TEXTURED IMPRINTS: IMAGES, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND CULTURAL MEMORY

by

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Abstract

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In this thesis I attempt to better understand the relation between image/texts and practices of social change by considering how two change practices take up images to connote particular meanings. I explore the range of relations produced by and through two different political movements which engage commemorative practices: HIV testimony and the Women’s Monument Project, a feminist public art project to commemorate the Montreal Massacre. My discussion focuses on how HIV testimony and the Women’s Monument Project consider relations between self, other and community produced in the dynamic between image/texts and cultural memory. My discussion of cultural image/texts considers my own and other’s stakes and investments embedded in their production. My reflections throughout these pages ponder how notions of knowledge and perception shape, and might have a role in recasting, relations with an other.
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I would have given up long ago without ongoing encouragement and support from a far from Damion Dooley. Local conversation and adventures with Beth Easton fed my spirit and imagination. As well, many OISE partners in crime offered ongoing insight and laughter over Szechwan dinners, social gatherings, and strike-related events.

And finally my thanks to my supervisor Kari Dehli whose insight, editing suggestions, and unexpected support calls make this thesis a richer and more interesting piece.
Memories, experiences
why don’t they talk?
Images leave me hungry

I can’t touch them
or feel their breaths
I want smells
to fill my room
soft and hard sweats

Words to touch skin
to swallow saliva
I need pictures
that have
headaches and diarrhea
when only blank walls speak back to me.

(Opal Palmer Adisa, 1992, 24)
introduction

a gateway

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are.

(Foucault, 1982, 216)

Two years ago I entered graduate school after a six year involvement with issue-based community work. This decision manifested through my ongoing struggle to stay up to date on recent theoretical developments in cultural studies and sociology, reading I felt as essential to refine my understanding of the social and political issues related to the fields in which I worked. Admittedly, though, this return to graduate school was also an attempt to seek a refuge of sorts, to allow myself time for thorough reflection and theoretical development.

Many of my academic colleagues, after hearing that I was involved with AIDS education, assumed that I considered myself an activist. Although my work over the years encompassed two ‘activism-based’ fields - women’s health and HIV/AIDS public education - I struggled with the notion of social change and my own investments in it, especially in the AIDS community where professionalization was becoming more the norm than activism.
Many of us doing AIDS work came to realize that its activism was in need of redefinition. The terms for constituting AIDS programs had shifted from the early days of the epidemic when struggles for basic government funding and recognition were backed by ongoing public displays of strength and anger to expose injustices (more recent struggles over funding continue from a more established base and, therefore, on different terms). The AIDS education I was involved in, in the early to mid 1990s, pulled from a range of practices (which included the occasional demonstration) in order to meet the demands of the non-profit, government and corporate sphere. Our work with corporations and other professional organizations required addressing issues in a way they would be heard, without overly compromising our demands. This required ongoing negotiation between our recommendation for a particular workplace and what was actually possible within the existing restraints of its policies and guidelines. Labeling this work as social change seemed too simplistic, it only partially described what I thought we were trying to accomplish. One piece of this thesis, then, attempts to better understand how the meanings ascribed to practices of change vary depending on their location and how they are taken up within that location.

I am specifically interested in how change practices take up images to inscribe or contend particular social and political meanings. Part of my community work involved producing ‘resources’ with various juxtapositions of image and text. This included curriculum, educational resources, posters, brochures, information displays, public art displays, a cultural exchange workshop, and risk reduction packages. My attempts raised many
questions about how such products/productions might be received. In fact the number of considerations which I took into account seemed unachievable and debilitating at times. What significance was I placing on these resources? How did I imagine they might influence attitudes about AIDS and support toward PWA’s? It is through my recollection of this work, coupled with an interest in images, that I expanded my initial interest in social change practices to include the image/text relation.

When presenting HIV/AIDS testimony or documentary-style videos during workshops to audiences I again became curious about the possibilities of visually-based pedagogies that claim or are claimed by subordinated groups. How might they be presented in a way which encourages ethical and responsible action in the viewer/listener? I came to wonder how a pedagogy which includes personal testimony, or video, might engage an audience in a way which makes possible an engagement that considers the others singularity. Throughout this thesis I explore the notion of the image/text relation to challenge my understandings of the hidden implications of representing politically and socially disavowed issues and groups be they AIDS, homelessness, or violence against women.

My early questions in my first semester of graduate school were related to the perception of difference. How is difference understood and conceptualized in pedagogies that call for transformation of the very relations that make this category intelligible? After a first year of trial and error, I settled in to explore my own and others’ attempts at current social change practices, with a keen interest to consider the relationship between images, cultural/collective memory and community development.
In the following chapters I seek to broaden my understanding of the relationship between image/texts and practices of social change. In its pages I reflect and theorize on the meanings produced when images, practices of social change and cultural memory intersect in sites of shared attention. I ask how socially excluded groups take up image/texts to connote change, and the ethical and political relations these produce for the viewer, by engaging and commenting on the meanings produced by and through the image/text relations of HIV/AIDS testimony, and the Women’s Monument Project, a recent piece of commemoratory public art.

What is an image/text? Edelman (1995, 5) complicates the notion of issue-based image/texts when he states: “(images) offer conceptions and perceptions that can be adopted or changed to fit needs, fears, interests, or aspirations . . . (there is) no neat correlation between images and political ideas . . . There can be no conception without some kind of shared objectification to symbolize it in the form of images or discourse.” In this thesis, image/text connotes the dynamic relations which exist between images, texts, artistic/authorial intentions and viewer relations. It recognizes their intertextuality, how artistic ideas are themselves formed by and through image/texts of books, film, painting, popular culture, activism, among many others, and it acknowledges how contradictory perceptions might exist simultaneously.

The image/text relation is therefore a key theoretical notion from which to explore the relations produced by and through seemingly divergent texts of HIV/AIDS testimony and the Women’s Monument Project. As image/texts, both practices represent sites where the
listener/viewer is implicated in a relation of interpellation as they are called into being, in a variety of effective and less effective ways, as political and ethical subjects. As such each are sites of transaction, a staging in which the viewer/reader is part of the performance of meaning. Patti Lather describes this process as one in which we shape and are shaped by the world around us. Bakhtin's work reveals more about the cognitive process of how: 'Every utterance is inherently dialogic meaning that we are always speaking through an other (Bakhtin, 1981, 293). I am curious about how this 'speaking through an other' shapes relations to self by and through the telling and hearing of subjugated stories, especially tellings which relate traumatic experiences.

How we see the world around us is constituted by and through 'pictures'.
(Mitchell, 1994, 41)¹

Mitchell works with the concept image/text to illustrate how tensions which exist between visual and verbal representations are inseparable from struggles in cultural politics and political culture. He claims that the interaction between pictures and texts is: "constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no 'purely' visual or verbal arts" (1994, 5). How might stories from socially excluded peoples told by and through image/texts shape and by shaped by conceptions of self and other and what impact do they have on how such stories inhabit everyday practices? How might ethical and political subjects

¹ I bring many styles of writing into the thesis in an attempt to create an open text. By introducing a variety of image/texts into these pages, it is my hope to provoke a range of contradictory readings for the reader to both challenge and attend to my commentary. I pull from a number of forms which include: repetition, reflection, description and reflection on my own experiences, literary quotes from contemporary authors and poets and some pictures. This attempt is admittedly an experiment.
produced in and through an image/text relation influence one's sense of responsibility and obligation when face to face with an other?

Edelman cautions against drawing a straight line between the authorial intentions of an artwork and its interpretation. This is key for understanding why I have chosen to frame this exploration around the image/text relation. Since image/texts are: "highly mediated and densely coded, they are dynamically produced in the act of representation and reception and already subject to grids of meaning imposed upon them by culture, history, language (Solomon-Godeau, 1991, xxviii), which implies that the relationship between the viewer and the image/text takes on new meaning when situated historically. This has further significance when one takes into account how current notions of knowledge and perception effect how one 'sees' and recognizes an other.

This writing also explores the relation between image/texts and cultural memory for reconfigured possibilities for social change practices through a consideration of how fantasy and desire influence every day notions of perception and action (Edelman, 1995, 8). How might the inter-relations between image/texts and memory influence perceptions of discrimination and prejudice? If we take into account diverse figurations for seeing the world around us, how might this affect our sense of ourselves, our responsibilities and our relations with those who have come into being in ways different then one's own?

I turn to image/texts simply because of the multiple meanings they are capable of producing within and beyond their frames. In this way they do not reject the emotional,
and poetic realm of existence, rather it is within these realms, as within the cognitive and the discursive, that their many readings/viewings are derived. In Chapter One I relate a discussion which took place between Carol Becker and Herbert Marcuse on political art. Marcuse makes a call for an artwork which uses an aesthetically challenging form to effect an estrangement of the viewer. Along similar lines, Edelman (1995) claims how direct efforts to inscribe political meaning are likely to be less effective than indirect modes. He also discusses how emotion effects perception: "seeing is based on expectations more than on observation... What is expected guides what is noticed, how it is interpreted, and what is ignored... Although we see largely what we think we know exists, what we “know” is often wrong, especially so in politics" (1995, 16). He troubles the linear assumptions which surround knowledge production in an attempt to reduce their domination. Of course, there is no way to limit the range of associations and interpretations which image/texts engender but nevertheless, Becker and Edelman make evocative points for issue-based art brought into being through rational, linear frames. In social change practices the terms for effecting a sense of estrangement in a viewer, which also call into question the terms of a self/other relation, have yet to be thought through. In the following pages I explore how the relation between image/texts and notions of collective and cultural memory might play a role in producing such an estrangement.

I will assess a variety of theories which explore the relationship between the viewer/reader and the image/text. How might image/texts inspire the development of ethical and political pedagogies in spaces of shared attention? How are such relations considered in current social movements? How do representations from subordinated
groups evoke memories formed by and through image/texts of a particular time and place? Both HIV testimony and the WMP are vehicles to explore how meaning is made in the relation between image/texts, memory, and community. Each are speech acts constituted by and through cultural memories which exceed existing frames of remembrance and: “take the teller and hearer beyond his/her personal experience to contextualize it in community, in a narrative of shifting and opposing dimensions of time and place” (Avni, 1995, 207). As image/texts which speak to a time beyond now they create a gateway for a discussion on the role of non-directive strategies which may only be accessible through a rethought affect realm - a realm which considers ambiguity, illusion and ambivalence as valid pedagogical and political practices.
Monuments exist in the symbolic realm and when there is a social crisis the symbolic realm becomes subject to evaluation.

(Zerubavel, 1994)
I'm standing at the foot of the AIDS memorial in Cawthra Park behind 519 Church St., a community centre in the gay ghetto of Toronto.

its semi-circle path weaves through pillars weighted with the names of the AIDS dead, this path calls me, beckons me to move through its past on present terms,

How will this cultural memory shape my memory and identifications? In AIDS work death came in waves, sometimes as many as four known deaths in a month, always crashing down in silence. I did my best to avoid them. Every once in a while I could feel the dead roaming the hallways screaming for recognition. How does one commemorate this pain? this loss? these shadows of spirit?

Now that I'm living a different narrative requiring a different performance how will this monument speak to me? Which meanings are rendered here?
"Didn’t you hear . . . ?

Every week he volunteered on reception, tossing jokes. I got to know him because he wanted to talk with highschool students about living with AIDS,

when I arrive on palliative care his friend, one of a constant vigil of friends, is standing at the foot of his bed massaging his feet. I see out of the corner of my eye how they both notice me as I mistakenly walk by looking for his room. As I turn around I hear him ask his friend if someone from the organization was here, meaning that he’s not sure I will come in for a visit. Have I been so transparent about not knowing how to do this?

After our visit we both know he will never talk in highschools. I struggle with my emotions as I leave and walking the three blocks back to the office where everything is as it was. Where now I know to ask about the missing bodies.

A week later I hear that he’s hanging on, hasn’t been able to figure out why. It turns out that a priest once told him gay men burn in hell and he can’t shake it. After another refutes this claim, he dies that evening.
How does the past ask us to re-think the terms on which we define ourselves in the present?

I read all the names, one after the other, aloud in my head, first and last names, thinking how they are all so young.
What does it mean to know this name only as a name of AIDS? Who were you when you weren’t wearing the AIDS label? Where you ever able to put it aside?

I know the woman before me now, she’s surrounded by roses.

