the demand to speak came into play.



Figure 1. Laure/Mikail poses for portrait



Figure 2. Jeanne's portrait of Laure/Mikail

The demand to speak and narrate confines speech and draws a different picture of Laure/Mikail. Speech's portrait demands linearity, well-defined limits, and sequences that limit the directions that narratives can flow. Not so of Jeanne's picture of Laure/Mikail. At the film's midpoint, Jeanne has Laure/Mikail stationed on a chair (see figure 1). Laure/Mikail is sitting on a chair, dressed in a t-shirt and zip down sweatshirt. She faces forward with an impassive expression. Laure/Mikail is posing for a portrait

that Jeanne is drawing. The setting is fit with a backdrop of a blue fabric with floral print, a setting just like the great artists would have used. Jeanne sketches Laure/Mikail with determination and precision. Despite the fact that she is six years old, she aims for accuracy. Her picture will be an exact replication of what Laure/Mikail looks like sitting before her, a snapshot of this time. The sketch we see is exactly that which one might expect from a six year old (see figure 2). Dots are her eyes, her freckles are scaled ten times bigger than reality. Laure's/Mikail's head is a sphere, as wide as it is long, a chin no different from a cheek. All the same, Jeanne's picture *is* Laure/Mikail as much as the world's greatest portrait artist could create. In this moment the viewer witnesses the world that Jeanne sees as possible. The viewer also witnesses how this picture is no more or less an accurate depiction of reality. All pictures and stories are this blurry.

The demand to speak and the vulnerability it produces are evident in other political places as well. Trans* politics is a particularly salient site because of its relative novelty within academic queer scholarship. But this economy extends to other places. Therefore in the next section of this chapter I wish to look at a strikingly different film to think about the way the demand to speak operates.

Elephant

In the years following the 1999 Columbine High School shooting, violent school events prompt a predictable round talk on gun control, bullying in schools, mental health issues for youth, fringe cliques in schools (e.g. goth culture), and video game culture. Many people are familiar with *Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore's 2002 documentary. Moore offers a critical read on the roots and cultural factors that contribute

to the high level of gun violence in the United States in search of explanations for the Columbine event. Similarly premiering in the aftermath of Columbine, the film *Elephant* (2003) is much less well known but also addresses school violence. *Elephant*, however, offers a different approach to addressing and understanding such events.

Elephant differs from other tales of school shooting violence in many ways. Film is often understood, like speech, to capture true presence (Brunette & Wills, 1989, p. 17). *Elephant* disrupts this assumption. In *Bowling for Columbine*, for example, Michael Moore utilizes interviews, offering in one segment a humorously disturbing interview with NRA guru Charlton Heston, in an attempt to get closer to the “truth” and the “real” story. This is a common documentary technique often called “the talking head interview” (Hallas, 2009, p. 39). As Hallas (2009) argues, “The talking head has become a foundational practice in documentary films that bear witness to historical trauma or systematic oppression” (p. 39). Focusing on the “real” participants and “true” accounts points to the assumption that when the voices of the people are captured, the story is more believable (Lesage, 1978). *Elephant*, by contrast, performs a double move. It offers a commentary on school violence that is far and away different from what one hears about and sees following similar events, but importantly this film also disrupts how films are read in general. As Graham Clark (1997) argues, “Far from being a literal or mirror image of the world, [the film] is an endless deceptive form of representation. As an object it announces its presence, but resists definition” (p. 25). *Elephant* exposes how film, like speech, is incapable of capturing everything. *Elephant* can be read as a self-conscious deconstruction of the frame. Derrida (2010) explains that the frame is marked

by “all sorts of initiatives...they modify reference itself, introducing multiplicity, divisibility, substitutivity, replaceability” (p. 7). There are always elements happening outside the frame, stories untold, untapped excess. As Richter (2010) puts it, a deconstructive approach shows that film “can be seen as an operational network and a metalanguage through which larger philosophical, historical, aesthetic, and political questions can be brought into focus” (p. xxiii).

From the beginning of the film, *Elephant* utilizes the frame in ways that capture the effects of inside/outside operation and play. Many filmic techniques use the frame to purposely exclude the outside in order to draw attention and focus to the specific narrative thread—one never sees and thus never thinks to consider what is “outside” the frame. *Elephant* instead uses the camera and sound in a way such that the viewer is constantly made conscious of the multiple “outsides” to every frame. The “truth” of what is spoken, seen, or heard in any particular scene, through techniques of framing and repetition, is exposed as only a partial presence exceeded always by that which is outside.

While *Elephant* is most certainly a commentary on the upsurge in school shootings in recent U.S. history, it can also be read for the ways it offers a critique of narrative to produce full accounts. The slippages in a narrative are made evident through the utilization of the multiple vantage points within the film. This eighty-minute film is mostly a recapitulation of about ten minutes in a day. The camera, as narrator, acts as a voyeur, an agent, bringing attention to the fact that the camera only has its perspective. The eye of the camera necessarily leaves out more than it captures. The use of slow-motion photography also helps disrupt the naturalness of the passage of time and its

linearity, both of which support taken for granted notions of narrative in the timeline of events that helps to produce causality, responsibility, and a coherent storyline.

The economy of vulnerability also circulates in interesting ways throughout the film. Character use and storylines produce a film that seems boring and tedious. Characters are not given much development. One knows little about any of the characters beyond what is picked up in conversations. The audience hears about what a character might be doing later in the day or how she feels about her mother's snooping. But all of this feels like meaningless drivel. This mood of the inane contrasts well with the horror of the event to which the film eventually leads. The viewer never comes to *understand* the lives of the students she sees or the perpetrators of the shooting. All is left equally unclear.

The film begins by telling the story of a day in the life of a student, John. While the viewer watches, she gets caught up in the belief that this is the central story line for the rest of the film, that John must be our main character. Just as soon as the viewer begins to connect with John, however, the film transitions, leaving John behind and the camera picks up and begins to follow someone else. The viewer is never completely inside or outside of any character's story.

The viewer's trek with John also sets the foundation for further cues about the social class context of the school. As the viewer follows John on his drive to school with his inebriated father, they travel along in a cream colored 1980s Mercedes, the audience aware of the rumble of its distinctive diesel engine. As John's father weaves along their route, the camera passes tree-lined parkways on the one side and a monotonous sequence

of suburban houses with manicured lawns and personal basketball hoops on the other. They arrive at a large high school with pristine, white, stone exterior and large, old trees in the courtyard, the lawns carefully groomed.

Not only is the school spotless, a privileged spot for mostly middle and upper middle class kids, the school is massive. Much camera time is spent following particular students through the long (again pristine) corridors—corridors of an open campus that move in and out of the building with equal ease. The school’s size and money support photography classes and accompanying developing lab and darkroom. There is a functional and supported GSA that is able to operate during regular school hours. The sports fields are large and groomed. Students pass in the halls with a sense of anonymity, only occasionally running into someone they know or care to say hello to. The population is large enough that there are visible cliques—break dancers, artsy students, etc.

But there are also those who seem to be the loners. Michelle, a character whose name one learns only later in the film, looks like an outsider at the school. Her physical presentation is less groomed than her peers. While many of the students are “attractive” and dressed fashionably, Michelle wears glasses (not contacts lenses) has curly hair (not blown out straight), bluntly cut and held away from her face in an outmoded, childish headband. She does not wear makeup and fails to participate in certain facial grooming routines that her female peers do. Michelle’s gym teacher even confronts her about her gym class attire: “We’ve got to do something about this gym clothes problem. This is not gonna do it, these long pants. Everybody else is wearing shorts. What’s the matter?”

Michelle answers back miserably, “I don’t want to talk about it.” While a brief moment of one-on-one attention in an otherwise alienating school, the encounter is not one of support for Michelle but rather one meant to get her in order. Michelle does not want to talk about it partly because she knows the teacher is too busy to actually care. Michelle takes a different route back to the locker-room to avoid, even if only momentarily, her peers.

The camera work helps reaffirm that fact that certain students matter not. The viewer’s first encounter with Michelle occurs during her gym class. The students are playing football outside and the camera sits fixed, allowing students to move in and out of the frame, but not moving with them. It is as if the cameraman has left the camera on by accident while off on a coffee break. Michelle enters the camera frame, away from the designated area where the other girls are practicing. She is out of place—the girls’ segment of gym class is over on an adjacent field. Michelle is with the pants-wearing boys. She appears as a random, nameless student dressed in her Wildcats sweatshirt and red sweatpants. She seems like an animal separated from its herd. She exits the frame and the viewer’s sights just as easily as she came into it, the camera making no acknowledgment of her presence. As if the cameraman has returned (or become interested again) the camera is picked up from its station and decides to begin to follow a student dressed in a red lifeguard sweatshirt. Importantly, this character is not Michelle. This tactful technique reaffirms Michelle’s no-one-ness and the lifeguard’s someone-ness. Michelle’s existence in this moment is too boring to watch, as the camera opts to go off and follow one of the more popular kids.