I’m in a small town in northern B.C. The woman who picks me up at the airport is nervous, doesn’t know what to say. I do the talking ask about the area, the workshop how many people. Despite my attempts to chat, she drives me directly to the hotel and drops me off, alone, avoiding the usual invitation to dinner. It feels like it was ‘AIDS’ that got in the way. The next day I find out her friend’s eight year old son is positive - they’ve known for four years but still haven’t found a way to tell him.
I want to explore the intertextuality of commemorative narratives to consider how the past is actually remembered, forgotten and understood - collective memory - not entirely fluid, continuously negotiating between available historical records and current social and political agendas - shifts its interpretation, selectively, emphasizing, suppressing and elaborating different aspects of those records. (Zerubavel, 1994)

Can a static form represent the fluidity of identity and memory - the notion of plural selves which Lorde speaks of? What would it mean for this memorial to include the unnoticed deaths of women who died early on in this epidemic, in '81, '82, '83, '84?
what does it mean to be faced with a history you cannot acknowledge without destroying yourself?
chapter one
marker of change

The circle, the symbol used by women for centuries to represent a continuum, a non-hierarchical way, is one of the major elements in this proposal for the Women's Monument. It is a symbol of woman's spirit as opposed to the line, cross or phallic shaft representing patriarchy.

(Alber, February, 1995)

Art should be recognized as a major and integral part of the transaction that engenders political behaviour ... its crucial feature is that it supplies images that construct the worlds in which we act.

(Edelman, 1995, 2, 3)

When personal memories of public events are shared, their meaning changes.

(Sturkin, 1997, 3)

In her book, The Subversive Imagination (1994), Carol Becker outlines how little discussion has taken place on what constitutes politically engaged artwork. She describes how the label 'political art' is often assigned to confrontational works which tend to favor an issue over the form of the artwork, often disregarding how it will be taken up. The assumption made by cultural producers, she claims, is that the audience will be forced into a self-reflexive stance when the piece confronts them within and through rational frames with political issues. Her early theoretical discussions with Herbert Marcuse helped her begin to recognize how artwork which presents a literal interpretation of social and political injustices is often implicated in reinstating the very relations the artist set out to disrupt. Marcuse proposed what he saw as a solution.
He claimed that to counter this phenomena an artwork needs to use its form and content to effect an estrangement of the reader. He imagined an: "aesthetically challenging form that would push the viewer . . . to a more complex, more emotional, or revelatory understanding of the problems posed by the work" (Becker, 1994, 122).

Although Marcuse has been widely criticized for his romantic assumptions about a unified subjectivity (Becker, 1994), which are directly related to the post war context in which he worked, he poses interesting questions for the image/text relation. In effect, he claims that producing meaning by and through illusive or ambivalent image/texts is a more effective way to address 'sticky' political issues. According to Becker the notion of a poetics of public art - one which considers the non-literal and the symbolic realm in social change practices - remains unexplored in the literature. Throughout this thesis I intend to explore the possibility of Marcuse's claim while, in this chapter, considering a number of issues related to the production and viewing of the Women's Monument Project (WMP), a work of public art to commemorate the women murdered in the Montreal Massacre, on December 6, 1989.

I remember the day in 1989 when fourteen women (Genevieve Bergeron, Helene Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Barbara Maria Klueznik, Maryse Laganiere, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michele Richard, Annie St-Arneault, Annie Turcotte) were murdered by Mark Lepine. At the time I commuted daily to my contract position at a women’s health collective. Staggered by the morning news of the massacre, I left the house feeling dazed and uneasy. I eyed each new passenger with suspicion as the bus stopped along
route; I was irrationally terrified that something might happen again. That night my lover claimed the massacre was an aberration. We argued - me trying to change his mind. As I read more about the massacre I remembered my own encounter as a twelve year old girl, when the man, whose family I occasionally baby-sat for in the evenings, offered me 'extra' money as he drove me home. Me, too young to understand the terms of the extra cash, accepted his offer. On the way home, he pulled into a park, shut off the car lights and handed me a twenty. I refused to take it (having realized on the way to the park that he meant something more then extra babysitting hours) and somehow managed to talk him out of it. I was fortunate that he listened. I know now that this fortune was written all over my body.

Commemorative public art has the potential to reveal our present relation to social and political issues through recognition of past events. It manifests particular 'social grammars' of sameness and difference as they are conceptualized by and through the claims of the communities which organize the terms of their encounter. Simon frames this as a dialectical process: "commemoration... is intended to be a practice which enables a living memory, one that dialectically presses on one's sense of future purposes and possibilities" (1994, 8). However, as Simon also makes clear, the presence of commemorative artwork in the public sphere does not guarantee integration of the issues they address into collective memories and communal identities, let alone conduct and practice. My discussion of the Women's Monument Project will consider these issues while exploring notions of the image/text relation - a dynamic relation which creates meaning in and through the monument's form, text, artistic intentions, and its viewing. I
will consider how the terms of its call for social change effect the development of political and ethical subjectivities and their integration into cultural and collective memory. Which meanings are inscribed by and through the image/text relation of the monument to call the viewer to read the piece on particular terms? Throughout this chapter, I consider the WMP on a number of different levels: the organization of its encounter; the viewer relations produced by and through the image/text relation; and, finally, how it is situated within notions of public art and collective memory. By way of highlighting these themes I enter in with a specific question: How might this remembrance inspire the formation of ethical and political subjectivities committed to work actively for change in the policies and practices which contribute to violent acts against women?

This inquiry stems from my long standing interest in the relationship between cultural production, social justice, and community development. It fits within my overall aim in this thesis: to explore the relationships produced between viewers and image/texts which represent social and political issues of socially excluded groups. In this chapter I hope to begin to unravel the relationship between feminist identity politics and image/texts. Doing so may be a step toward seeing how socially excluded bodies are marked and mark themselves in particular ways by and through productions of knowledge and culture.

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2 Marita Sturkin (1997, 3) uses the term 'cultural memory' to describe memory which is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning. For example, the WMP is an artwork in which personal memories are shared by and through a monumental form which is considered to have cultural meaning. Sturkin pays heed to the self-consciousness, "with which notions of culture are attached to these objects of memory" which lead her to use the term 'cultural' rather than 'collective' memory (1995, 3). She continues: "This process does not efface the individual but rather involves the interaction of individuals in the creation of cultural meaning. Cultural memory is a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history" (1997, 1).
Within this context of commemorative practices, ethics, and viewer relations I consider the contradictory stakes and investments for cultural producers (artists, teachers, writers), and viewers, to produce an ethical (symbolic) practice, one which may call for a reconsideration of the relationship between knowledge, perception, and responsible action. Ultimately, I hope to pose questions for an ethical pedagogy for social change, one which encourages the construction of active viewers in the public sphere. Key to this, is the relation between the viewer/reader and the image/text.

Giroux, in his foreword to Cultural Pedagogy, describes pedagogy as a “form of political and cultural production deeply implicated in the construction of knowledge, subjectivities and social relations . . . it involves analyzing the production and representation of meaning and how these practices, and the practices they provoke are implicated in the material and ideological dynamics of social power” (Trend, 1992, vii). Along similar lines, toward a consideration of reading practices and viewer relations, I work with the notion of representation as one that stretches beyond a particular image/text under consideration toward “a kind of activity, process, or set of relationships . . . (to think of) representation, not as a thing, but as a process in which the thing (artwork) is a participant . . .” (Mitchell, 1994, 420 parenthesis added). My questions exploring the relationship between image/text and viewers, then, will be considered by and through the WMP which produces a range of social and political relations for a historically situated viewer.
As collective memories formed within and through commemorative public art are shaped by the experiences and identities of the rememberers (Young, 1993, 54), I will begin with some background information on the organizers of the WMP. I will then consider the monument in relation to the historical context of public art and memorial practices in Canada.

The Women’s Monument Project occupies a unique space within the tensions surrounding public art and its relation to perception, knowledge, and responsible action. Its stated role is twofold: It exists first as an ‘educational claim’ which calls for change to the persistent and pervasive acts of violence which occur each year in Canada, by men, against women; second, the monument “is a national symbol of remembrance, of healing and of change . . .” (‘How It Began,’ WMP, 1997) to commemorate the massacre of fourteen young women at L’ecole Polytechnique in Montreal on December 6, 1989. It is the first attempt at a permanent, national symbol to commemorate violence from a feminist perspective in Canada (at the project’s inception it was the first of its kind in the world). Early on, the organizers struggled to gain funding from established public art sources (city, public, corporate), but when they found out that these sources would not meet their financial goals they devised a creative, though exhausting, fundraising plan: they solicited donations from women who belong to feminist associations or subscribe to feminist publications. Within five years the organizers secured donations from over seven thousand women. They also received funding from the city of Vancouver, the VanCity Credit Union, and BC Hydro.
The project was inspired, soon after the massacre, by a women attending Capilano College in North Vancouver, who realized how little attention is given in the public sphere to extreme acts of violence toward women. She wrote a proposal to the college Women’s Centre Steering Committee to “create a project to remember the fourteen murdered women at Montreal’s L’Ecole Polytechnique and all women who are victims of violence” (‘How It Began,’ WMP, 1997). Over the years women have volunteered their time (with one paid staff person) to develop the project, raise funds, obtain a site, and devise the National Design Competition. In July, 1993, the Vancouver Park Board donated the site of Thornton Park in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DES). Ninety-eight women responded to the National Design Competition in 1994 and a diverse jury of seven Canadian women: artists, writers, human rights advocates, and an architect were commissioned to review the design submissions, choosing from among the three finalists, Beth Alber’s Marker For Change (‘Giving Voice’, WMP, 1997). Throughout this process the project organizers faced unrelenting, and hateful opposition from outspoken media representatives.

Two salient questions immediately arise when considering the WMP. How is this monument situated in the history of ‘public art’? How does Beth Alber, the Toronto-based artist, use image and text to confer both commemorative and social change issues in the monument? In Canada, public monuments typically depict iconoclastic images of
state leaders, war heroes or the bronze memorial form. Lewis outlines how the discourses of visibility, permanence and change surround this form of artwork (1992, 29). Central to Alber’s design was finding a way to disrupt the traditional memorial form. She writes in her artist’s statement how she designed the monument to disrupt this history, and that of the war monument genre, through her use of horizontal circles rather than vertical forms. Yet, Lewis mentions how the monument is “always more and less than the figure which it ostensibly represents,” it is not uncommon for a monument to go unnoticed through their silence in their assigned landscapes yet still produce identification and memory (1992, 29). A question, then, which I will address later in this chapter is which identifications and memories are remembered on this particular site?

In order to better understand the relation between the WMP and its position within the genre of public art, I outline only a limited history of this genre as it is beyond the scope of this chapter to pursue a more detailed historical analysis. The term ‘public art’ is relatively recent in Canada. After a momentary appearance in the early 1970s it did not gain extensive use, for most people, until the 1980s. Today, there is still little agreement on its terminology. It is referred to as ‘art in public places’, ‘publicly funded art’, ‘issue-based community art’, ‘new genre public art’ and ‘site specific installation.’ Each reference implies the philosophy of the artists and indicates who is funding the project. The latter three terms are often used by artists involved in community-based projects who want to take action around particular social and political issues affecting the communities in which they live. For instance, some ‘new genre public artists’ have
organized communities around artworks which depict homelessness in New York City, or environmental issues in Chicago, through collaborative process.

Many artists working within the 'public art' genre resist pressure to articulate and define categories for their practices as this, some feel, would feed into the agendas and discourses which disavow their work. From this perspective, many public artists support the recent departure from the 'canon in the park art' (Lacy, 1995, 4). Raven describes how the statue/memorial syndrome of ‘public art’ was replaced by abstract sculpture in the 1960s and 70s. The 1980s brought new forms such as: street art, guerrilla theatre, video, page art, billboards, protest actions and demonstrations, oral histories, . . . posters, murals, paintings and sculpture which further expanded the genre (Raven, 1995). New public artworks in Canada today range from exceptional and imaginative styles to drier, less innovative sculptural forms. It is not necessary to augment each style of work for this discussion, other than to acknowledge how guerrilla theatre, for example, differs from a public monument in what it demands from its viewers. It is infinitely easier to pull a viewer into an active role during street theatre than while they are viewing a monument.

Compared to the United States, little has been written or documented on ‘public art’ in Canada. This silence might reflect the lack of visibility given to independent and experimental artists, who address political issues in their work, in the mainstream press. Lambton (1994) provides a glimpse into the historical relationship between public art and

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3 Personal conversation with the Project Coordinator at the Women’s Monument Project Office, Capilano College, North Vancouver.
Canadian cities by noting that most of the art that entered into the ‘public’ spaces of Canadian cities between the 1950s and 1980s was publicly funded. However, after W.W.II ‘public artists’ witnessed a drastic reduction in the number of commissions offered to women. Lambton speculates on how this absence played a formative role for the current climate of public art: “. . . as the Royal Commission on the Status of Women pointed out, the new commercialism that arose in the 1950s placed art in a value context not unlike that of the stockmarket” (1994, page). As art gained commodity status and, in turn, attracted capitalist investment, ‘public art’ advisory committees began to spring up across Canada embodying a mostly white, male, middle to upper-class membership (Lambton, 1994). This process still operates today, where the terms and conditions set by selection committees determine whose art gains access to public and commercial spaces. This history reveals how selection processes for ‘public art’ are framed in a language of commodity which, in turn, influence the range of readings and viewer relations produced by and through the artwork to particular terms. This affects artists and audiences by regulating whose values, notions of beauty, and political issues enter into public spaces. The WMP, having gained access to a public space previously denied them, has succeeded in churning up this discriminatory history, but not without undue duress for the organizers.

The most common style of public art, and one most connotated in public monuments, is that of the war memorial as memories of the war dead claim the majority of Canadian ‘public art’ space. Winter’s (1995) analysis is interesting for what it reveals about repeated themes between past and present commemorative practices. For example, he
discusses how after at the end of the first world war commemoration became an act of citizenship: "To remember was to affirm community, to assert its moral character, and to exclude from it those values, groups or individuals that placed it under threat" (80). As such commemoration is a political act. Saying so is a first step in recognizing the variety of ways in which subjects are interpellated by and through the meanings produced in commemorative artworks, meanings which are never neutral. He also points out how these artworks are surrounded by public spectacle and are recognized as places where people can mourn and be seen as mourners. This adds a performative dimension to the viewing process. He lists essential components of war monuments and the ceremonies which surround them to further reinforce the notion of the past repeating itself through the present: "(there are) two essential components of these ceremonies: the public recognition, and the mediation through ritual, of bereavement; and the appeal to the living to remember the dead by dedicating themselves to good works among their fellow men and women. Grief and indebtedness, sadness and personal commitment are the pillars of local commemoration" (Winter, 1995, 97). War memorials had, and continue to have, great personal meaning for their grieving public, meanings which move beyond their static, imperial, forms. They are sites for communities to recognize and constitute themselves as communities by and through the act of mourning their dead. Membership in 'the community', then, is assessed by and through the terms of these losses. The WMP make similar tropes visible in print materials. The organizers describe their vision of the site as a place for people, those affected by violence and their supporters, to gather for commemorative rituals and to mourn lost lives. Along with the war memorial, the monument's dedication makes an appeal to the living to remember the dead by
dedicating themselves to ‘good works’ toward change. It evokes a sense of community and belonging.

Alber’s design proposal describes the piece as a marker of change to create a feeling of rest and contemplation and to have a questioning appearance. Her design places fourteen pink granite benches around a three hundred foot diameter circle surrounded by paving tiles inscribed with the names of over seven thousand financial contributors. (Figure One) On the inner side of each bench will be one of the names of the fourteen murdered women. Every second bench will reveal the following dedication in one of seven languages, including Braille and raised lettering: “We, their sisters and brothers, remember, and work for a better world. In memory and in grief for all the women who have been murdered by men. For women of all countries, all classes, all ages, all colours” (Globe and Mail, November 23, 1994). Construction began in July, 1997. In her artist’s statement she describes her rationale for choosing this symbolic form:

...a circle (is) a symbol that has been used by women for centuries to represent a continuum, a non-hierarchical way...it is a symbol of woman’s spirit as opposed to the line, cross or phallic shaft representing patriarchy. All have equal seating in a circle and it is also associated with the idea of a protected or consecrated space. ...

Alber is making an appeal to notions of feminist equality. She claims the circle as a symbol capable of producing this meaning, (and these subjects), which she predicts will be widely recognized and understood within ‘feminist community’ as a marker of change. She makes several references to women in her description, as she does to
symbols of spirituality, equality, feminism, social change, and the notion of a safe or protected space. By connecting the “circle as a symbol . . . of women’s spirit,” I am asked to recognize this symbol as representative of women’s spiritual practices. However, the symbol of the circle alone can be taken up in a variety of ways, as any symbol can, some ways which are compatible, others contradictory to Alber’s intentions.

According to Jung’s (1964) work on symbols, circles are displayed in many creation myths and form patterns in religious images which serve as instruments of meditation (266). This alludes to Winter’s notion of war monuments representing a time and space for reflection and mourning - in this case for men and women to mourn violent acts against women. In Tibetan lamaism the circle takes the form of a mandala representing the cosmos in it relation to divine powers (268), the circle has also served as the ground plan of secular and sacred buildings in many civilizations, and such patterns can still be detected in cities around the world (Jung, 1964). Along with its meditative and sacred significance Jung associates the circle with archetypal images of unity between the body and spirit, connoting a totality of the psyche or a sense of wholeness (1964, 266). It is possible to read this sense of unity to reinforce notions of an essential or authentic self.

What does it mean to read Alber’s work through this frame? Alber makes clear that she intends the monument to refer to the great stone circles of the matriarchal societies of the iron age in England to signify equality and a rejection of patriarchy (Proposal, 1995) which sits in tension with how the circle is also widely used in Christian art, in stained glass windows and in the symbol of the halo surrounding Christ all of which conjure notions of moral goodness, justice, absolution and charity. (This might be another way in
which the monument links commemorative practices with a commitment from its viewers for ‘good works’ toward change.) Yet, the circle is also a symbol used widely in spiritual practices of First Nations people, and when I consider the WMP in relation to its site in Thornton Park in the Downtown Eastside (DES) which has a large First Nations population, the circle can also be seen to mirror the dynamic of marginalization which maintains the area as one the poorest neighbourhoods in Canada. I now diverge, for a moment, to introduce how processes of spatialization play out in the area, complicating the monument’s call for change.

In 1994, I moved into an apartment in Strathcona, a residential neighborhood that expands east off the boundary of the DES. Having lived in most other areas of the city, I noticed a distinct reaction whenever I mentioned where I lived. People would say: “Oh that’s a dangerous area” or “Do you feel safe living there?” In fact, Strathcona felt as safe to me as any other area in an urban centre. The difference, I determined, was its geographic location - situated next door to Chinatown and just in from Hastings Street - Strathcona conjured images of “skid row.”

I lived in Strathcona for two years before returning to school. On my daily walk down the two blocks from my apartment to Hastings Street, I witnessed professional and blue collar men cruise women for prostitution. Sometimes, while waiting for the bus on Hastings Street, they also cruised me, regardless of the time of day or what I was wearing. I learned not to look at them, if I did they slowed down and waited for me to

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4 A survey by Saturday Night Magazine (September, 1994) found the DES to have the lowest income per capita in Canada.
make an offer. The DES houses the highest rate of prostitution in the city. Due to gentrification and increasing numbers of men cruising, its main strip swells further east with each passing year.

Street nurses in the area, who presented at some of our AIDS trainings for home support workers, described the experiences of men and women who live in its hotels, dealing with addictions, and living prostitution. For the most part, the living conditions for people in the DES has attracted little attention from public officials and the media. The area, which encompasses Chinatown, houses the homeless, addicts (alcohol, cocaine, heroin), prostitutes, the poor, First Nations people, the mentally challenged, professionals and artists. The two or three blocks radiating from its main intersection overflow with slum hotels and taverns. For women who spend their days raising enough cash to eat, pay their hotel fee, and satiate the needs of their addictions, few ‘safe’ hotel rooms remain available at the end of the night when they finally get it together to pay for a room. After a day on the street they face further violence in the hotels themselves. Last year I interviewed a social worker who frequently visits women in their hotels. When I asked her about the housing situation in the DES she described how it is not uncommon for women to be sexually assaulted and raped in their hotel rooms with little to no recourse to the law. A conversation with a representative from the Downtown Eastside Residents Association adds complexity to the problem. He detailed for me how the permits and licensing department at Vancouver City Hall “try to stay on top of the issues” around housing in the DES. But because of a shortage of staff they do not always inspect all of the hotels in the area. The provincial residential tenancy act does not uphold city by-laws.
A 1990 report from the Vancouver Health Department determined that women in the DES have a life expectancy of nine years less than women in Vancouver overall. They are six times more likely to die a violent death and ten to twenty times more likely to be killed if they are between the ages of twenty and forty five. Deaths for First Nations women significantly outnumber white and Hispanic women.

Last summer I took a temporary position with the Ministry of Education and Training to assist people, who were being forced off welfare through recent government reforms, to upgrade their current level of skills: literacy, computer, arts or trades, in order to gain employment. The rationale behind the program (of which I was constantly reminded was irrefutable) was ‘to level the playing field’ of opportunity. I was placed in the DES in an office in the VIA Rail station which faced Thornton Park, the site for the WMP. Although I was not well suited for this position, it revealed to me just how discriminatory the Ministry’s policies were toward people living in the DES. In Ministry terms they are considered ‘unemployable’. In other words unless one can meet societal standards of employment, one is considered unfit for upgrading under the new policies. In effect, this office served as a facade for ‘equal opportunity’ by staffing five workers with invisible case loads.

While there I would often eat my lunch in Thornton Park, and I could see its day to day activities clearly from my office. The park has undergone a renovation of sorts in the last few years: new gardens were planted and regularly maintained, and new pathways
installed. Much of this was to accommodate a recent condominium development which went up across the street along with its accompanying services: Starbucks, Subway, a Credit Union and so on. However, many DES residents remain in the park and continue to ask tourists for money as they pass through. Some also sleep in the park if they can, or party there - it was not uncommon to find needles and condoms strewn across the grass in the morning. My point is that although the monument might offer a space for reflection for some, it might also be used to meet the needs of the people who frequent its space for purposes other than for mourning. Given that the organizers searched for some time to site the artwork, and were denied other more central locations, it is curious that this donated site, caught as it is within this dynamic of marginalization, was considered appropriate by the local Park Board.

The DES, in the early part of this century, was a black, working class neighborhood. In the last twenty years prostitution moved into the area when city bylaws were enforced which made it illegal to solicit in the downtown core of Vancouver. However, the city’s bylaws never moved prostitution out of the area and there it continues. What is maintaining these power relations? While assisting Dr. Sherene Razack on a research project theorizing spatial relations and prostitution, I gained some insight into how social and political relations maintain the area as a marginalized space. Work by critical geographers, who consider spatial relations in their work, discuss how injustices such as those witnessed in the DES might be maintained by systemic, interlocking, power relations. Goldburg (1993) discusses how spatial control is not simply a reaction to natural divisions and social pathologies but is constitutive of them. It is not uncommon
for marginalized places to be more strictly surveilled by law enforcement allowing “certain types of activity (to be) criminalized - hence conceived as pathological or deviant. . . It magnifies the image of racialized criminality, and it confines the overwhelming proportion of crimes involving the racially marginalized to racially marginal space” (Goldburg, 1993, 111). Anderson (1992) documents this in her detailed history on Chinatown in the DES which reveals a contradictory pattern of city by-laws which enforced the racialization of Chinatown based on notions of innate Chineseness. Shields (1991) elaborates on how one’s spaciality shapes one’s relationship to the world. He quotes Foucault who states: “The human body enters a spatial machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down, and rearranges it . . . The success of this arrangement thus depends on the coding of this space. In this manner, individuals and values become places and positions in a grid defined by power which are observed and administered with great efficiency” (1991, 41). In other words, labeling this space in relation to the supposed innate qualities of the people who live there, allow a particular set of power relations to be produced and reproduced. As Razack indicates, these relations and their effects are lived on the bodies of people who occupy these spaces. How is the WMP situated in this dynamic?

Each year a group of First Nations women hold a Valentine’s Day vigil where they walk through the streets and alleys in the area to mark the spaces where women have died or been victim of violent attacks. They do this to commemorate the lives of women from the area who were found murdered in alleys or reported being taken to alleys to endure violent attacks. On Valentine’s day, 1995, over one hundred people carried placards
which named over eighty women whose names they called out as they marched and stopped to mark alleys and spots in the doorways of hotels. According to an article in *Kinetics* (March, 1995), a bi-monthly publication from a feminist collective, many of the women commemorated were First Nations women who died alone. It would be fascinating to consider how the terms for a call to change differ in these two acts of commemoration, but for now it is enough to note the irony of how the WMP, commemorating the deaths of fourteen white women with no history in the DES, has landed here. The implications of this have been noted by the WMP organizers - they included a quote from the *Vancouver Sun* in their recent “Giving Voice” document on the number of women who died from violent attacks in the DES (one which unfortunately does not name who these women were). They also invited the organizers of the Valentine’s Day march to participate in the selection process, but they declined. The Park Board appears to have donated the site without taking this dynamic into account. Given the web of politics surrounding the siting of the piece at the time, the organizer’s felt they had little choice but to accept what was given to them. And although Alber’s design does produce a variety of readings in an attempt to avoid reinstating such dynamics she had to design the piece before it was sited.

Young states that monuments are: “points of reference creating an exchange beyond themselves, their sites, and the history of their sites . . . they make palpable memory” (1993, 103). Commemorating the deaths from the Montreal Massacre with a symbol

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5 See Sharon Rosenberg’s OISE PhD Dissertation: “Rupturing the Skin of Memory” for a more detailed analysis of this dynamic.
often used by First Nations people, without locating that symbol historically, could be seen to disregard the deaths of women in the DES. When situated within the politics of the site the form of the monument unfortunately mirrors the social and political relations which contribute to the subordination of women. The fact that Alber did not have a say in determining the site, she was working ‘blind’ to the site dynamics which complicate the placing the first piece of feminist public art in Canada. Would this same set of relations be present for a monument which did not represent socially excluded groups?