In the aforementioned scene, students pass by the camera as if it is not there. Unaffected by the camera, they move in and out of the frame to retrieve runaway footballs. Michelle, by contrast, looks around as if she is aware that there is outside to the frame and the scene, that she is a semi-participant in both the film and the fact that the film is being filmed. She looks up toward the sky as she enters the frame and faintly smiles as if she hears the soundtrack play *Moonlight Sonata* forebodingly. While other characters have shown the play of inside/outside as they move between the domains of the school campus, Michelle represents a bridge between both inside and outside of the film itself.

Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* and *Für Elise* are used as recurring and important signaling elements in the film. At the beginning of the film *Moonlight Sonata* is used as part of the background music. The viewer hears it as "background" and decoration to the story, an arbitrary accouterment. It takes on a strikingly different use when the camera traverses the outdoor landscape of the school, following the student wearing the red lifeguard sweatshirt, Nathan. As Nathan approaches the school building the sonata is no longer the only sound. As the lifeguard walks toward the school, the camera following from behind, a student playing guitar under a courtyard tree becomes audible; his music clashes with Beethoven's piece. Instead of the piece ceasing at this point to make room for the "real" action again (this is just part of the sound track after all, the guitar is part of the "real"), they coexist. The piece, despite its soundtrack role, resists becoming secondary and instead the film allows the two pieces of music to compete against each other. It is as if the two pieces of music do not know that the other exists, that they are

not aware that they are sharing airtime. Or the soundtrack is so stubborn as to not be outshined. Their dissonance is audible. This unusual filmic moment brings into stark relief the constructedness of inside/outside and real/unreal. Here the soundtrack clashes with what is “real.”

Once the camera moves away from John, our thought-to-be main character, the audience receives its first clue that this is a non-linear telling. This gets reinforced in several ways. After Nathan, the kid in the red lifeguard sweatshirt, leaves gym class, he meets up with his girlfriend, Carrie, and together the two go to the office to check out to go off campus (a privilege reserved for seniors). We hear Nathan upon entering the office say, “excuse me miss, we need to sign out.” While this mundane fact of high school life could easily go unnoticed, a film that offers so little dialogue makes it highly audible. Yet, what are easily missed on a first watch are the side conversations, the ones present, but that go unnoticed. Momentarily, the subsequent scene will reveal that John is also talking during Nathan’s scene. This office scene is recapitulated when the camera moves back to John. He has gotten trapped in the office with the principal as a consequence of being late to school. When the principal finally releases him saying, “Get to class,” John enters back into the foyer of the office and the audience again hears, “excuse me miss, we need to sign out” come from Nathan. The camera angle is different and the viewer’s perspective on the scene has shifted, but the viewer has just witnessed the same scene.

The camera recapitulates several other scenes from different perspectives. For example, a hallway scene repeats from multiple vantage points. In one telling, Nathan

passes by a group of three girls (later revealed to be Brittney, Jordan, and Nicole) on his way out of gym class to meet up with his girlfriend and head to the office. The film takes a moment in slow motion—almost making fun of teenage crushes—while we see the lips of one of the girls form the words “sooo cute.” This scene is later relived from the perspective of the three girls. This time we hear Brittney, Jordan, and Nicole chatter, wondering if Nathan’s girlfriend may have seen one of them commenting on how attractive he is. They discuss more mundane elements of social life at high school—told with eagerness and importance.

A second recurring scene occurs in a different hallway of the school. The halls are quiet—classes are in session—and Elias and John meet up unexpectedly. We watch from John’s point of view as Eli asks if he can snap a photo of John and John obliges. Later we view it from Elias’s point of view. And finally we watch it from Michelle’s point of view, whose presence was easily missed in the two other renderings, as she scampers down the hall hugging the opposite edge of the hall as John and Elias.

The climax, the shooting, does not occur until three quarters of the way through the film. The viewer has been voyeuristically watching students partake in mundane aspects of their day. The audience watches Brittney, Jordan, and Nicole talk about fat grams, vomiting those wretched grams from lunch up later, going to the mall, and the trials of dealing with boyfriend-time competing with friend-time. We watch Elias move about the school taking photos for his portfolio and going into the lab to work on developing them. We watch Nathan and Carrie discuss a party alongside discussion of a possible pregnancy for Carrie. The viewer witnesses John dealing with his drunken

father and calling home to his brother Paul to come over to school to pick up the keys and take his dad home. We watch Michelle get mocked by the other girls in the locker-room, “Yeah she smells...loser.” The camera portrays none of this as a “crisis;” the dialogue is matter-of-fact.

Alex and Eric are first met as they make their way into the school building. Alex is dressed all in black with a backwards-facing baseball cap. Eric is dressed in khaki camo gear and is wearing a handkerchief on his head. They carry packs full of ammo and a Tech A, rifle, a shotty, pistols, knife, and explosives. This is the first time the audience realizes a school shooting is going to take place.

The audience learns that Eric and Alex are friends. They hang out together in Alex’s split level, mid century home that is tackily decorated with outdated flat honey colored cabinets, and a green, algae colored dishwasher. Eric and Alex hang out in Alex’s bedroom. Alex plays the piano—*Für Elise*—and Eric plays a first person shooter video game on a laptop. Together they look up online gun catalogs.

Economy of Vulnerability and *Elephant*

What the viewer “hopes” to find out in the film *Elephant*, or the expectation that she has been taught to have, is that she will find out the truth of why this violence happens. She will find out what was *really* going on with these students. But the film reveals little in the way of truth. This film, in other words, refuses to “speak” according to the usual liberatory models that demand a reason in order to make locating victims and villains possible. *Elephant* refuses to “speak” about bullying and causes of the violence.

Eric and Alex, the perpetrators of the shooting, share a shower and kiss. Are they lovers? Are they bullied because of this? This film provides no cues as to whether we should feel bad for the shooters and the teasing they may or may not have suffered as a result of their sexual identity. That is, if we were “supposed” to feel empathy, Eric and Alex would have to be produced as subjects who are victimized as “gay” or “bullied.”

Despite the urge to have “testimonials” or “confessions” that would provide understanding and a window into the pain these teens may have faced, we only see the surface to the story. This affects how we view the event and what we think of Alex and Eric. The camera does not provide a clear “why” to accompany the event. Thus, the viewer witnesses a cold, senseless killing. We are left “outside” of the story of these two boys despite going “inside” the event. The boys are not produced as objects of our sympathy and as a result we feel nothing. *Elephant* is not a classic documentary, but it is realistic because it does not produce anything easily consumable out of the event.

One of the only scenes that shows extended dialogue is the GSA meeting. Students are gathered in a circle with a teacher. A student walks in and the teacher says, “We were just talking about walking down the street being gay.” He addresses the group, “What do you think about that? How can you tell?” A student chimes in, “Or can you tell...is the other question?” Despite the significant content of this meeting, the camera does not follow this apparently important conversation. As the camera scans the circle it fails to focus on the person speaking. Rather, it is committed to working its way around the circle from student to student, in order. The students talk about dyed pink hair, rainbow paraphernalia as possible evidence of identity. They discuss an event in the

Oregon paper about “gay” rams. They talk about “what causes homosexuality” and “who even cares anyway.” Alex and Eric are not present at this meeting. The viewer wonders what this might indicate about Alex and Eric. They are not present; are they therefore not gay? There is, apparently, a place where gay kids and their voices are supported. But the meeting is itself questioning what it means to be gay, anyway—so their lack of presence at the meeting is not indicative of identity. The disjunction of voice and face and presence and identity in this scene denies any connection between Alex and Eric and the GSA. The viewer is left not understanding the connection, or even if there is one.

That the film does not produce Eric and Alex as having a consumable identity is also exemplified in one of the scenes of the shooting itself. As Eric stands over the principal, Mr. Luce, pointing a gun at him, Eric says, “You know there are others like us out there too. And they will kill you if you fuck with them like you did me and Jared.” It is unclear to what Eric is referring. Is it that Eric might be gay and picked on for that? Is it perhaps about Eric’s social class (he seems to be in the lower middle class: he doesn’t have a car and rides to school in Alex’s beat up vehicle, he wears a cut off t-shirt, he gets a free breakfast at Alex’s house)? Moreover, we do not know who this “Jared” is. The closest we come to evidence that bullying might be a factor in the event is a scene where Alex, sitting in the back of the chemistry class, gets globs of stuff thrown at him while the teacher answers questions posed by the culprits to distract attention. The audience does not really know more than anyone else about what life is like for Alex and Eric, or any of the other students for that matter.

Who do we want to speak in this film? We want to know the motivations of the boys. We want to know the stories of those killed. But the school shooting is a hyper-reality. The school shooting becomes hyper-real and therefore it is what has value and it is what is legible. When a school shooting takes place scripts easily circulate to determine the victims, bullies, etc. The school-shooting event is unhinged from reality and becomes more real than the mundane. The mundane does not have a script or valorized signifiers. *Elephant* manages to describe the real in all of its banality through its juxtaposition with the hyper-real—the shooting. *Elephant* juxtaposes the hyper-real with the mundane realities of daily school life. We can only see the mundane when it is a foil for the hyper-real. The economy of the hyper-real is obsessed with storytelling. But what if reality is mundane? Does the mundane only become interesting when a dramatic event gets to name its importance? The hyper-reality of school shootings is what reveals the mundane realities of these lives, but it is also what makes the real not real enough. The mundane is illegible and unrecognizable until it is refracted through the hyper-real. It makes the unexceptional unrecognizable.