The ideologies surrounding art, and public art also influenced the climate in which Alber worked and, in turn, affect the range of viewer relations produced by and through the monument in this public space. One way this can be considered is to take into account how ideology restricts access to representations which address complex political issues through non-literal forms of expression. In designing the WMP Alber was also negotiating the relations of autonomous individualism which continue to influence how art is taken up and the role of the artist in communities. Although her practice intended to disrupt these relations the WMP was produced in a web of contradictory stakes and investments which position art as a ‘pure’ object untouched by moral or social issues. Categories of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art are one example of the art world’s categorical imperatives of legitimacy which continually disavow political public art ventures (Lacy, 1996). When considered alongside the long history of opposition to publicly acknowledge violence against women, the relations surrounding the monument’s installation are indeed complex and contradictory. Who will mourn on this site within the dynamic of this image/text relation?
Most public art committees in Canada, such as the one which approved the WMP, operate within a tension between ‘public art’ and private or gallery art (Bennett, 1995). How are notions of audience formulated within this tension? To generalize, museum discourses frame their public/audience as well-educated and art literate (Lambton, 1994). Bennett (1995) expands this into notions of class by showing how museums and art galleries, typically run by social elites, continue to play a role in differentiating elite from popular social classes. By implication this high/low binary situates ‘public art’ and its audiences as artistically unsophisticated. The notion of audience, then, is constituted by and through modernist discourses of art, aesthetics, and capitalist values which place a higher value on artwork viewed in gallery spaces. The web of politics surrounding the WMP and the hostile reaction from the media which met their initial request for public funds, are striking examples of this disavowal.

Given this web of tension, contradiction and investments whose bodies will attend the candlelight vigils the WMP organizers imagine on their site? Under which terms? Such questions are heightened by Zerubavel’s reminder of how commemorative narratives: “produce new images and themes to ‘fill in’ what the society perceives as history’s obvious gaps and silences, while glossing over those parts of the historical account that are deemed inconsistent with the desired ideological message” (1994, 91). The WMP unintentionally contributed to this selective attitude. How might those involved in the project and those of us who might grieve there disrupt the blood and gut relations which
perpetuate violence in the DES? Perhaps one way is to recognize that on this site mourning can only be understood when positioned in relation to these absences.

I once had the opportunity to sit on a ‘public art’ committee with artists and other community activists to plan an installation for World AIDS Day.⁷ We decided to exhibit a collection of international public education posters curated by Dr. James Miller at the University of Western Ontario entitled “Visual AIDS”. After hearing that the installation provoked controversy whenever it was displayed our coalition, rather than opting out of the exhibit, decided this might prove beneficial in attracting viewers and encouraging critical discussion on the issues. We found an empty, street-level office space in the heart of the law district offered free of charge (which calls for another spatial analysis). Unlike the WMP we had little trouble finding a display space, largely, if I remember correctly, because the owner did not ask for details of the exhibit. The exhibit met such an overwhelming response, it remained on display for a full month after its scheduled close.

On display were AIDS education posters produced by both community and government agencies in Africa, India, Australia, Russia, Thailand, and Canada, among others. We chose to display work from countries not often reported in the media. Our hope was that by contextualizing the exhibit within discourses of social justice and human rights we would stimulate conversation on critical issues and frame the global impact of the epidemic. Miller, who usually traveled with the exhibit, was not able to attend the

opening. Instead, he sent along captions and blurbs for display with each poster. I remember how it did not occur to me to ask for more details on the context surrounding the production of the posters nor did anyone ask me for these details. While on shift at the gallery, I watched people go through the exhibit and noticed how some viewers moved through very differently than others. Some people only looked at the posters which were creating a ‘buzz’ (due to their sexually explicit tone) from outside of North America. Others ignored or dismissed these altogether. Later I wondered what was at play in their viewings. What informed the way Miller’s assistant had installed the exhibit, and how did the each viewer interpret how the people and the issues in the posters were displayed? The exhibit provided little information on how the issue was addressed in the represented communities. Yet despite this absence each poster illustrated, through a variety image/texts, how discourses of sexuality, health, illness and death play out in each country. Later, I came to wonder how we, the organizers were implicated in reinstating the ‘imperialist’ gaze at play in the exhibit. As Trinh asks, “how can one re-create without recirculating domination” (1990, 329)?

I turn again to Alber’s design proposal. It reads: “The horizontal rather than vertical position of the forms, the solid mass of the stone and the length of five and one-half feet all draw reference to the female body -- fallen bodies. A shallow, subtle and textured depression of approximately five-eighth’s inch at the deepest point in the centre of the top surface of the stone slab will serve as a reservoir for collected water and a vessel of memory -- a collection of tears” (Alber, 1995). The Democrat interviewed some project representatives who also describe the indentation as representative of the “vessel of a
woman’s body from which all life emerges.” The article continues: “If the memorial helps to foster . . . a public change in attitude . . . and helps bring a greater acceptance of women as equals, as persons, whomever they may be . . . these women will be able to give the life that (the monument) is intended to sanctify and honour”. Having read the artist’s intentions I can see how these benches/tombs might create a sense of belonging for some viewers, while excluding others, a belonging based on gender rather than politics. In this way the artist’s statement claims identity as politics. But not everyone may see it in the same way. I can also imagine different readings based on my experiences in the DES. The benches might offer a place to rest, to think, to grieve, to wonder about their placement and inscriptions. They offer a position from which to marvel at the number of women who agreed to donate money to the project, and to allow their names to be displayed as such. The monument might also be taken up in a variety of ways in this park. Will people be allowed to sleep here and frequent the park at night, or will the area be more heavily patrolled with the monument’s presence (and the process of gentrification)? How will the relations produced by the monument change if it is tagged with graffiti, or defaced with slanderous remarks, or if people drink and shoot drugs on its benches?

Nevertheless, if read in relation to Alber’s intentions, the monument calls for a belonging based on identity and experience. Wendy Brown’s book, States Of Injury, analyses identity-based claims through a critique of ‘standpoint’ theories implicit in the monument’s call for equality and change for all women:
Through articulations of "standpoint" or women's "point of view" this alternative (to aperspectival and masculinist reason) seeks legitimacy as a form of knowledge about the world that, while admitting to being "situated," cannot admit to partiality or contestibility, and above all cannot be subjected to hermeneutics without giving up its truth value. (1995, 43)

Brown is commenting on the personal and professional stakes and investments at play for feminists working for social change by and through identity-based claims, and asks how these relations are made intelligible. Her critique of liberalism is developed on, among other theoretical concepts, Neitzsche's notion of ressentiment in which a 'righteous' critique of power is formed by and through injured perspectives: "(ressentiment) delimits a specific site of blame for suffering by constituting sovereign subjects and events as responsible for the "injury" of social subordination," while fixing these identities as social positions, "and codifies as well the meanings of their actions against all possibilities of indeterminacy, ambiguity, and struggle for resignification or repositioning" (1995, 27). Brown's analysis is important to mention but it appears harsh in light of the web of tension surrounding the monument's installation. Such a claim is difficult to uphold when placed within the complex and contradictory dynamic of feminist 'public art' which pays heed to past struggles in order to establish terms for present action. How might Brown imagine 'breaking the silence' surrounding violence against women on current political terms, in a way that is different?

Cornell, in her critique of Kantian Reason, describes the limits and the remains of ontology and epistemology. Her critique provides some background for my questions on
how the WMP came to mirror the social and political relations which reinforce the endemic violence near its site. She indicates how discourses informed by Kantian Reason constitute knowledge in a way which effect master/slave relations between self and other, between knower and known. Reason, she continues, "denies certain groups, peoples and nations 'actuality' (and) justifies the imperialism of the west" (Cornell, 1992, 21). In this frame, knowledge production reproduces coherent, fixed identities without contextualizing how they are historically situated. A relation between the self and the other is formed by and through categorical imperatives which disavow the existence of the other within the self, thus leaving the self intact. What the WMP and my own attempts at social change practices indicate is how such absolute frameworks are easily reinstated within the dynamics surrounding each particular change practice.

The text on the monument, written as an inscription into every second form, has sparked much controversy for its naming of men as the perpetrators of violence against women. Although men do constitute the overwhelming majority of those who inflict violence against women⁸, this naming, which has been celebrated by some for 'breaking the silence,' is also embedded in a series of complex relations. They did not go unnoticed by the organizers, rather it was felt that the silence surrounding the issue needed to take precedence.⁹ Theorists such as Brown frame this naming as one which reinforces victim

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⁸ I quote from the selection of quotes in the WMP “Giving Voice” document to provide a range of current statistics on violence against women. "In 1991, 225 women were murdered in Canada: of them, 208 were killed by a family member or acquaintance" (Statistics Canada, 1993); “98% of women murdered in Ontario between 1974 and 1990 were killed by men, usually by an intimate partner” (Women Killing: Intimate Femicide in Ontario, 1974 - 1990), “2 1/2 million Canadian women have experienced violence at the hands of a partner; 21% of the assaulted women were beaten or attacked by a partner during pregnancy” (Statistics Canada, 1993).

positions. I too can support her point yet also recognize the importance of gaining public recognition by and through such naming. Kai Erikson discusses how trauma has a social dimension which damages the texture of community:

traumatic experiences work their way so thoroughly into the grain of the affected community that they come to supply its prevailing mood and temper, dominate its imagery and its sense of self, (and) govern the way its members relate to one another. . . . The experience of trauma, at its worst, can mean not only a loss of confidence in the self, but a loss of confidence in the surrounding tissue of family and community . . . the imageries that accompany the pain have a sense all their own. . . (1995, 190,198)

This naming then sits within a tension in political and social movements to both recognize injustices and abuse and to support those who have been injured.10 Erikson does not elaborate on the imagery he mentions yet I wonder how the notion of estrangement might sit within this tension. Other public and performance artists provide some context to this debate - one who attempts to rupture reason-based knowledge claims and another who feels that such claims spark reflection and change within her viewing public. Coco Fusco, a performing artist, outlines how the desire to look upon predictable forms of otherness persists: “The literalism governing American thought complements the liberal belief that we can eliminate racism through didactic correctives; it also encourages resistance to the idea that conscious methods may not necessarily transform unconscious structures of belief” (1995, 154). She also makes a call for estrangement as one which might be a more effective way to stimulate change by

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10 I thank Kari Dehli for this insight and for helping me move my thinking beyond ‘victim’ frames.
highlighting how notions of reason shape social change practices. Another artist Adrian Piper, in an interview with Maurice Berger, talks about her use of confrontational techniques to move her white audience into a process of self-inquiry. She claims that grounding her work in a “Kantian philosophy of self” provokes emotions that have been suppressed in people and forces them to reflect on them. Such reflection, she feels, affects change. Her strategy is one of repeating broad rational categories of race back to the public to provoke reflection on their defenses in order to increase the viewer’s self-awareness. In many ways the WMP follows a similar strategy as Piper’s, with the intent to effect a disruption. Do such attempts provoke responsible action toward change?

On the one hand attempts to situate subjugation inflicts ‘wounds of blame’ on those subjects perceived as sovereign by reinforcing “the impositions of suffering as the measure of social virtue” (Brown, 1995, 70). Wounded identity claims perpetuate notions of difference as a fixed category measured against a coherent, equally fixed (oppressor) subjectivity. Such image/texts are typically produced within a web of polarized social and political debates in a given community which also remain fixed. For the WMP, the organizers responded to the lack of public representation given to extreme acts of violence against women, as well as the widespread reluctance to name men as perpetrators of this violence. Yet it is important to recognize the significance of such naming to reflect on the present relation through past events. Brown continues her analysis of the relations between ressentiment and identity politics:

in its attempt to displace suffering, identity structured by ressentiment at the same time becomes invested in its own subjection. (They) reverse without
subverting this blaming structure. They do not . . . critique the sovereign subject of accountability that liberal individualism presupposes, nor the economy of inclusion and exclusion that liberal universals establishes . . .

Brown would argue that on these terms resistant-based image/texts are locked into a logic of linear reproduction which limit viewer relations to those of “wounded attachments.” But again I mention the politics of traumatized subjectivities. Another frame implicated in this dynamic is that of collective memory. Especially, as Brown eloquently describes, collective memories formed by and through the “logics of pain.” The monumental form, even when intended to counter existing relations, evokes what Gillis names “memory sites” which are capable of instilling forgetting rather than remembering: “The core meaning of any individual or group identity . . . is sustained by remembering, and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity” (Gillis, 3). Reason-based knowledge fails to recognize that representations engender multiple interpretations when viewed by different people, at different times, in different places. It also disregards how the meaning of a representation remains incomplete until it is read: knowledge is partly produced in the act of interpretation (Trend, 1992, 52). It can be argued that depicting an issue through frames of “selective remembrance” (however necessary at this time and context), elicits “doubt and rebuttal . . . and it invites dissenters to ignore both the argument and the work of (art) in which it is embedded” (Edelman, 1995, 50). Given this, how might image/texts which commemorate traumatic circumstances call for a reconsideration of the relationship between social change, image/texts, and viewer relations? Is it possible to both name and unsettle or move beyond such namings?
Donna Haraway speaks of knowledge as contingent and partial. She calls for a reflexive visual praxis which frames vision as "always a question of the power to see" (1991, 192). Haraway brings attention to the violence implicit in seeing by asking: "With whose blood were my eyes crafted" (1991, 192)? On such terms, constituting a non-totalizing visual praxis requires entering a space that recognizes both the limits and the remains of ontology and epistemology. It necessitates moving beyond absolute notions of Kantian Reason which inform modernist discourses surrounding "public art" that limit the terms of production and engagement for both artists and audiences. In my experience this work takes place on shifting ground and requires an ability to engage with image/texts to provoke questions rather than supply answers, but to do so in a way that does not privilege the limits over the remains. Yet whenever I attempt to move beyond I face my own resistance to step into the unknown with a passion named wonder: "(with) the ability to see, hear and touch, to go toward things as though always for the first time" (Trinh, 1990, 333).

Edelmen and Marcuse propose establishing an in-direct point of view, or what to me is better stated as an open, multi-voiced text, to communicate a political issue in order to turn the audience into active viewers able to engage reflection on their relation to the artwork and the issue. The WMP attempts this by using ambivalent forms which may be interpreted as benches or as sarcophagi. Of course there is no way of insuring a "correct" interpretation but the notion of an active viewer is interesting, yet also raises further questions. The first that comes to mind is a question of access - how artistically sophisticated will a public viewing audience be, and how might a work take this into
consideration? How might I need to reconsider the image/text relation to produce a sense of mobility and change that might, however temporarily, exceed received subjectivities? Upon which terms might an image/text, in monument form, produce boundaries as constantly in flux and fluid rather than fixed and permanent? Perhaps acknowledging the range of relations surrounding image/text relations is a way in which one might move toward making claims for a performative-based telling which performs experience rather than represents it (Denzin, 1997, 115). (I am not making a case for reproducing violent acts.) Considering how this might be worked into a monumental form proves difficult and complex. Yet posing such questions lays the groundwork for a consideration of an ethical practice for social change, a discussion I pick up again in the last chapter.

I initially turned to the monument to see how social change is articulated in identity-based image/texts. I have attempted to read the WMP, which is struggling for recognition in sea of criticism, by contextualizing its production within the range of contradictory stakes and investments in which it was produced. However I am not sure if it is possible to engage such a discussion without contributing to the ongoing struggle faced by the WMP organizers, or being perceived as reinforcing ‘wounded’ claims.

My approach has been to raise these issues in relation to the series of complex social and political relations in which they live, which are not easily countered. Although many artists propose finding a way to engage with dominant forms in ways that render them new by and through confrontational, ideological, or ironic techniques, few offer strategies that might be transferred from one site to another. Some of these approaches
raise emotion for the viewer, yet also appear to have little impact on changing one’s practices. Estrangement, then, is something that is known to be experienced differently for each viewer depending on who they are in relation to the artwork they are viewing. (I have recently heard of a monument in Germany which encourages an active viewer relation with a moving image/text by inviting the viewer to write on the piece as it is lowered slowly in the ground over several months’ time.) As my unravelling of the WMP, and my own investment in such practices, suggest how social change might be embedded in the very relations it seeks to disrupt, I am inspired to end this chapter with a question. How might the relations which structure the telling be made visible to the viewer, and to what end?
How do our perceptions, derived by and through the images, paraphernalia, and activism which constitute our cultural memory of HIV/AIDS and our experiences of trauma, effect how its testimony is told and heard? In considering such testimony, discourses related to sexuality, illness, death, contagion, health and risk, among others, enter into the dialogic relation between image/text and listener/viewer. Similarly, testimony manifests images, memories, desires, and fantasies, for both the teller and the hearer, as they are constituted by and through the above relations. As image/text, HIV testimony is a site where discourses converge. This intersection of possible relations and readings of them interpellate listening subjects in particular but open-ended ways. Historically situating the role of cultural image/texts in the telling and hearing of HIV/AIDS testimony offers a way to question how we know what we think we know about our selves in relation to a 'diseased/deviant' other, and to community. Throughout the next two chapters I will attempt to link cultural memory image/texts and HIV testimony while reflecting on my observations and encounters with it in pedagogical settings. In this way, I consider HIV testimony as a site, similar to the WMP, to explore how ethical and political relations are made intelligible by and through image/texts for both the teller and hearer.
As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be construed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of remembrance.

(Felman, 1995, 16)
chapter two

textured memory

Survivors embody memory, their bodies the texts of memory, their voices its textures. They stand at the juncture of memory and history, tugging by their very presence at the boundaries of each other. (Sturkin, 1997, 254)

and at times when
only the void stood between us we got
all the way to each other.
(Celan, 1980a, 153)

Inviting people with HIV/AIDS into educational settings to talk about their experiences living with the virus was a common practice in the outreach workshops I facilitated. Long before I arrived on the community-based AIDS scene, in 1989, HIV/AIDS testimony was an effective way to stimulate dialogue about life and death issues for the public, who may, it was assumed, have little exposure to people living with AIDS (PWA’s). It was understood that this form of telling brought a ‘human face’ to the epidemic; it was considered to be the most effective way to call the public to attention about their risk behaviours. Throughout this chapter I recollect frames of telling and hearing testimony.
In the 1980s, AIDS was constructed in the public imaginary as a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that affects particular groups of people. A common link between each of these groups was their shared subjugation from mainstream culture, an experience articulated in unique ways by each person labelled as a member of a ‘high risk group.’ Today, gay men, IV drug users, people of colour and hemophiliacs continue to maintain the highest rates of infection in North America, though rates of new infections for older gay men are in decline. Such high numbers and ongoing deaths mean that representatives from these groups predominate in media representations as ‘AIDS-carriers/victims’ more than others. The implications for this are especially severe for both those seen as responsible for the disease, and for those not seen, such as women, whose living and dying experiences with the virus are often curtailed in its venues. A similar politic plays out in AIDS social marketing campaigns which create image/texts to illustrate the issue by and through the commodification of its cultural products. I turn to Marita Sturkin to contextualize the relationship between the epidemic, and its impact on the cultural sphere:

AIDS emerged early and devastatingly in urban gay communities . . . because it affected at least one community that has a sophisticated understanding of the media and marketing, the representation of AIDS has been hotly contested in a variety of public arenas. . . . Indeed, the cultural politics of AIDS have been like those of no other disease. AIDS has spawned . . . a proliferation of cultural meanings that parallels the medical epidemic. . . . (it) has emerged as a public phenomenon and a public-health crisis at a particular historical moment of emerging identity politics. . . . simultaneous with . . . a rhetoric of morality, shame, and narrowly defined “family values.” . . . It has produced a
public discourse of hysteria and blame and a simultaneous counterdiscourse of criticism and defiance. (1997, 146 - 147)

Sturkin highlights the cultural politics of AIDS in the United States. I include her synthesis, even though it recounts an American urban history with the issue, as I see similar issues playing out in Canada, although to different degrees. For instance, the ‘family values’ debate has been much more predominant in the United States than in Canada. (That is until a recent right-wing land slide in Ontario politics which resurrected a ‘common sense’ campaign from the dusty vaults of conservative strategy.) What Sturkin’s book pointedly illustrates is how, in the last twelve years, AIDS has significantly reshaped the boundaries of popular culture by and through the production of various cultural products. These include: books, independent and commercial film and video, the quilt, memorials, posters, red-ribbons, pamphlets, social marketing campaigns, art installations, public art, and demonstrations (Sturkin, 1997, 148). It could be argued that AIDS has provoked a crisis in cultural memory for the ‘general public’ who, when faced with this proliferation of cultural products addressing sexuality, health and risk in marginalized groups, is forced to re-evaluate notions of the ‘public’ as a cohesive unit. At least this is what one might assume. Equally possible is it that this proliferation of diverse cultural products also works to reconfirm a sense of cohesive identities. In this chapter, I consider how some of this vast array of image/texts produced by community-based organizations, government, and corporations impact on the telling and hearing of HIV testimony. I will consider the implication of cultural memory provoking a crisis of memory and self for both the teller and hearer.
HIV/AIDS testimony is still widely used as a pedagogical tool, especially in highschools where tight time-lines restrict the focus given to the issues it addresses. As it is often the only exposure that highschool students receive, testimony, from a person living with HIV/AIDS, is expected to cover all of the ‘sticky issues’ which teachers might otherwise eschew. Issues such as: sexuality, sexual activities, drug use, illness, death, intimacy, love are crammed into a brief testimonial slot. I have witnessed many episodes in highschools where an HIV+ person is invited to speak to students for ten to twenty minutes, and then address questions. Sometimes this occurs in the more intimate setting of the classroom, but more often than not the speaker is expected to address an entire assembly of students numbering from one hundred to five hundred people. This notion of ‘education on mass’ alarms me. In my experience, in classrooms addressing what were presumed to be sexually active highschool students, I needed to review basic anatomy to insure that the students could identify their genitalia, before we could talk about AIDS. There was never time for this in larger settings, nor was it possible to establish a comfortable space for students to ask questions about sexual activities.11 Recently, I have been wondering how the bodies of PWA’s telling their experiences, are positioned in a dynamic of evaluation to assess both the listener’s and the teller’s moral worth, either through recognition or disavowal. It is within this frame that I will attempt to link cultural memory image/texts and HIV testimony while reflecting on my observations and encounters with testimony in pedagogical settings.

11 At AIDS Vancouver we accommodated all calls from schools as we thought some exposure to the issues was better than none. In addition we began to advocate at a policy level for curriculum changes.
My most recent experience with HIV/AIDS testimony was coordinating an education program for professionals working in social services, education and health-care. During the late 1980s and early 1990s they began working with increasing numbers of HIV+ people. Most of the health and social service professionals in our workshops had no experience with an HIV+ clientele prior to these clients walking through their doors. And most claimed not to have a clue where to begin. From our perspective, HIV+ people were denied benefits, support and care of which they were in desperate need. My role, as the facilitator during these ‘trainings’, was to stimulate discussion on the impact of HIV/AIDS on our everyday lives and the lives of people living with the virus. I spoke about my experiences working in the AIDS community, my ongoing struggles with how I coped with fear in my own risk practices, and my sense of urgency about the profound impact the virus, and all of its associations, has on present notions of community and responsibility. I would ask the participants to take similar risks. Many did.

While coordinating this program I heard a range of testimonial accounts from people living with HIV or AIDS. Each teller brought their own unique interpretation of their diagnosis and its implications for their workplace, their community relations, and for their caregivers, friends, lovers and family members. Each telling profoundly impacted, in a variety of ways, on both the teller and the listener. Over time, I began to note the subtle aspects of recounting personal experiences of trauma through the frames of HIV testimony.
Generally, the evaluation forms from such workshops indicated that the most remembered moments, for the majority of the audience\textsuperscript{12} was when a person living with HIV/AIDS delivered a testimonial account. I noted, during both the highlights and the challenges of such testimony, that the emotion at play during its telling and hearing increased the stakes for those involved, including me. (I noticed a difference in highschools where students were more forthcoming with their questions.) Testimony was assumed to be a quick way to move most people to an emotional response, and this emotion was presumed to lead to action. Nevertheless, some people in the audience never appeared to be moved at all. Ultimately, I never figured out how to most effectively attend to the range of possible responses which may occur during its telling and hearing.

What is actually going on in testimonial moments? How might the structure of a testimony influence how it is taken up? There is a great deal at play in these moments. For instance, how do our perceptions, derived by and through the images, paraphernalia, and activism which constitute our cultural memory of HIV/AIDS and our understanding of trauma, affect how testimony is told and heard? I began to wonder, in spite of many efforts to avoid and counter problems, if testimony was complicit in reinscribing the social and political relations which frame identity and sexuality as fixed categories - some of the very issues we tried to counter in our workshops. In the next section I consider some of the challenges I observed and encountered with HIV testimony in pedagogical settings, including reflections on my role in their proliferation, on how the

\textsuperscript{12} The term 'audience' is used to imply how a group of people or workshop participants which might be presumed to constitute the general public may be differently constituted by and through a diverse range of identities and identifications.
teller's body is evaluated in terms of moral worth, and some recent thinking on the relation between image/texts, cultural memory and subjectivity.