The film begins with a shot of a light post. The viewer hears the voices of teens playing outside. The sky moves in time-lapse photography while the lamppost stands still. It gets dark and finally the only thing that can be seen is the glowing of the lamp from the streetlight. The sky is dark and the streetlight's yellow glow is the only sign of life. This scene captures, perhaps most dryly, the events of a day. That is, this progression of light to twilight to darkness can be read as a parallel to the day the shooting takes place. Its significance can be fast forwarded because when only

considered from the perspective of the lamppost, the day is not very interesting. All that happens is the wind blows and then darkness comes telling her lamp to glow. The streetlamp has no knowledge of the carnage that took place at the Oregon school that day. How does one assess the significance of, for example, John's dad's drinking problem against the harassment that Michelle faces in the girls' locker room or the torment Alex experiences in Chemistry class?

Conclusion

While this chapter focused primarily on a deconstructive analysis of visual texts, in the final chapter I move to a Deleuzian analysis. Chapter 5 deploys a Deleuzian stylistic and philosophical approach to examine the politics of trans* public restroom access alongside cultural discourses surrounding "school shooters." This analysis shows how the economy of vulnerability functions as an abstract machine that territorializes bodies as coherent, speaking mouths.

CHAPTER VI
DETERRITORIALIZING THE MOUTH: SILENCE, PUBLIC RESTROOMS, AND
THE SCHOOL SHOOTER

Introduction

This chapter offers a Deleuzian (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 1992) exploration of two seemingly disparate phenomena: trans* bathroom access and school shootings. Trans* issues are most often talked about in terms of identity politics, rights, and legibility. School shootings have a common cultural language that reads them as an indicator of the current state of U.S. culture. When read together, however, these two phenomena are shot through with the politics of speech. This chapter explores the productive possibilities of considering trans* public restroom access and school shootings in post-humanist terms. That is, I aim to examine the systems and the affective connections among their human and non-human elements, rather than in terms of static subjects and agency. Thus, where Judith Butler (1997) argues that “the question is not what it is I will be able to say, but what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I being to speak at all” (p. 133), I seek to trace the mechanisms and assemblages that produce the demand to speak—what drives saying in the first place. What structures what saying *is* and what saying *does*.

Trans* Bodies in the Public Restroom

Bathroom Introduction

To think about trans* in terms of the body and the normative cultural language that surrounds it is to consider what is speaking. What can be spoken always assumes the role of the mouth, the organ that delivers the words, meanings, and presence we rely on to produce identity. The hermeneutic practice of speech as presence acts to produce the mouth as the bodily organ from which subjectivity and identity flow. Likewise, a phonocentric system produces other mouths. The wholeness of one's body can become a mouth, for example. The visibility of the trans* body, upon entry into the "wrong" bathroom, for instance, seems able to "speak" its lack of proper belonging without using the mouth at all. Or, rather, seems *unable* to speak its identity and belonging. But narrating or naming what was previously unspeakable or illegible does nothing to disrupt the speakable in the first place. Narrative and voice function to reinscribe identity and presence, shutting down other productive knowledges and flows and they merely reaffirm the logic that that which cannot be understood through language is not to be understood, that danger exists in the unintelligible, the secretive, and the silent.

In the first half of this chapter I explore the space of the bathroom and the productive presence of trans* bodies within them. I ask what the trans* body *does* in and to social spaces. In the bathroom, bodies that do not speak or refuse to speak properly are dangerous. Bathrooms are not simply about urethras, penises, vaginas, and assholes; they are about eyes, ears, mouths. The bathroom within which the trans* body seems

dangerous and aberrant is never simply a place to eliminate and sanitize, but an abstract machine within which *identity and belonging circulate as affects*, a machine that produces neat, tidy subjects of surveillance.

Bathroom History

Bathrooms have had admissions practices since their inception. Always already a place in which some belong and some do not, bathrooms have always been about letting some in and keeping others out. Hygiene, for example, was one argument for the installation of restrooms (Cavanagh, 2010). That is, excrement belonged in the sewer, not the street. But hygiene extended beyond the management of human waste to human bodies as well. Those deemed “unclean” are also often denied access to public restrooms (Norén, 2010, pp. 93–96). The homeless man who smells or the customer who cannot pay are a blight on the cleanliness modern Western society demands.

Safety is another historical reason for the creation of separate facilities. Dividing by sex or gender was thought to be one way of fostering safety. Women, it was also argued, who were often caring for the elderly or children, needed facilities where they and other dependents could go. As domestic subjects, women were understood to be dependent and vulnerable; they and other vulnerable subjects needed to be kept safe from men. (Cavanagh, 2010, pp. 73–78). Furthermore, as Cavanagh (2010) argues, bathrooms are not just about sanitizing bodies, but serve to “sanitize sexuality” (p. 32). To consider humans as sexual beings in public disrupted Victorian notions of proper decorum (Kogan, 2010). Separate facilities were thus a way to keep the private from leaking into the public.

Men's and women's bathrooms are also gendered and sexualized differently. While women's restrooms are primarily seen as a place of safety, a place where women can care for domestic responsibilities of child and elderly care (Barcan, 2010, pp. 29–34), a place to primp and preen, the men's room has traditionally been more of an eroticized space. To look at someone in the wrong way in a men's room is to arise suspicion of sexual interest, for example. Cruising, too, has long been a practice in men's public restrooms (Halberstam, 1998, pp. 24–25).

Additionally, facility separation extended beyond gender divisions. During the height of the Jim Crow era, separate facilities for blacks and whites were the norm. Indeed this was another example of the way the clean (read: white bodies) wanted to be free from interacting with the unclean (read: black bodies). And those with physical disabilities have faced struggles to gain access to and proper accommodation within public restrooms. While disability laws have created larger stalls and adjusted the heights of toilet stalls and sinks, still facilities are usable by a select group.

For the trans* community, the bathroom has historically been a violent space. Physical violence becomes a material threat for gender deviants who enter public restrooms. One's un-belonging becomes justification for such abuse. Moreover, non-admission to the restroom in the first place or harassment within it constitutes a violence as well. Because trans* bodies have at times failed to access certain systems, like the bathroom, calls for trans* visibility and rights have been a major focus in attempts to achieve equity, as these techniques help produce trans* bodies as "safe" and legible in their own right.

So, for trans* individuals, bathrooms are a fraught place. Transgender bathroom access is frequently cast in terms of human rights and pursued through human rights law because of the material necessity for a safe place to go. Complaints are filed against schools, universities, and workplaces. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) names the importance of bathroom rights for trans* folks as part of its campaign to end discrimination in the workplace (Restroom access for transgender employees). The ACLU and organizations such as Lambda Legal work to uphold existing laws and for the addition of new laws that protect trans* individuals and grant access.

Restrictions on trans* access have been upheld in the courts. Recently, a woman in Florida, Alex Wilson, was denied access to a reasonable facility at her technical community college. Instead of being permitted to safely use the women's facilities she was relegated to a storage closet (Nichols, 2013). Late in 2012, Nicole Maines, an elementary school student from a school district in Maine lost the case against her school for denying her access to the girls' restroom (Ring, 2012).

Legal tactics and human rights discourses, however, have also brought some victories. Recently a six year old female identifying student, Coy Mathis, won a case against her school that was forbidding her to use the girl's restroom, instead offering her the staff bathroom or nurse's station. It was decided to be a case of discrimination against the student (Stanley, 2013).

In California, signed Assembly Bill 1266 went into effect in January 2014 granting trans* students access to the bathroom of their identification in K-12 schools.

But an op-ed piece by Republican assemblyman Tim Donnelly points to the fact that trans* bathroom access is never simply about bathrooms or about rights. He names what he sees as the most central questions that this bill raises:

Donnelly (2013) asks:

What are the long-term repercussions of this measure? Will some kids be too embarrassed to use the bathroom or locker rooms, knowing that a member of the opposite sex could enter any time? Could this create unneeded anxiety with students, creating a massive learning distraction? Will creating gender neutral facilities increase the likelihood of a sexual assault on campus?

Despite the fact that Donnelly clearly does not understand what is at stake for trans* students and his reading of who faces the danger of sexual assault is limited (e.g., sexual assault can happen among same-sex people), his questions show how what seems like a rights discourse is also about notions of privacy. Donnelly even goes so far as cite “anxiety” as a reason against California’s measure. But the anxiety that he is referring to is the anxiety that people *might* pass, *could* pass. Undetected. As Halberstam points out in *Female Masculinities*, “for free bathroom use, one must be readable at a glance” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 23). That is, admission to the bathroom necessitates speaking—the body must speak in some form to its proper belonging in that space. Being readable means being legible and being coherent. What would be worse, in Donnelly’s mind, than not being allowed to know who is in the bathroom?