Critical reflection on the assumptions embedded in the telling and hearing of HIV testimony is long overdue. Setting out on this path requires a radical questioning of the limits of the frames which validate not only the telling but also the hearing of personal stories. Such an attempt brings several questions to the surface. Which ethical and political considerations need to be taken into account when inviting highly marked bodies to re-tell their experiences in pedagogical settings? How might a pedagogy which includes personal testimony engage an audience in a way which makes possible an imaginative engagement toward the other's singularity? How do notions of cultural memory influence how testimony is told and heard? What follows is a recollective account of my observations.

In this next section I will name various frames of telling and hearing HIV/AIDS testimony. However, it is important to note that such frames are not absolute. One testimonial account might embody many of these named ways of telling. And this naming in no way implies a predetermined relationship between the personality and experience of the teller and their chosen frame of telling. Rather, I surrender to this practice of naming as an attempt, not only to reflect on the many different structures of HIV testimonial accounts which I have heard, but to also contextualize this practice for both myself and the reader. It is important to keep in mind that these frames are filtered within and through my own readings, desires, fantasies and memories. Nevertheless, I hope this
naming useful for the reader to gain a sense of the range of possible responses which might occur in moments of testimony.

beginnings...

In the early 1980s, amidst mass animosity and stigma, the risk associated with naming oneself as a PWA in public settings was enormous. At risk was the loss of one's professional reputation and possibly employment, one's friends, family and lovers, as well as insurance benefits and access to health care services. Speaking HIV testimony, in the early days, took tremendous courage, and still does. Stigma and discrimination toward people living with the virus forced many people to keep their diagnosis hidden - it produced a silent epidemic - testimony is instrumental in rupturing this silence just as the WMP plays a role in 'breaking the silence' surrounding violence against women. In this climate, testimony is an act of defiance and affirmation that requires determination and strength on the part of the teller. These tellings cut a political edge as they speak with emotion, even anger about exclusion and discrimination. This is not to imply that this form of political testimony remains separate and distinct from other frames, rather it is important to recognize that the telling of testimony is a political act. One difference between this past and present frames of testimony is how early testimony was supported and enhanced by the ongoing presence of activist groups such as ACT UP New York, which configured PWA's as confrontational, revolutionary, politically savvy, angry, and loud, in the cultural sphere (Sturkin, 1997, 163): the antithesis of the traditional medical
patient. PWA's told, and tell, testimony to bring attention to the lack of government funding available to develop and maintain much needed support and care services, and, for some, to call for compensation. Gradually, as more services are developed the political base of HIV testimony begins to shift.

Frames of Telling

I often ask myself how it is that I came to be open about my status. For me, AIDS had been one of my best kept secrets. It took me approximately 15 months to discuss this issue openly. As if not saying it aloud would make it go away. I watched other people with AIDS (PWAs), who were much more open than I was at the time, reveal to audiences their status, their vulnerability, while sharing from a distance, from silence, every word that was being uttered by them. I wanted to be a part of what they were building, what they were doing, their statement, I am a PWA, because I was. It was a relief when I said it. I could stop going on with the lie. I could be me. People were supportive and they didn't shun me. And now I can go anywhere and be myself.¹³

In the late 1980's, HIV/AIDS testimony was often preceded or followed by a message about prevention, rather than support and care issues, which turned the teller into an object for the audience to assess their risk activities and identifications. When asked to fit into a health-belief testimony the teller became the barometer from which the audience measured how not to be in order to maintain their illusion of safety and distance both from contracting the virus and from the identifications of the speaker. This allowed the

audience to maintain an illusion of themselves as innocent and whole, and to avoid the difficult emotions stirred up during a telling. Within this ‘health-belief model of education,’ information delivered by an ‘expert’ to a passive audience, is assumed to lead to behaviour change. Often resorting to a “this happened to me, don’t let it happen to you” approach, the teller was asked to frame their experiences to comply with current information on risk reduction, as it was often assumed that they were addressing an HIV-audience. What is often overlooked here, is Simon’s notion of the ‘textured excess’ of testimony. Only the teller’s spoken word, or saying, is taken into account, thus dismissing the said or the more translatable, performative moment of telling (in press). This frame overlooks how a telling interpellates particular subjects by and through not only what is said but through the social, political and institutional response of the particular place and time of the telling. As such, health-belief testimony frames the saying as the objective ‘truth’ of the telling and places blame on the individuals who do not comply with the suggested behaviour change. It denies the complex reality of living with HIV/AIDS and of participation in risk activities.

When coordinating testimonial speakers I followed the principles of peer-education to assign an HIV+ person to a particular group based on their stated identity and identifications. I would match youth with youth, women with women, gay men with gay men and so on. After returning to graduate school I wondered about my complicity in the complex reality of HIV testimony, and many questions began to surface. What was I encouraging and discouraging as ‘valid’ testimony in my preamble and pep talks with the speakers? Whose voices were sanctioned to testimony? Who was excluded, and on which
terms? How did I come to assume that one's experience of living with HIV should be the primary identification one articulates during testimony? At the time I justified many of my decisions in order to avoid a wounded testimony. This might include perpetuating discourses of victimization by claiming a position of helplessness or denying the complex relations one faces with an HIV+ diagnosis. Sturkin describes it as “romanticizing the concept of marginalization” (1997, 160), where HIV might be framed as a manageable illness or claimed to have changed one’s life for the better. Although each claim has political and historical significance, and plays an important role in one’s ability to cope with a diagnosis, it is important to recognize how they are constituted by and through discourses that pit an ‘us’ against a ‘them’ where the ‘us’ is framed by and through traumatic experiences as outlined in the previous chapter.

When a person living with HIV is asked to reconstruct their experiences, unrealized thoughts and feelings - their fears, images, desires, and struggles - may surface in the moment of telling. I remember a young woman who spoke to a group of new volunteers for our organization. Her father had recently died of AIDS related illnesses. In her telling she deviated from her initial intention - to tell her experience living with an HIV+ father - and began to speak of how he contracted the virus through secret sexual relations with a local public figure - behaviour her family knew nothing about until his death when it was highly publicized in their community. As soon as she launched into this story, deep wrenching sobs emanated from her body. She had never spoken of this publicly. Many people in the audience were deeply moved by her telling and many expressed their thanks. Several named this section (which included three testimonial speakers) as the
most effective part of the training. Yet, few recognized how she had been encouraged, by friends, to speak at this session in order to come to terms with past wounds through her disclosure. This frame conjures a *therapeutic testimony*, where one intentionally or unintentionally discloses confidential, emotional, and psychological aspects of past and present experiences. Caruth names these unintentional revelations a form of *departure*: “This speaking and this listening . . . from this site of trauma - does not rely . . . on what we simply know of each other, but on what we don’t yet know of our own traumatic pasts. In a catastrophic age, that is, trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves” (1995, 11). Although discussions before her presentation established the importance of confidentiality, and it was understood that more risks could be taken within the setting of a volunteer training, it was difficult to assess the audience’s ability to hear her therapeutic testimony and her departure from it. The challenge as Caruth states is: “how to listen to departure” (1995, 10).

People living with HIV/AIDS often describe a sense of being ‘called’ to testimony or feeling obligated to tell of their experiences. During a telling, coming out as an HIV positive person should be a supportive and affirming experience, as the telling of testimony often has a tremendous effect on the teller. Yet the terms of this support change when a telling is conflated with confession, when it is assumed that the telling will absolve the teller, liberate her/him, unburden them of their fears and doubts. This frame of *confessional testimony* is related to what Foucault describes as: “An obligatory
and exhaustive expression of an individual secret” (1978, 60). Yet, as Foucault points out, we often overlook how this obligation to confess exists within an intricate web of power that regulates the telling. In a confessional mode of telling, the teller might feel obligated to confess what is societally disavowed about their identifications: their sexual identity, drug use, abortions, prison sentences, from a therapeutic rather than a political frame of telling. The difference is that political frames might challenge the very structures which force this slide into therapeutic tellings (Brown, 1995, 75). Brown frames *confessional testimony* in terms of power relations:

Confessional revelations are thus constructed as liberation from repression or secrecy, and truth-telling about our desires or experiences is construed as deliverance from the power that silences and represses them (rather than itself a site and effect of regulatory power). . . . In believing truth-telling about our experiences to be our liberation, Foucault suggests, we forget that this truth has been established as the secret to our souls not by us but by those who would discipline us through that truth.”(1995, 42)

When inviting highly marked bodies into classrooms and adult education settings we need to consider how the confessional dynamic is a relation of power which positions the listener and the teller in a hierarchical way. In this frame of telling power resides with the listener rather than with the teller. It is the listener who has ordered the telling, the listener who is in a position to assess and evaluate the teller’s character by and through their cultural memory of HIV/AIDS (among other means). Such relations situate the teller as a beholder of prescient truth, and the listener as one with the moral authority to regulate and assess the validity of their truth.
It is often easy for HIV/AIDS testimony to be taken up in a way that the speaker did not intend, and very easy for the person to unintentionally conform to what he or she believes the audience wants an HIV person to be (Taylor, *Positive Women's Network Newsletter*, January, 1996). In *normative testimony* the speaker is positioned by and through their preconceived notions of the audience, especially when they may one day be dependent on the audiences' professional services with the onset of their symptoms. As a form of compliance, *normative testimony* is regulated by dominant social and political relations and cultural memory. Within such testimony one might sanitize their HIV narrative to subscribe to the terms of compliance of normative codes which name disenfranchised identities as deviant. In this frame, gay men might speak only of their monogamous relationships (or avoid discussion of sex and sexuality all together), women cover up their drug use activities, hemophiliacs claim their innocence. The teller retells key aspects of their identity and identifications to fit into their perception of normative codes. One tends to focus on descriptions and experiences to which it is thought the audience might relate. This dynamic is also affected by callers to the organization who ask speakers to conceal identifications which are socially disavowed. Such callers sought heterosexual, white, men and women, who would be presumed to have contracted the virus through heterosexual (innocent) activities, rather than gay activity and drug use. As has been well documented, such normative categories of identity are rarely absolute. Nevertheless, these categorical imperatives play out during a telling. Later in Chapter Three I will further consider the relation between normative testimony and cultural memory image/texts.
To counter these dynamics the teller might attempt to avoid this identity terrain and speak a *rights-based testimony*. Here one recounts situations of injustice while making a plea for restorative action. *Rights-based testimony* calls for action based on the principles of social justice and human rights. In the telling, the teller calls attention to inadequate practices and policies which limit their quality of life by restricting access to necessary services, benefits and care programs. It has proven especially useful when training professionals who are in a position to assess one’s right to access benefits. However, this *rights-based testimony* is grounded in notions of autonomous individualism which seek rights for particular bodies that fit into fixed, categories of identity (to the exclusion of others). It does not call into question the system itself which supports such distinctions. Within this frame of telling, the teller presupposes a just and compassionate response from the listener. Yet, the listener might well engage in “guilty action” without necessarily experiencing a shift in attitude toward PWA’s (Meyers, 1994, 51). What happens when rights are determined by and through moral standards which disclaim difference?

This last frame, which most closely reflects the initial political frame but on different terms, is a *health promotion testimony*. Here, it is common for an HIV positive speaker to address other PWA’s about various health and support strategies that have proved useful for them. It is based on a resource development, advocacy and self-empowerment model. The person living with HIV is understood to know best what is needed in terms of their
own health care. However, it is not to be confused with a ‘positive’ testimony, one that glosses over complexities to frame AIDS only as a good thing.

Each of the above styles of testimony range between political and therapeutic frames of telling constituted by and through discourses which presume an autonomous, rational individual with a fixed identity, who by recounting and reflecting experience produces knowledge and truth which, in turn, effects a perspectival shift (Simon, 1992, 114). Yet, if “experience is an interpretation and in need of interpretation” (Scott, 1992, 37) one must consider the social and political relations at play in the interpretation of experience. Brown cautions against this slide from political to therapeutic discourses, “even as we acknowledge the elements of suffering and healing we might be negotiating” (1995, 75).

The tension between the two frames position political frames which put a listener on defense as an accused, in opposition to therapeutic frames which request support on particular terms.

Through these frames of telling, HIV testimony might inadvertently reinforce knowledge claims as ‘the truth’ spoken from an agentic self. They disavow divergent frames which may reveal contradictions that challenge the psychic support for difference as separate and distinct, thus dismissing the possibility of a simultaneous encounter. Within these oppositional frameworks, dichotomies remain unchallenged - the political does not intertwine with the therapeutic, the role of emotion, memory, and image/text are not thoroughly explored, and social change practices are thought to remain separate and distinct from everyday practices. Such tensions between resistance and complicity
maintain the self/abject other relation as separate and distinct. I will continue with this line of thinking in the next chapter. However, it is key to note that the limits of an oppositional paradigm frame survivors of traumatic events into fixed frames of telling.

How might those of us working within social change paradigms move beyond oppositional frames move into a more performative-based telling which describe experience without conceptualizing it?