As Cavanaugh (2010) notes, among her interviewees, the trans* body—especially when it passes—is accused of tricking and deception (p. 69). While many Millennials taut they “don’t do boxes” and “don’t like categories,”—marking a significant move to

question gender stability—this happens against the backdrop of a greater level of surveillance. The post 9-11 world is a hyper-vigilant, security culture that is constantly taking inventory of bodies: full body scanners and pat downs in airports, identification forms requiring more and more detail, complex identifications to cross borders. And the trans* body that passes is close—too close—to the terrorist body. As Jasbir Puar (2007) argues, “Bodies [infect] other bodies with sensation, vibration, irregularity, chaos, lines of flight that betray the expectation of loyalty, linearity, the demarcation of who’s in and who’s not” (p. 172).

Using the Bathroom

The first step in using a public bathroom is finding the sign on the wall that designates the location and sex of the user. The mono-sexed bathroom notifies its admitted parties with a plastic plaque on the wall next to the door. These signs are the first gateway point to admission to the restroom. Upon stepping up to the public restroom, the person seeking entry into the facility must check him/herself against the sign. Most signs spell out: “women’s” or “men’s.” As if an unintentional commentary on the slipperiness of what “woman” or “man” even is, many signs accompany the text with the image of an ambiguous character in pants or a character in a triangular dress. The image is significant. Being a woman or man is not enough; one must also look the part.

To enter the facility, one must check him/herself against the sign on the wall in an act of self-surveillance. To proceed forward means to indicate rightful belonging. How embarrassing it would be to walk into the wrong one! In the moment where a person

decides which restroom to enter, knowledge of what sex one might be is never enough, s/he must also consider whether s/he will be read as such by others.

The people in the vicinity of the bathroom, whether on purpose or not, also monitor who enters and exists. Passers-by, others looking to use the restroom, those in the area, all surveil the congruity of one's body with the sign on the restroom door. Surveillance outside the women's restroom often assumes the vulnerability of women and makes it the duty of all—women and men—to make sure that men do not enter. Surveillance outside the men's room is more lax as men are not presumed to require the same protection.

But entry into the restroom is only the first doorway. In the women's room, the stall door represents another gateway point. Within the restroom itself, the surveillance is more heightened than it is outside. At this point, anyone who has entered has surely seen the sign and gotten through the first level of bathroom security. And in the women's restroom, this means that eyes are now allowed to inspect each other. While proper protocol dictates minimal eye contact for men, women are expected to be free to chat, look, and assess.

Once one is in the stall, a brief reprieve from surveillance is had (that is if other users have not noticed a gender deviant's entrance; in that case, expect security to soon be present). The stall, however, is only semi-private at best. Often there are large gaps at the bottom and small creases between the door and the wall that allow the outside in. This makes the role of the feet important. Size of the foot and footwear are indicators of belonging, as is the direction the feet face. The direction feet point is presumed to

indicate how one's urethra is structured and how it interfaces with the toilet. Provided that this experience has gone smoothly, one must exit the stall, again bare to the other bathroom occupants. This is another opportunity for full assessment by other users.

The men's room, by contrast does not have the same level of vigilance about who enters the first set of doors. Eye contact is to be avoided and, as a result, the first step is slightly easier than the women's restroom. Once inside, however, there is a different level of vigilance. The men's room is policed for "perverts." While it is easy to pass undetected if one does not violate any codes, any violation may be subject to punishment. Men do not stand next to each other at urinals if at all possible. Where one directs his eyes is also of utmost importance. A glance in the wrong direction or the wrong posture at the urinal can get one marked as suspicious (i.e. sexual pervert). So while admission to the men's room is often much easier, the costs when proper subject-hood is broached can be more physically violent. Security and outside persons are not called in. Incorrect subjects (perverts) are managed within the facility.

Speaking in Bathrooms

Most people who enter a bathroom do not vocally say, "It is I, a woman, who is now entering the women's bathroom." They do not need to. Bodies are territorialized in the public restroom. Through rituals, codes, and behaviors, we read each other's bodies for those very same words. Some people enter and use bathrooms without a problem because their body "speaks" to its proper belonging. The cisgendered male, for example, who fits structures, assumptions, and stereotypes associated with masculinity does not have to say, "I have a penis so I can be in the men's restroom." But his body—through,

for example, his proper posture at the urinal and his gait—speaks the existence of that proper penis and proper belonging. Similarly, the woman who enters the restroom, void of facial hair, with breasts, and “soft features” speaks the existence of her vagina. The body is territorialized in the bathroom as a speaking-mouth.

When a gender deviant enters a restroom, she may be called to show rightful belonging by directing attention to a body part (typically breasts) or by making the pitch of her voice heard. A higher pitched voice can become the necessary admission ticket. In the restroom, then, the body deterritorializes the mouth. The body “speaks” the words that were meant for the mouth—names its secondary sex characteristics. At the same time, the mouth deterritorializes the body by its expectation to speak the body.

Put another way, the person-going-to-the-bathroom works as part of an assemblage. The man standing at a urinal is not just trying to pee. He assumes particular postures at the urinal, knowing when to make eye contact and when to avoid another’s gaze. The man going to the bathroom is cut across by rules of masculinity, heteronormativity, the gendering of space, public-private divides, and beliefs about safety—who needs it and who deserves it. The urinal, in turn, is territorialized as a male appendage. The urinal makes the man a man and the man makes the urinal a urinal. These connections produce identity and belonging as affects that resonate throughout the assemblage. This affect is not reducible into its constituent parts. But failure to produce it is noticed and punishable. Using the bathroom is a series of speech acts that say over and over again, “I belong in here;” “I have an identity.” The bathroom is like passing over the border into a different country. At the border you are asked to verbalize the

answer to, “where were you born?” “Let me see your identification.” And, like a customs booth, the urinal can reject you if you fail to have the right “equipment.”

The person-going-to-the-bathroom activates surveillance. Just as easily as one can pass by properly occupying the bathroom space, one can get marked as suspicious through a failure to make his body speak his belonging. Gender policings are different in the men’s and women’s restroom, creating unique issues for users of each. Looking at one’s neighbor at the urinal for example, sounds the alarm of non-belonging. The bathroom system is one in which watching is expected and facilitated. So much so that the Transgender Law Center has produced a guidebook, “Peeing in Peace” (2005), that uses stereotypical bathroom practices as both a critique of the rigid polarization, but also as a way to help trans* people safely navigate.

But the trans* body or the gender deviant body, particularly when it fails to “pass,” disrupts the body-as-mouth. Bodies that do not pass seamlessly fail to speak their belonging. Instead, when a person’s right to use a particular restroom is called into question—for example, “are you sure you are in the right bathroom?”—the trans* body is called to speak from her mouth, disrupting the stability of the body-as-mouth. She must name the parts of her body, show the pitch of her voice and verbally support her belonging, provide testimony in court. In this way, the trans* body deterritorializes the public restroom. The trans* body’s presence acts as a vector in the public restroom, reterritorializing the body as something “not-mouth.” Thus, the body is placed back into the realm of the illegible, necessitating the call for the speaking-mouth again. The speaking-mouth is shown to be responsible for more than speaking. It is more than part

of the body; the speaking-mouth is the indicator of the essence within. It is a truth device. It is a form of identification within a security system.

Deterritorialization

The trans* body sets in motion a relative deterritorialization of the body-as-mouth upon entry into the restroom system. When this body narrates itself, claiming an identity, this relative deterritorialization becomes a negative process. When the trans* subject narrates herself to claim a right to use the women's restroom, she reterritorializes that which her body's presence had deterritorialized. She puts back together the disarray that a body out of bounds caused. The body is immediately subjected to a reterritorialization of body-as-mouth, obstructing the full potential of this line of flight. Claims of identity and the production of narratives by those infectious bodies tempers the disruptive forces that they set in motion. The trans* body is a deterritorialization of normalized forms of gender presentation and of the body as a site of identity and presence, but when it narrates itself is also a reterritorialization of security forms¹.

Perhaps it makes sense to try to answer Republican congressman's Donnelly's initial question concerning California's new restroom access law: "What are the long term repercussion of this measure," he asks. He fears that the bathroom may become a site resonant with insecurity and anxiety. Uncontrolled and unsurveilled bodies in the restroom do indeed threaten a security system. Bodies that do not or will not speak

¹ My description of this movement of deterritorialization followed by reterritorialization that reinscribes security forms is informed by Camilla Griggers (1997) assessment of the way in which charismatic female military leaders disrupt "state forms of militarized masculinity" at the same time they represent "a state reterritorialization of militarized femininities" (p. 63).

certainly produce anxiety for that system. And that might be the very point. A politics that is about access and identity functions within the same surveillance machine that is producing Donnelly's desire for anxiety-free, safe, well-controlled spaces. It is about seeking an answer to how to make my body into a mouth.

To conclude, I do not intend to minimize the reality that validation of identity in the bathroom can be a psychologically necessary event, but what the bathroom reveals is that this validation of identities is similar to stamping a passport. The demand to speak is a specific territorialization of bodies by this particular war machine to the extent that the body gets territorialized as a mouth and with it what comes from the mouth—speaking, naming, creating identities, and so forth.

The trans* body, through its movement in the bathroom, reveals the way that identity, naming, and narrative all function within the same surveillance machine. Visibility and rights, while important, might actually serve in some ways to dam important lines of flight that a radical trans* politics sets in motion. A body that is willing to narrate itself obstructs the full potential of that disruption.

School Shooters

“He was a Quiet Kid”

He's the pensive kid. He's the kid who hides in the background. He is generic enough to not be noticed. Maybe sometimes you remember he is there, but for the most part his presence is a non-presence. Every once in a while he says something. You think, “Oh, wow, I didn't know he talked.” Even his voice is unremarkable though. Or perhaps the little he says actually says a lot. But it is no matter. Soon you forget, again listening

to the murmurs of kids bustling in the halls, lockers closing, shouts and slaps of kids passing each other.

Time passes and you forget about the kid. He was never really that noticeable. You pull out the yearbook and flip through. Perhaps you remember his name. Or perhaps you just remember him as “that really quiet kid.” Maybe you even remember him as odd, a loner. It makes no difference. The sentiment is the same. He was a kid, queer to your school experience.

But what happens when this kid suddenly becomes noticed? What happens when the “quiet” kid turns violent. There is often some plot revealed. A manifesto based on years of torment. The torment may have been at the hands of bullies or the general pain of being a teenager. Or the torment may have been his own psychological pain created by being ill equipped to deal with what life dealt.

You find out he had an obsession with the military or with guns. You find out that he played endless hours of violent video games. You find out his parents worked a number of jobs or were largely absent from his life. You construct a picture that the social imaginary readily helps you create. It is the popular kid, the extrovert who is deemed healthy and balanced. This kid was none of those things.

People pass by. He observes. He hugs the edges of the hallways during passing between classes. Maybe you come upon him in the bathroom, and he diverts his eyes downward, something he always does no matter where he is.

In class the teacher never calls on him. The teacher deems him not really present in the first place. Perhaps he does fine on his tests, but no one cares if he fails either. He

moves with the other bodies in the class. Never particularly distinguishable from the mass that is a pile of students in a school.

But one day his body becomes hypervisible. He has been waiting for this moment. The moment when he will tell the world that he matters. That he is big and bold. Others will regret the day they underestimated him.

And what this boy does varies. Sometimes he seeks revenge. Revenge for being an outcast. An answer to the silence everyone assumed him to be. He takes out his gun. With this weapon he transforms himself. He becomes a different kind of body. The gun is an extension of him. His body a part of the machine of social pressures of youth, a relief valve in a system that always surveils while never actually seeing anything in particular or anything all that accurately. The machine assumes it knows. The machine's eyes are expected to be all seeing, never to fail. This moment is not a failure of the machine, but a failure of this body to conform within the machine. The boy shoots, but what and why he shoots are unclear. Sometimes it is others. Often at some point the gun is turned on himself. The moment of the ending, when the gun makes contact with his head is the moment when dysfunction bursts from the closed system. What has been controlled, so tightly watched, explodes into a million pieces. The body is reconfigured as its constituent parts. Only those parts are no longer recognizable. Blood is spattered.

But the blood is that which courses through veins, it is blood mixed with flesh, with sweat, with the metal of the bullet, with the chalk dust on the board, with the dirt on the school floor from passing sneakers that trudge in the dirt from the world outside the school. In his moment of explosion, he is not quiet. He is loud. The gun bangs, sending

an echoing sound. The bullet to his head only speaks once. One single pitch. But from that comes the sounds of its effects. The once-quiet-body is contagious and infects those in its vicinity. The bullet and the gun's bang is transformed into screams of others, gasps, tears, warnings, sirens—the police state goes into action.

“It’s Always the Quiet Ones”

Quiet students appear Janus-faced. They are “good” students if they do not make too much trouble, are obedient, and not too noticeable. Teachers in elementary school teach children to pass silently through the halls, not to talk in the bathroom, have “silent” lunches. Quiet students are easier to manage. Come the teen years, quiet students can be a reprieve for adults from the smelly bodies of middle school, hormone infused students and young adults figuring out how to be independent.

But the quiet student is always also a potentially disruptive student. As soon as the quiet student becomes the one who *will not* speak, not simply does not or who will not maintain their quiet bodily comportment when called upon, she suddenly becomes a disruption. Quietness is also both raced and gendered. The white student is more frequently considered the “good” quiet student. Their whiteness makes their body disappear into the background of a white-centric culture. But the black student—who is always raced—has more difficulty becoming the “quiet” student, for his body always speaks. The black body is always already loud. Depictions of the “dangerous” black male often involve loud, heavy-bassed music. Similarly, the quiet girl is demure, well-behaved, innocent, and sweet. A quiet boy is too shy, he is not confident, is not a leader. The quiet white boy, however, is silently dangerous.

Recently, the Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting drew national attention. With each school-shooting event, attention draws to the perpetrators, looking in them for an explanation to these violent events. Most often, the bodies of these shooters become encrypted with the social sign of “quiet.” Adam Lanza, for example, was described as a kid who was “quiet, odd, loner” (Kovner & Mahony, 2012). A schoolmate remarked of Adam, “He was the quiet kid at the bus stop. I’d say, ‘Hi,’ and he’d say, ‘Hey,’ back and that was the extent of it” (Boyd, 2012). Similarly, in February of 2012, student T.J. Lane shot six students, killing three, at his Ohio school. A fellow student described him: “He was quiet, but he wasn't creepy quiet. He wasn't mean. He wasn't evil. I'm surprised, but I'm not shocked. It's always seems to be the quiet ones” (Caniglia, 2012). And the headlines declared, “Ohio school shooter identified as a ‘*quiet* kid’ named T.J. Lane” [emphasis mine] (Emery, 2012). In this way, quiet becomes a loaded sign that marks the deviance that explains the event.

But quiet need not even be used outright, as “loner,” “Asperger’s,” and “socially awkward” usually elicit the same feelings and responses. The suggestion that the quiet kid turns murderous is a frequently used trope. One news article purports to describe, “How Adam Lanza went from quiet honors student to goth killer who didn’t utter a word during horrific murdering spree” (Stebner & Durant, 2012). A similar headline from a different shooting reads, “Decatur school shooter was a quiet and polite nanny to three kids” (Hutch, 2013). Quiet is both positive, in that Adama Lanza was a quiet (read: good, not-disobedient) honors student and the Decatur school shooter was polite (read: good, not-disobedient). But it is the fact that these students were “quiet” that explains

how they were able to explode in a killing spree. The link between quiet and unexplainable violence suggests that anxiety exists when silence frustrates the desire to know. This gives reason for the need to surveil, for the quiet kid is a ticking time bomb. Speaking, loud, and quiet are about queerness just as much as they are about the verbal. Much as the trans* person in the bathroom who might pass unnoticed is considered a threat sitting just below the surface, the quiet student can always hide a murderous intent. Quiet is cast as pathological.

“Jeremy”

The early 1990’s rock and fashion scene marked the mainstream heyday for the tormented teen. Fashion was driven by Seattle grunge—flannels, Doc Martens, Nirvana t-shirts—unassuming and shabby. Alternative rock turned mainstream with distorted electric guitars and throaty, raspy vocalists. Lyrics were driven with socially conscious and anguished interior lives. The pain of being a young adult was what hit songs on the radio were made of. MTV, which had been around since the early 1980s, took on even greater popularity. To be an angst-ridden teenager was not just mood, it was style, it was affect.

In 1991 Pearl Jam released their debut album, *Ten*, which included the hit song, “Jeremy.” “Jeremy” was written by lead singer and guitarist Eddie Vedder in response to two events: Vedder’s own schooling experience, which involved a student who shot himself, and the January 8, 1991, shooting by teenager Jeremy Wade Delle. Delle killed himself in front of his English class in Dallas, Texas (Letkemann, 2011). A hit music

video soon followed, produced by Mark Pellington, which won Best Music Video of the year at the MTV music video awards in 1993.

The lyrics of the song tell the account of a kid who shoots himself in front of his class. Hints of Jeremy's tortured inner world are described. He is depicted as a boy who fantasized about being King and finally being visible and noticed. Jeremy was picked on and ignored by his parents. The lyrics never explicitly name Jeremy as a "quiet" kid, but the lyrics are loaded with signifiers that allow us to see that he invisible, and quiet, and therefore, dangerous.

At home/Drawing pictures/Of mountain tops/With him on top
Lemon yellow sun/Arms raised in a V/ Dead lay in pools of maroon below

Daddy didn't give attention/To the fact that mommy didn't care
King Jeremy the wicked/Ruled his world

Jeremy spoke in class today/Jeremy spoke in class today

Clearly I remember/Pickin' on the boy/Seemed a harmless little fuck
But we unleashed a lion/Gnashed his teeth/And bit the recess lady's breast

How could I forget/He hit me with a surprise left/My jaw left hurting
Dropped wide open/Just like the day/Like the day I heard

Daddy didn't give affection/And the boy was something that mommy
wouldn't wear/King Jeremy the wicked/Ruled his world

Jeremy spoke in class today/Jeremy spoke in class today
Try to forget this.../Try to erase this.../From the blackboard.