As I mentioned earlier, I never figured out how to attend to the range of multiple and simultaneous responses that may occur while listening to HIV testimony. After reflecting on my witnessing experiences I came to wonder about the impact of preconceived notions of the witnessing relation on the listener, particularly, the expectation to perform a compassionate and just response. What is produced in the above frames of telling that limit response? If HIV testimony calls for a reconfigured self, how might our psyche’s run to the defense when experiencing disruptive and divergent emotions which challenge our very sense of self and relation to community? Afterall, few people are accustomed to facing their own mortality in public settings. I never did witness an overtly negative or hostile response to someone’s telling. Rather, the responses I will discuss here surfaced, subtly, in the aftermath of a telling. Of course, I could never predict the range of emotion stimulated by and through a telling, even though questions from the listeners often suggested a deeper affect at play. Affect reactions surfaced at different times for different people. For some during or after the telling. For others some time later. I came to understand HIV testimony to also have a residual effect on the hearer. Often people
returned to the workshop the following day describing how profoundly moved they were while listening, and how surprised they were by their eagerness to retell their experiences to their friends and/or family. It is these remains in which I am most interested. As it is by and through these remains that I am able to notice particular trends and patterns.

**Frames of Listening**

It was not uncommon for someone to engage an *obsession with the details of the telling*, especially after the telling of an injustice. For example, having heard a teller describe the devastating loneliness he faced after his same sex partner was denied visitation rights while the teller was hospitalized, an audience member pressed for more details of the occurrence. After receiving them from the teller, they disclosed an intimate familiarity with the described hospital and expressed their disbelief that its administrative staff would enforce such restrictions. Suddenly, the teller’s credibility as a witness/teller was in question. It was an uncomfortable moment for many people in the room. Few of us wanted to admit to the question running through our minds. Had the teller actually experienced this event or had he fabricated it for this telling? Nor did we fully acknowledge how quickly we were able to come to this question. It was a sharp reminder that the power in testimonial moments remains with the listener. Our teller stumbled through his claim, reinstating the truth of his story, while visibly shaken that his character, rather then his experiences, were under investigation. As shown here, an
excessive distrust for the teller, which must be considered in relation to the teller’s identificatory claims, accompanied this response.

Contrary to the above, it was not uncommon, as Avni recounts in his description of listener responses to Holocaust testimony, for the listener to return an undiscriminating identification to the teller. This could be considered a form of transference, when one’s thoughts, feelings and wishes come into being through another person’s telling of their own. This response was often accompanied by an instant recognition for the listener which may or may not fit the context of the listener’s life experience. Nonetheless, the telling was heard in a way deemed significant for the listener’s perceived future (which is not always a wholly negative or a wholly positive phenomenon). When the teller’s experience are assumed to constitute a truth it can be assumed that all who encounter similar experiences will evaluate and assess them in the same way that the teller has just demonstrated. This perceived significance for the listener is constituted by and through a false sense of connection with the teller. This raises important ethical questions for people who address disavowed social and political issues in public settings with the hope of sparking an action-based response. What can be expected from people who do not identify with the teller? Does this free them from the responsibility of an ethical response? For those who do feel a sense of obligation, what of the transient quality of this frame of listening?
Once, while touring the province, I encountered, more than I had previously, some implications of moral identification. While facilitating a training outside of Vancouver, I relied on local AIDS organizations to rally HIV+ speakers who could address the group about local issues. I asked specifically for people who had encountered problems in their dealings with the Ministry of Social Services, since their staff comprised the audience. The two speakers for this training were a gay man who had several problems gaining disability recognition from his local Ministry, and a woman who found out that she was HIV+ while pregnant. Since travel was an issue for the man, as he had to arrive on a sporadic ferry, we were unable to talk in person until only an hour before their presentation. Unknown to me, the woman brought her five-year old daughter, also HIV positive. However, she did not feel a need to bring her daughter before the audience, for which I was relieved. If this were to occur I was concerned that the audience, who were mostly women with children, would attend more to the woman and child than to the gay man.

The gay man spoke first, pulling from a health promotion testimony. The woman spoke a wounded testimony. While she spoke the audience appeared riveted and devastated. I have never since encountered such instant recognition from an audience. They asked if they could meet her child who, we found out during the mother’s telling, was not yet old enough to comprehend her mother’s or her own health problems. Furthermore, no one had told her that their problems were HIV-related. I cautioned against bringing the girl forward. I felt concerned for two reasons: we were inviting the child into a room that was charged with emotion for reasons of which she had not been informed, and because the
mother was relying on an unspoken level of trust from the audience not to mention HIV/AIDS in front of the child. But the mother felt this exposure was important to the girl, and the child joined in (clearly dressed for the occasion in a fancy dress). The audience asked her a few questions about school and the shy child responded, nervously, as any typical five-year old. Many people dabbed their eyes as she left the floor. My co-facilitator and I did our best to acknowledge the emotion in the room, and pay respect to the woman and her child. But we failed in our attempts to bring the audience’s attention back to the gay man’s issues. It became clear that the audience’s moral identification with the mother and child prohibited recognition of and, in turn, devalued the gay, HIV positive, man. (This phenomenon will be addressed more thoroughly when I discuss the role of image/texts in HIV testimony.) What was produced in and through her wounded testimony that generated her moral authority?

Accompanying this moral identification was a form of illusory empathy. Under the conditions of illusory empathy, one identifies with the teller based on the principles of self-sameness. As will become clear further in this discussion, this type of empathy does not recognize the teller’s uniqueness or difference, in fact it may, as in the example above, disavow connections that occur by and through lines of difference. Within illusory empathy, the points of the connection between the audience and the teller fit into the listener’s existing moral framework, a morality formed by and through societal forces of normativity and regulatory practices. As my discussion on the relation of image/texts and HIV testimony will illustrate, this response might be accompanied by a detached

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14 This notion of illusory empathy is culled from Roger Simon’s concept of deceptive empathy. (Simon, 1994)
perception of the gay man’s trials. Some theorists describe how the audience pulls from a stock of perceptions and experience to validate the avoidance of an encounter with the other within themselves, which is the ultimate requirement for entering into the witnessing relation. Sturkin states: “In the AIDS epidemic, the marginal and the mainstream, the commercial and the home-made, the sentimental and the cynical all converge in producing meaning. The complexity of this tangled set of meanings keeps closure at bay; simple narratives cannot take hold” (1997, 182).

Vetlesen (1994) illustrates how the exercise of moral judgment, whether we claim the teller as immoral or moral, is derived through emotional faculties. In fact, moral judgment presupposes and is made possible by our having, and having the ability to have, certain emotions (157, emphasis added). In the Kantian view of reason, feelings and emotions have no moral relevance, “their presence or absence cannot reflect on the person morally” (year, 154). Vetlesen calls for a need to move beyond this Kantian view which repudiates the role of emotion in moving one to a place of moral judgment. Since we typically come to know the other by and through rational frames of knowledge and perception, Vetlesen’s call essentially requires a reconsideration of the relationships which support the frames through which meaning is made.

What are the roles of emotion in the above frames of telling and listening (and my retelling)? Clearly, it is at play in most of the frames, as even dissociation requires a process involving feelings and attitudes, (Vetlesen, 1994, 155). Is it wise, though, to assume that the relations produced by and through HIV testimony establish felt
connections with the other which lead to responsible action? What are the investments in wanting this to be so? To what extent do the knowledge claims at play in the witnessing relation affect the range of critical reflection on the self/other relation? The significance of how HIV testimony is heard and seen cannot be underestimated. As Vetlesen indicates “the subject (listening and viewing) actively constitutes the moral object or phenomena” (1994, 164, parenthesis added). The question then becomes one of how this might move one to action. Since the practices of engagement which surround image/text relations and cultural memory are dialogic, it proves interesting to explore how the listener/viewer is active in disclosing the teller. By delving into how the frames of testimony intersect with cultural memory image/texts of AIDS, I will, in the next chapter, consider how its telling and hearing might be structured by notions of deviancy and morality. As will be made clear, cultural memory is only one way to explore the frames through which HIV/AIDS testimony is made intelligible to its audience.
chapter three

remembering image/texts

... the possibility for each of us of having psychic access to what does not "belong" to us - of "remembering" other people's memories. And through these borrowed memories, we can accede psychically to pains, pleasures, and struggles which are far removed not only from our own, but from what normative representation validates, as well.

(Silverman, 1996, 4)

With the representation of AIDS, as with other images of disease, it is the historically determined variations that mark the function and place of the sufferer in relation to society in which he or she dwells. From such images we can begin to understand how such models of disease evoke the most deep-seated of the self's fragility.

(Gilman, 1988, 271)

Cultural meaning does not reside with the text of a particular object . . . so much as it is produced in the act of "consumption," where in the viewer citizen engages with its meaning.

(Sturkin, 1997, 257)

What is the relationship between cultural memory image/texts of AIDS and the knowledge produced during the telling and hearing of its testimony? How are PWA's inscribed by and through historically situated discourses which constitute the issue as we know it on this continent? When considering testimony, discourses related to sexuality, illness, death, contagion, health and risk, among others, enter into the dialogic relation between image/text and listener/viewer. Similarly, this testimony manifests images, memories, desires, and fantasies, for both the teller and the hearer, as they are constituted
variety of discourses converge in contradictory and continuous ways. Similarly, this intersection of possible relations and readings of them interpellate listening subjects in particular but open-ended ways. In this chapter I will explore the terms for interpellating ethical and political subjectivities by and through the image/texts at play in sites of testimony.

Considering image/texts of cultural memory through the frames of HIV testimony is one way to assess the consistent and contradictory relations that exist between perception, action and figuration. Doing so might prove useful in reconsidering the divide which fixes the self/other relation as polarized and distinct. Not only is HIV/AIDS testimony understood by and through what is said, what is left unsaid, and Felman’s notion of departure, it is also greatly influenced by the historically situated images from public health and education campaigns, as well as the cultural products displayed in the many venues of popular culture. To consider the pedagogical implications of this, I will explore the meaning made by and through these image/texts during testimony and their role in producing a sense of obligation and responsibility for the listener when face to face with a ‘diseased’ other requesting their support and understanding.

Historically situating the role of cultural image/texts in the telling and hearing of HIV/AIDS testimony offers a way to question how we know what we think we know about our self in relation to a ‘diseased/deviant’ other. It provides a bridge toward a reflexive engagement for the reader/viewer to consider how the “production of cultural memory around AIDS is always directly linked, though to varying degrees, to the
capacity to mobilize support, be it emotional or financial, for the AIDS community” (Sturkin, 1997, 176). I probe briefly into Sander Gilman’s writing on AIDS imagery as he articulates an historical base for this discussion. I will present and read a number of historically situated image/texts which include among them a brief recollection on my experience in a highschool sex education class.

A central theme in Gilman’s work is the easy association in HIV/AIDS imagery of health with beauty and illness with ugliness. For hundreds of years public health imagery has associated disease with immorality and deviance. As Gilman’s current writing indicates, these notions are still inscribed in recent HIV/AIDS imagery which continues to gain extensive exposure to the public imaginary through a wide array of popular media. A brief historical analysis of these images reveals a great deal of repetition between the past and the present - a ubiquitous imagery which reinstates reason (limits/bounds) over a more ambiguous, fluid relation between the self, other and community. However, it remains difficult, if not impossible, to fully estimate the effect these images have on our collective memory and, in turn, its relation to our present understanding of ourselves as political and ethical subjects. I propose HIV/AIDS testimony as a site, similar to the WMP, to explore, recognize, and question how ethical and political relations are made intelligible for both the teller and hearer.

Reading the witnessing relation through cultural memory image/texts is one way to acknowledge the broad range of consistent and contradictory meanings produced in and through the available stock of HIV/AIDS imagery. Such a discussion in pedagogical
settings might begin with the space or setting in which the telling of testimony takes place. In the workshops I facilitated we often tacked public education posters on the walls in order to provide a range of images for the audience to consider. One rationale for this action was to activate a variety of points of connection for the audience, which may otherwise remain unacknowledged in the workshop. It opened the possibility for the audience to experience simultaneously a range of consistent and contradictory meanings which might counter and support the content of the pedagogy itself.

limits

*Interpreters of the Holocaust have understood the Jewish experience of the inside to be so dramatically particular that they speak axiomatically of its unprecedentedness and singularity. But if the inside is unprecedented, can those on the outside ever forge a meaningful connection to it? . . . can those who approach it in the aftermath ever know it in a way that does not trivialize and reduce its scandal? And if they cannot, does this condemn the survivor to a silent isolation that hauntingly maintains the fence...?*

*(Plank, 1994, 2)*

The early construction of the PWA has left an indelible impression on our cultural memory of the AIDS body as socially and physically marked. Gilman discusses the initial descriptions of the PWA in the 1980s. The early ‘4H’ description which stood for: homosexual, heroin addict, hemophiliac, and Haitian, was quickly superseded in 1981 by the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) naming of AIDS as the Gay Related
Immune deficiency Disease or GRID. The PWA became stigmatized not only as a carrier of an infectious disease but as also placed within a specific historical and social category that carried with it a particular stock of images (Gilman, 1988, 245). As Gilman states: “The idea of the person afflicted with sexually transmitted disease, one of the most potent in the repertory of images of the stigmatized patient, became the paradigm through which the AIDS patient was categorized and understood” (1988, 247). Despite community-based organizations’ efforts to broaden these categories, sexual deviancy is perceived as a tenacious and salient characteristic of a PWA, no matter how they might describe their sexual orientation during HIV testimony.