"Jeremy spoke in class today" is the recurring refrain. Importantly, Jeremy never speaks verbally, but his action is interpreted as a speech act. His blood is portrayed—in the lyrics and in the video—as words written on a blackboard. He "spoke" by pulling out

a gun and shooting himself. Jeremy is not Melinda from *Speak* (2004). Melinda eventually moves toward speech and properly embodies speech through her mouth. The subtext is explicit; Melinda does not become the scary school shooter because she uses the right instrument to produce the right kind of words. Jeremy does not; he speaks by bringing together gun and body.

The lyrics describe Jeremy as being bullied. There is the juxtaposition of the lyric, “seemed a harmless little fuck” with “but we unleashed a lion.” These lyrics express a common sentiment that undergirds the way quiet becomes correspondent with dangerous. It is significant that this boy “seemed” harmless. He was largely invisible and did not cause trouble. Jeremy may have “seemed” harmless, but what was revealed was that this kid *was* dangerous. When he shot himself—spoke—he revealed the true character that was inside him the whole time.

We might like to imagine that Jeremy is a socially aberrant kid, troubled and mentally-ill. While one might choose to focus on the details of Jeremy’s social life and pressures or his mental state in order to account for this event, to territorialize this moment in terms of the psychological subject, such an analysis does little to understand this even as a web of effects and affects. Moreover, such an account does little more than produce a life that fits into a world of intelligibility. Even if we spoke to him, even if he narrated his life, what does it matter in a social that cannot hear Jeremy?

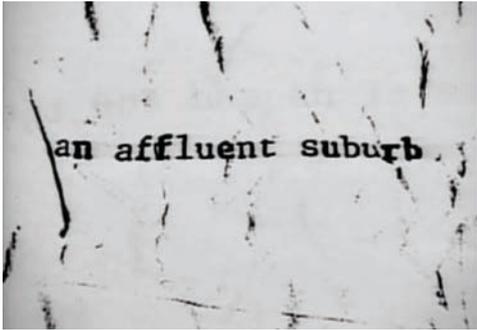


Figure 3. Frame from opening of “Jeremy” video

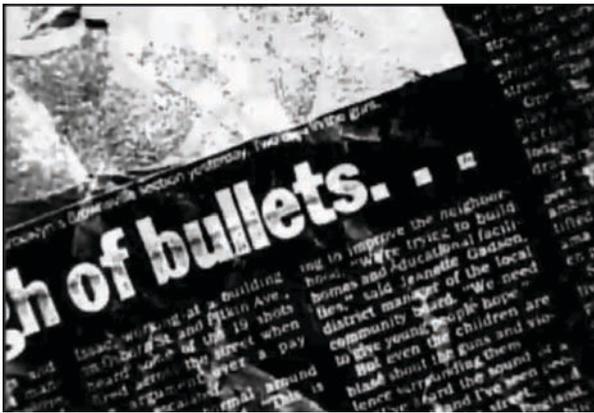


Figure 4. Headline at opening of “Jeremy” video

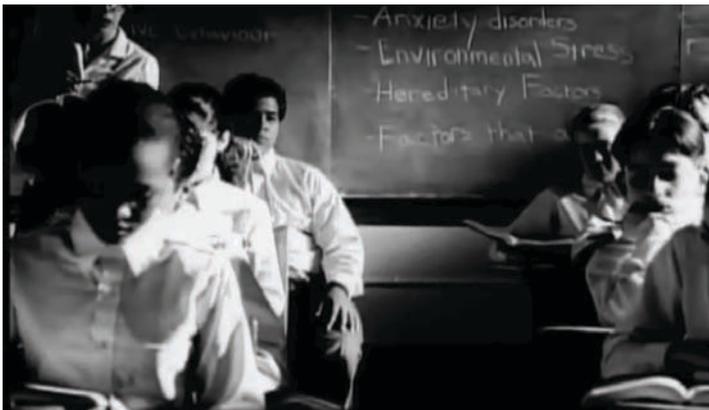


Figure 5. Blackboard in Jeremy’s classroom



Figure 6. Final scene from “Jeremy” video

The video paints the picture even more vividly. The scene is set with flashes of text describing the day: “3:30 in the afternoon,” “64 degrees and cloudy.” This was just an ordinary day. The setting is described as “an affluent suburb” (see figure 3). “Jeremy,” like *Elephant*, is set against the same white, suburban backdrop as many school shootings. Other phrases and images describe Jeremy as “bored,” “ignored,” “harmless,” “numb,” “disturbed,” “wicked.” The social context is also implied through a video collage of newspaper headlines (see figure 4). The video locates Jeremy in a society in which “bishops say they are determined to halt child molesting by priests,” and “the White House declined to comment.” The blackboard in Jeremy’s classroom lists factors that explain mental illness: “anxiety disorders,” “hereditary factors,” “environmental factors...” (see figure 5). Additionally the final scene from the video (see figure 6) shows the classroom of students frozen with hands in the air, blood spattered across their white shirts, a large blood blot on the board marking the location of the massive bullet wound. MTV did not want the suicide shown and as a result the viewer is left with this image. Mark Pellington notes his frustration with the way MTV

would not allow the image of Jeremy putting the gun in his mouth to be shown (Weisbard et al, 2001). Consequently and significantly, many viewers read the blood spattered across the students as Jeremy having shot his classmates. The fact that so many viewers saw the video in these terms shows the cultural programming that reads school violence as about dangerous, silent monsters.

Art

Within the U.S. cultural imaginary there are reasons behind school shooters. They are troubled youth. They are violent video game players. They are loners. They are mentally ill. They are quiet kids turned violent. We want the perpetrator to *speak* what it was that made him do it. We look to the account his home life tells. Or we examine his online activity to try to find the words that never came from his mouth. We place a narrative upon him. We try to look for secret clues. We look to psychological professionals who can explain behaviors and name signposts that should have been heeded. In particular, we look to the stories that his artwork tells.

Artwork is often cited as a place to look when seeking warning signs of potential school shooters. The FBI has its own threat-assessment manual, authored by Mary Ellen O'Toole, Ph.D.: "The school shooter: a threat assessment perspective." Although she notes that it is not possible to "profile" a school shooter (O'Toole, 1999, p. 7), she does lay out a "four-pronged assessment model" (p. 16). This valuation is to be used only after a threat. School personnel are to look for instances of "leakage" (pp. 16–17). Leakage may reveal itself in artwork. She explains:

Another example of leakage could be recurrent themes of destruction or violence appearing in a student's writing or artwork. The themes may involve hatred, prejudice, death, dismemberment, mutilation of self or others, bleeding, use of excessively destructive weapons, homicide, or suicide. Many adolescents are fascinated with violence and the macabre, and writing and drawings on these themes can be a reflection of a harmless but rich and creative fantasy life. Some adolescents, however, seem so obsessed with these themes that they emerge no matter what the subject matter, the conversation, the assignment, or the joke. In an actual case, a student was taking a home economics class and was assigned to bake something. He baked a cake in the shape of a gun. His school writings and other work also contained recurrent themes of violence. (pp. 16–17)

I use this extensive quote to show the ways that, although O'Toole admits that kids can become fascinated with dark images without it leading to sinister results, artwork becomes a place to look for the unspoken in students who do not speak enough. Artwork becomes the site of the mouth in a speech driven economy. When artwork is made the site of the mouth, artistic production becomes a stable signifier of the "inside." Art gets read phonocentrically. This erases process, wishing instead to evaluate snapshots, and ignores that the process of creating art can be a working through, rather than a fixed "sign" of an internal truth.

It is also significant that this manual comes from the FBI. The governmental security-surveillance system relies on the primacy of the mouth. Interrogations focus on statements: "Tell me where...", "Tell me the truth." In O'Toole's manual, art is taken into the interrogation room and subject to questioning. For the suspect who will not speak, looking at art, like using torture, becomes a useful tool for forcing the "inside" out. Art becomes a way to get the suspect who will not speak to talk.



Figure 7. Jeremy's drawing



Figure 8. Jeremy as artist

It is through Jeremy's art that we answer our questions about his pathology; Jeremy's art is telling. Jeremy draws a picture of himself on top of a mountain looking at his domain below. Because his mouth does not speak, we try to locate one in his art. His art gets located in the mouth because his body does not provide us with one. Art is expected to operate like a mouth, speaking the meanings and ideas that are inside the artist. This is the same expectation for speech—the revelation of the inside, the absolute presence.

Quiet as Queer

Jeremy is a queer kid. He does not fit the social matrix of high school life. He is not “outgoing.” He is not “popular.” He is not fixated on fashion. He is not alone in his queerness. A 2007 study, for instance, reads “cynical shyness” as a mark of school shooters; Jeremy’s silence is sarcastic and suspicious (Carducci & Nethery, 2007). The specifics of his “condition” or “identity” are not necessary to mark his body as queer. Whether Jeremy is gay or straight, mentally ill or sane is of little consequence. His body is still marked with the moniker “quiet.” And in school, quiet is decidedly queer. His quiet, queer body resounds within the social fabric of a high school.

Quiet is queer because it hides. Quiet is queer because both are considered dangerously hidden from hegemonic surveillance. Deception, fraud, and the closet—all are qualities that place the quiet/queer outside of normative legibility. Quiet bodies are full of potential energy. When a quiet body becomes noticed, it is often because it has breached the implicit contract that is demanded of such a body: that it not ever be noticeable. This contract is demanded by the bodies around the quiet body. The quiet body can be simultaneously (a) a quiet, harmless body and (b) a body that is (threateningly) passing. And the second is always implied by the first. Quiet is conceived of as a temporary state in between events. Quiet is not-yet-speaking. And speaking happens as a result of one breaking or cracking against the pressure of this potential energy. After the shooting we look back, “He was a quiet kid.” Quietness concealed the danger that was brewing below the surface. In this way, the quiet body is a relief valve in a system under pressure.

Relief Valve

School shootings are often read as a reactionary stance to being wronged and marginalized. A Deleuzian approach would suggest eschewing social scientific models of cause and effect in favor of understanding the function these youths serve within a larger system. In many ways these youths function as a relief valve. Relief valves work to limit and control pressure in a system. Relief valves open when there is a failure or malfunction in a system. Relief valves help divert excess energy in order to protect the larger system. This excess energy gets released outside of the closed system. In a pot of boiling water, for example, the lid lifts to pour excess steam and water out over the sides to expunge excess pressure and preserve the system. If the lid did not lift, the pot would explode. The relief valve then recloses once enough energy has been released for the system to function again. These students function as the valve through which the excess energy gets spit out. In this analysis the shooter's body, the gun, the bullet are not sources or causes, they are sites from which the excess energy flows to escape. The pathology, then, is not in the student shooter, but in the system itself.

Assemblage

When Jeremy shoots himself, the gun is not an accessory. The gun is part of the assemblage of the student shooter. It becomes part of his body. Jeremy "speaks" when he shoots himself, thereby making the gun his mouth. His spattered blood, the words. The gun is part of the becoming school shooter. The gun transforms the quiet, loner kid into the kid who is noticed, someone entirely different from before. When he shoots himself in front of his classmates, the social bears witness to psychic destruction, psychic

destruction that is a consequence of complex webs of the life of youth—chemical and biological factors, social pressures, anxieties, fears, plays of visibility and invisibility.

In the case of Jeremy, a student holds in his body trauma and isolation for which the “verbal” seems to offer nothing. Jeremy is tattooed with the social and upon that canvas he spills his own blood.

In an economy where the mouth rules, the desiring machine wants this kid to declare his vulnerability. Telling is considered healthy, socially acceptable—and the means of surveillance. His vulnerability circulates within an economy of vulnerability, which in turn is part of the surveillance war machine. Jeremy is especially dangerous because he was passing, he “seemed harmless.” In the system that demands a narrative and demands speech, quietly passing disrupts the affects of safety and security that flow within the surveillance machine.

At the same time that Jeremy’s action seems to stand outside the verbal economy (he does not articulate his vulnerability verbally), it still runs along the currents of the same system. It becomes a form of speech. His speech-act involves the spilling of blood because this is an available line of flight within the system. Maleness, whiteness blackboard, blood, school, body, suburbia, gun, and youth converge in the shooting event. The school shooter and the shooting event are produced within an economy of vulnerability that demands speech and for the war machine that surveils it.

School shooters deterritorialize speech and the mouth, revealing the connection that speech has to surveillance and violence. They move the speech event from the mouth to the body, to the assemblage of the school shooter, infected with environmental,

biological, and social factors leading to the event. Much like the unidentified trans* body that passes in the public restroom, the school shooter is a vector that changes and challenges the economy of vulnerability. The mouth, now manifested as a gun, is reterritorialized into an assemblage of body, machine, pathology. But the event of the shooting also accelerates the flow of the need to surveil once more. These bodies disobey the surveillance culture because they indeed accomplish their event. But the event also redirects and reinforces the need to surveil, reemphasizing the desire of the machine to hear one tell and produce his vulnerability. It creates the need within others to move toward speech. Reading the school shooter in terms of gun culture, troubled youth, or mental illness is a way the system tries to close over that wound again, preventing other lines of flight.

Conclusion

Let me be clear: I am by no means in favor of school shootings nor would I argue that fighting for rights for trans* bathroom access is not important. Instead, this chapter serves to cap off my consideration of trans* and quiet bodies in order to provoke and propel different ways of thinking about how both trans* bodies and quiet bodies come together in assemblages that order and surveil bodies. By considering a Deleuzian approach in my final chapter, my aim has been to further unhinge these bodies from traditional cultural readings.

By juxtaposing the school shooter and trans* student, I have run the risk of the reader hearing me suggest that the perpetrator of violence and the one who defies gender expectations are the same. Instead, I am calling the reader to consider the ways that the

school shooter's and the trans* student's relationship to the demand to name and speak in the bathroom are part of a larger machinic processes that needs the school shooter and the one who defies gender.

CHAPTER VII

EPILOGUE

Education must be understood as producing not only knowledge but also political subjects (Giroux, 1991, p. 47).

I purposely omitted an account of my own subjectivity at the beginning of this dissertation and avoided taking a first person standpoint. I have added it at the end as a coda. This move is not an attempt to minimize the importance of the way positionality figures in the scholarship one produces. One's positionality is a critical consideration not simply because it informs the research, but also because within the academy certain voices are resoundingly silent despite attempts to increase visibility. Academic writing has privileged white, middle class, heterosexist, cis-male perspectives. Narrative, ethnography, and critical storytelling have served as important interventions into such limited perspectives, as adding a multiplicity of voices can be a challenge to monolithic ideas of experience. Moreover, these techniques are important traditions that produce knowledges outside of the traditional Western canon. Storytelling and oral traditions disrupt the notion that reason and truth are what counts as real. For the purposes of my study, however, I intentionally wanted to defer the "I" from becoming the focus.

My hesitation, then, has been the way that first person narrative and interviews have taken on a commodified function within academic contexts. My project has in part

aimed to disrupt the epistemological privilege often granted first person narrative, as well as the notion that narrative gets us out of an epistemological bind. I wanted to defer the expectation that a first person narrative is necessary, or that it is something the reader/listener has a right to demand or expect. I have tried to show that the taken-for-granted way narrative, voice, and speech have been culturally privileged is conditioned by a political economy—one governed by the sign and located in the mouth. I am concerned about replicating this economy by providing an account of myself—that it might reinforce assumptions about who tells, who consumes, who produces. Much as the camera in *Elephant* refuses to follow any single character’s story, I would hope the reader would view this Epilogue as another framing among the many that comprise this dissertation.

I have always been a “quiet” student. I was dedicated, earned high grades, was friendly with my classmates, yet each quarter of middle school I wondered which of my teachers would assign me an A alongside the inevitable, “very quiet, seldom contributes.” This seemed to be their favorite piece of constructive criticism (drawn, of course, from the handy list of personalized comments teachers could choose from on their Scantron grade sheet). Even as a middle-schooler, the way “quiet” and “contribution” were unquestionably linked always baffled me. My high school wind ensemble director made a comment during one of my competitions, “I never thought you’d amount to more than a quiet 3rd clarinetist.” This comment was made in a friendly, joking tone, since I had long since proven myself as a musician. Quietness, it was clear, was seen as a deficit, and it was something that I came to associate as part of my identity.

When I became a music teacher at a private, predominately white K-8 school, I was keenly aware of the “quiet” students. I paid close attention to the way other teachers talked about them. Behind the closed door of my own classroom, I aimed to let my “quiet” students “be,” not wanting to inflict on them the various forms of not so helpful “help” teachers had given me. Instead of forcing their voices, I tried to pay attention to the different ways they showed me their talents. James, one of the “space-cadets” (as I had been told by my colleagues), rarely spoke in class. When I offered him the position of stage manager for an entire musical production, however, he didn’t miss a single cue. He, like some of the other quieter male students, was viewed by some of the other teachers and students as a “sissy” and “fine, but not especially smart or talented.” That same year I also taught a student with “selective mutism.” Before her parents made the disclosure asking for accommodations, many teachers gave her a hard time and thought she was being defiant because she would not speak. It was only after a formal request for a learning disability accommodation that her teachers stopped harassing her and before she had a right *not* to speak.

My own “quietness” and silences were not very detrimental to my school experience, but I think I had a set of “lucky” circumstances. For me, being labeled “quiet” did come with a certain set of advantages. As authority figures tended to perceive me as “quiet” they simultaneously read my white, female, middle-class body as “docile” and “agreeable.” At the same time that quietness was perceived as a “lack of contribution,” my docility and choice of comportment fit well within white, suburban expectations for girls. I was “quiet,” which meant that I was “well-behaved” and a “good

girl.” I was experiencing what feminist scholars would describe as the intersectionality of identities (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). That is, identities cannot be viewed monolithically, nor can race, class, sexuality, and so forth be considered in isolation. I was living at a particular intersection that worked positively, for the most part. Had I been a black male at my predominantly white school, for example, I would likely have been perceived differently.

But I come from a line of “quiet” folks. My father is the one with whom I would commiserate when we seemed to meet yet another person who “talked a lot but said nothing.” But he too knew the importance of speech and often wished for me to adopt characteristics of extroversion to avoid invisibility. My grandmother (my dad’s mother), for her part, dropped out of school in the 9th grade because of her “shyness.” Her narrative and story are largely absent from the world. So, I wonder if that means that I am without a history. While sharing stories are no doubt part of the way one understands one’s history and influences what we know, how does one account for what never spoke nor was ever recounted in the first place?

So, I’ve become more engaged with my own journey to unravel and explore what might be operating in these contexts and how to trouble the “normality” of speech. I’ve begun to ask different questions: Is the notion of “voice” part of a Western apparatus of knowledge that sees speech as fundamentally liberating and an act of true agency and, in contrast, silences as mostly oppressive? If so, what can be gained by loosening the tie between liberation and voice? How are verbal silences productive, generative, and transformative opportunities?

Does a quiet student's "silence" make one a "quiet" student, or do other ways of being outside of silence participate in creating the "quiet" student? I recall some of my own learned practices: Sit towards the back of the room, don't sit up too straight, don't wear "loud" colors, don't draw attention to your body. This focus on bodily comportment suggests that the quiet student's *body* matters. These silent bodies are brought into being and subjected to regulatory regimes. Reda (2009) argues that if dialogue is central to liberatory education, then this privileges a particular type of pedagogy and a particular type of student. This is dangerous because in effect "liberatory" is being defined using a limited set of conditions that confine rather than include (p. 49). In these ways "speech [acts] as an examination, 'a normalizing gaze'" (p. 88). For instance, it locates speech alone as the site of liberation, and it normalizes a particular kind of subjectivity. That is, the type of subjectivity that is assumed is one bound by the skin and individually based. Subjectivity here does not include the body of the class, for example. If "I" speak, only "I" get credit for participation, not the classroom body, which helped me speak through its ears, its space.

I had originally thought I would examine course syllabi, teaching texts, and other sources to explore what is meant by "participation" in education, how the knowledge of what "participation" means is constructed, and the ways in which the demand to speak operates in the production of particular types of subjects. But I found the role of speech and narrative production to be undertheorized. Thinking in terms of identities, even complex intersectional identities, was not sufficient. I have attempted to theorize the

political economy and machinic assemblage within which narratives and speech are normative.

The demand to speak is enforced by a variety of disciplinary systems in education. Many educators view students' verbal participation in the classroom as part-and-parcel of the learning process. Evaluating and calculating participation grades is common practice in higher education. In a recent essay published in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Brian Croxall shares his own detailed grading procedures for student participation, and invites others to share their comments. One respondent, dn871263, shares:

I'm one of those that keeps a seating chart and makes a tick mark for each comment by a student, a **"star"** for each comment that shows the student has read the material beforehand, and a **"d"** for a class **disruption (talking to neighbors, letting the cell phone go off, doing crossword puzzles, passing notes, etc.)**. Students **start the semester with an "F"** in participation, and end up that way if they don't show up or **show up but don't speak**. At the end of the semester, I add the three components together and to 50%, the beginning score. Before adding [sic], I apply a weight to each of the three components (and each component is raised to a fractional power), with a negative weight for disruptions, and work with the weights and the powers until the grades across students correspond to what I think each student should have received. Thus, students who participate more, and with more preparation, will always receive better participation [sic] grades, although there are diminishing returns. Those who talk just to talk will do better than those who make fewer comments, but not much better, and they won't do as well as those who make fewer, but well-prepared comments... The point system is rational [sic], data-based, and encourages class participation and preparation. I just point to my tick marks, stars, and disruption notes, and the student has no argument. The downside, of course, is that I have to make all the little marks, which is a bit intrusive. (bold my emphasis, Croxall, 2010).

Despite the commentator's claim that his system is "rational" and "data-based," his final calculation comes down to a subjective gut feeling in which he computes the grade

“until the grades across students correspond to what I think each student should have received.” While I am sure that critical pedagogues would not applaud this instructor’s tactics, he does point to implicit conceptions of participation that are shared by good educators too. There is no shortage of research on diversity of learners and techniques for encouraging different styles of participation. Universities have teaching and learning centers that offer resources that encourage instructors to consider this research. K-12 teachers are educated in methods courses that address the importance of this research as well. But none of this research considers the relationship that is strongly felt to exist between speech and participation. Where does this feeling come from? Why is the subjective experience of “the grade I think each student should have received” so seamlessly linked to speaking? The grade is based on how the instructor feels about any particular student’s participation, not on any particular content. Thus it is essential to interrogate the political economy that drives this feeling. The affective experience of “knowing” a student’s participation grade is a product of systems that extend beyond the classroom and beyond education. It is produced through a political economy that valorizes the verbal and the mouth.

I have also become interested in the intersections of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with Educational Studies. At the same time I was trying to understand the political economy of speech as it relates to liberatory projects in critical pedagogy, I was also considering LGBTQ issues in schools. I found that trans* students have become a major topic of conversation. Universities are making overt structural changes to address the needs and concerns of trans* students. Trans* students have also become

visible in K-12 schools. Conservative forces, like California assemblyman Donnelly in Chapter 5, are resisting efforts to make schools inclusive of trans* people while others are fighting for trans* access and rights. This “new” marginalized position is evolving, and trans* subjectivity has emerged as a site of recent study. Trans* studies has become a discipline in its own right, with departments beginning to form that focus specifically on trans* studies.

And trans* scholarship, like other liberatory projects, sees uncovering lost narratives as the critical first political step. If one looks at the change in the *Transgender Studies Reader* from volume one in 2006 to volume two in 2013, the trajectory is explicitly stated by Stryker (2013): “The first iteration of the field [transgender studies] engaged in the kind of identity politics necessary to gain speaking positions within discourse, and consequently featured a good deal of autoethnography and self-representational work by trans subjects” (p. 3). I wonder, however, what it means for these narratives to be revealed. There are always stories absent, no matter the number told. What of those? In a discipline dedicated to the project of social change and greater equity, how can we understand these always already lost stories?

Dean Spade (2006), for example, employs a first person narrative in his account of trying to access sex reassignment surgery (SRS) in L.A. in his article “Mutilating Gender.” While utilizing narrative, Spade also challenges narrative. He notes how on the one hand narratives have been used by disciplinary power (e.g., health care industry, psychological services) to normalize the narratives that trans* people can tell (because to not tell the right story means being denied surgery/hormones). Trans* people, for

example, are expected to produce a narrative of gender bending or confusion as a child, thus producing notions of childhood and gender in their own right. Knowledge of the “proper” narratives, however, are well known among the trans* community and are also utilized (whether these stories reveal the “truth” or not) to access what one needs.

Narratives that deviate from the “typical” narrative, by contrast, help expand the canon of what counts as a trans* narrative.

Spade recounts how he was often told by his therapist that he was “intellectualizing” too much (p. 321). When asked how and when he knew he was different as a kid (with the implicit expectation that his difference must have been solely gender related), Spade answered with the ways his social class, for example, marked him as different. His challenges to the necessary stories, however, also proved a threat to his ability to access a diagnosis and thus surgery. He had one meeting with a psychologist who determined at the end of the session that he was not transsexual (p. 324).

A Final Word

Speech and narratives are produced for and serve people other than those who are telling. My aim has not been to argue that the voices of marginalized groups in the classroom are unimportant, or that trans* folks stories have no political significance. Rather, I have tried to consider why and how participation, true dialogue, and empowerment become *synonymous* with the verbal. I focused on quiet/silent students and trans* students because limiting the discussion to trans* students alone left open the possibility of the project being read as about particular identity categories, while focusing solely on quiet/silent students risked a dis-embodied reading of my theorization of voice.

As a project influenced by Derrida's critique of phonocentrism and deconstructionist analyses, my strategy has blurred boundaries between disciplines and theoretical approaches. A critique of political economy, influenced by Baudrillard, helped connect speech to broader ideological processes and apparatuses. But I have also shown, through a Deleuzian analysis, that the cult of the verbal, the demand to speak, and the economy of vulnerability are embodied and circulate within a system of seemingly disparate elements.

Often, liberatory projects are assumed to stand outside of or to act as a counter force to oppressive regimes. Through this dissertation, however, I hope to have shown that despite our best intentions, these projects can at times help to install oppressive forces in their own right. That is, coming into speech and voice, too, operate within a demand—one that understands silence as absence and absence as an impossible political stance. Moreover, absence (or anti-presence) is positioned as without a history. If one never becomes a speaking subject or the subject of another's speech, they are an object. What stories can we tell of the anti-subject?

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