The early HIV imagery, associated with these categorizations, plays a role in affecting how HIV+ people are perceived in the public imaginary. According to Gilman, early public health and education images depicted PWA’s as isolated, immoral, and deviant, thus paralleling the imagery used during the syphilis campaigns. Sturkin broadens this analysis to include representations surrounding the plague, tuberculosis, leprosy and the history of images of the insane, and the ‘perverse,’ as they are linked to depictions of the homosexual as pathological (1997,148). Basic services offered the PWA might be sifted through these morally coded images, which linger in our cultural memory, and limit the delivery of support and care to the parameters of moral performance. Sturkin historicizes this politics of blame:

In the Middle Ages the concept of disease as divine punishment bore little currency, but by the eleventh and twelfth centuries leprosy was increasingly associated with sexual vice, and lepers were eventually quarantined in colonies. Part attributes this shift not only to the tendency of
the Christian tradition to sexualize evil but also to what R.I. Moore calls "the formation of a persecuting society," which persecuted, among others, Jews, lepers, heretics, and homosexuals. In this kind of society, disease cannot be naturalized; it must be assigned a cause, attributed to specific subgroups, and linked to immorality. (1997, 149)

Thus, AIDS is perceived in cultural memory as a disease one contracts through the pursuit of deviant pleasures. Diseased bodies are marked by and through their historically situated image/texts with the capacity to infect the morals of society. These associations might affect the quality of support and care offered to PWA's, they also affect perception of risk.

Gilman names two themes which are persistent in syphilis imagery and pertinent to this discussion. The first is that of an isolated sufferer, revealing to the viewer the signs and symptoms of syphilis like the stigmata of a parodied Christ. (figure two) Here the syphilitic is seen as isolated, visually recognizable by his signs and symptoms and as a sexual deviant (Gilman, 1988, 248). The second theme is of the distinction made between the male sufferer as active and the female as passive, constructing the male as the primary victim. Apparently it took close to two hundred years for this understanding to shift. When it did it maintained its gender bias - women constructed as the sources of infection - themes still present in recent HIV/AIDS campaigns (Gilman, 1988, 252). (figures three and four) The imagery associated with syphilis inculcated infected men as outsiders, and sexual deviants. Women were constructed as the sources of infection, outsiders, prostitutes and sexual deviants. As Gilman says: "syphilis left our culture with a series of images of the mortally infected and infecting patient suffering a morally
Figure Two
SHE MAY LOOK CLEAN—BUT

PICK-UPS
"GOOD TIME" GIRLS
PROSTITUTES
SPREAD SYphilIS AND GONORRHEA

Figure Four
repugnant disease but without a sufficiently powerful disease with which to associate these images” (1988, 258). AIDS was constructed as that powerful disease.

Gilman juxtaposes media images of AIDS patients in the 1980s with representations of the syphilitic patient to parallel the visual history of syphilis in its first decade with the iconography of AIDS. By doing so, he reveals how cultural beliefs related to sexuality, illness, and death are consistent between the two periods. He sketches the image of the AIDS patient as key to the shift in the boundaries surrounding the image of disease. He does so in order to define the qualities visually associated with the PWA, those related to the early labeling of AIDS as an STD and as a gay disease.

This image of an AIDS patient, published in the New York Times Magazine in 1985, (figure five) perpetuates this notion of isolation and deviancy. When I first viewed the image I was struck by how its tropes parallel those of HIV testimony. The young man in the image is under observation (one might say surveillance) by a group of people, who, though intent on determining more about the nature of his illness, maintain their physical distance (keeping their self intact) while appearing reluctant, even fearful, to change their physical proximity to him. Touch is forbidden in this image just as critical reflection is feared for what it might disrupt while listening to HIV testimony. In this image, the patient remains anonymous. The distance his healthcare workers maintain represent their fear of contagion while also serving as a metaphor for emotional and physical detachment from the HIV + person. This image/text produces meaning in relation to our understanding of the self/other relation and community. It accentuates the boundaries
A group of doctors, above, examining a patient during rounds at AIDS clinic at Bellevue Hospital Center

Figure Five
placed on the HIV+ body, boundaries manifested through our fear and loss in relation to our own mortality and difference. Gilman comments: “This reaction of the boundary between the infected and the healthy rested on the need to see a clear boundary existing between the heterosexual, non-IV drug using, white community and those at risk” (1988, 266). Sturkin parallels this with immune system imagery: “... the metaphors of the immune system are essential to its scientific definition, and these metaphors reveal a deep fear of difference. Popular medical discourse defines the immune system as a regulating force that identifies the “foreign” within the body; it is thus a primary agent distinguishing between self and nonself” (1997, 227). This fear of difference parallels what we know of the self/other relation within frames of reason-based knowledge.

Another image which reinforces early depictions of isolation, deviancy and denial of dying is the depiction of an ‘AIDS victim’ in a Benetton advertisement (an Italian clothing company) released in January, 1992. The ad, displayed as part of a six-page series of images, run by Benetton in Vanity Fair and Vogue magazines, displays a photograph of an emaciated young man, David Kirby, dying from AIDS related illnesses while surrounded by his mother, father and sister, and an anonymous person. The image sparked discontent for many community groups who were working to counter the association of AIDS with death. (Gilman, 1995) In response, Benetton eventually agreed to distribute a ‘safe sex brochure,’ developed by the Gay Men’s Health Crisis in
the July 1992 issue of Spin magazine. The brochure maintained the image of the healthy and beautiful (gay) body (Gilman, 1995, 159, parenthesis added). This reveals an interesting tension persistent in AIDS imagery. Gilman argues that the trope of beautiful bodies in the ‘beefcake approach’, of both those at risk and those HIV+, avoids dying and as such denies the lived complexity of HIV. He claims that this avoidance of death repeats the earlier syphilitic tropes of ascribing a moral dimension to disease and maintaining the “opposition of the healthy and erotic to the diseased and ugly...” (Gilman, 1995, 115). In contrast, Sturkin reveals how images of bodies in the final stages of disease reassure the public that the person with AIDS is detectable and therefore not invisible among us and asks: “what does it mean to require the “positive” in the context of an epidemic in which the reality is that people are dying, often quite painfully” (1997, 153)? This effects the telling and hearing of testimony by regulating which bodies are called to speak. Is it assumed by and through normative standards of performance that an audience may be less likely to establish identification with a visibly marked body?

What motivates Benetton’s use of controversial issues to market their clothing? Is it to raise global social consciousness or merely for profit and gain? Benetton’s ad countered the image of vitality and determination community-based AIDS organizations were striving for, to counter the association of gay men with deviancy and mental illness. At the time my colleagues and friends were working hard to portray an image of living with HIV. AIDS workplace programs were in place to insure HIV+ individuals their right to continue working. One way in which the “beefcake” approach is maintained is by the
threat of a possible loss in the public imaginary, through depictions of death, pain and illness, of political and social status for the gay and lesbian community.

Benetton’s company gained international exposure with this image of a dying man. Given their access to mass advertising venues they had the potential to influence the public’s understanding of the virus. By situating the photograph of the dying man with earlier images of illness and disease one can associate his visual symptoms with a puritan, anti-pleasure, stance of the Christian tradition which sexualizes evil, and attributes disease to particular subgroups and immorality (Sturkin, 1997). Here we see a link between pleasure and deviancy. Is he dying as a result of his pursuit of pleasure? Is the ad supporting what Simon Watney refers to as “AIDS commentary, that is more interested in stopping “promiscuity” than it is in stopping the transmission of HIV” (Watney, 1990, 90)? Is the dying man’s resemblance to Christ intended to parallel the genocide of Jewish people with the slow institutional response to HIV? If so, does this radically question or reinforce anti-semetic beliefs? Perhaps we can make parallels to Watney’s discussion of ‘African’ AIDS that: “any seeming concern for the lives of the populations described is entirely secondary to the larger ideological imperatives of Western AIDS commentary, as it redraws the epidemic in the likeness of older colonial beliefs and values, targeted at the assumed (white) audience” (Watney, 1990, 90). Benetton’s visual depiction of dying with AIDS reinforces, rather than counters, racialized and sexualized othering.

In an article in the Toronto Star newspaper by Desmond O’Grady (August 20, 1995, page), Oliviero Toscani, the photographer and creator of Benetton’s ads, stresses that the
primary purpose of his ads is not to increase sales but rather to engage in social commentary. He then states: "A message which doesn’t stir controversy is bland, mediocre . . . When products are barely distinguishable from those of competitors, the important thing is to sell a brand name belonging to a company with character." Rather than question the representation of AIDS, Benetton commodifies what Watney names "phobic images", which deem the company as politically progressive, and AIDS as something that happens to morally coded others behind closed doors.

Benetton’s second attempt at AIDS commentary displays a side view of a fragmented, white, male torso with HIV positive tattooed on his muscular forearm. (figure seven) Some colleagues of mine loved its representation of strength and pride in displaying one’s ‘status’. The association between tattoos and ‘branding’ reminded me of early attempts by various governments throughout the world to distinguish and quarantine HIV+ people. I also felt that it reinstated the whiteness of AIDS thus denying the devastating affect of HIV in the Black, Latino/a, Aboriginal and Asian communities. Benetton’s advertisements have stirred up controversy and no doubt increased sales for the company, but they have done little to provoke effective and accurate social commentary on AIDS related issues beyond the sensational. Their ads fit with other media attempts which define PWA’s, and those working in AIDS, through narrow identity categories in which: “. . . all gays are coded as white and middle-class, (and) all blacks and Latinos as potential drug users” (Sturkin, 1997, 157).
sex ed

*Thus, the production of cultural memory around AIDS is always directly linked, though to varying degrees, to the capacity to mobilize support, be it emotional or financial, for the AIDS community* (Sturkin, 1997, 176).

Bright light shatters the darkness. A slide of an inflamed blister on an unidentified man’s mouth covers the entire screen in my highschool auditorium. Groans and shouts of disgust rise up from the student audience. Our reflexes take over and we scrunch up our faces and turn our heads to avoid this onslaught. But with the sound of the advancing slide we glance back, again and again, not wanting to miss the next equally repulsive image. This is the part of sex education that we heard about from our older siblings and schoolmates - the part we’ve been waiting for. Our teachers say this could happen to us if we have sex before we meet someone we love and care about. (As if loving someone means immunity from disease. As if love equals trust.) When the lights come on, our teachers, a man and a woman, invite questions. We surprise them with our candid concerns. We claim that we are going to have sex despite the risks they pose, and we ask for the details of sexual activities to reduce our odds of becoming pregnant or ‘branded’ with an STD. Our teachers acknowledge our request, but claim they are bound by the curriculum and as such cannot provide the information we desire. Instead, what they can do is review various forms of birth control: the pill (highly promoted), the diaphragm (effective but awkward), the IUD (dangerous), and the condom (laborious). They pass each of them around the room for us to handle, obligingly. But the objects remain in their neatly sealed packages and as such remain a mystery to us - one my friends and I are
keen to discover. At least this is what we tell each other. We never hear anything more about the people on the screen (which gives the impression that once infected one loses recognition as a social subject in the public imaginary). All we could do, as young highschool students, is hope to be spared such affliction. (Ironically, according to government statistics, at least one third of us contracted an STD in the next five to ten years of our lives.) What was established here were rigid boundaries between the infected and non-infected, and between love and the pursuit of deviant pleasures, coupled with the notion of 'sexual deviants' as visibly recognizable.

what's love got to do with it?

We . . . need aesthetic works which will make it possible for us to idealize, and, so to identify with bodies we would otherwise repudiate. . . . But this is not enough - we must respect the otherness of the bodies. . . . It is equally vital that we be brought to a conscious knowledge that we have been the agents of that illumination, so that the newly created ideal does not congeal into a tyrannizing essence (Silverman, 1996, 3).

During workshops I tacked up posters from various organizations around the world including some from the Austrian AIDS organization. They produced a series of images, in grainy black and white, each representing a variety of nude heterosexual, gay and lesbian couples in erotic embraces. Each image was accompanied by the motto, “Protect out of Love” (figure seven) Another poster from a series, designed by Big Active for the Terrance Higgins Trust in London, England, depicted two nude women in an erotic embrace with the slogan: “Wet Your Appetite For Safer Sex.” Beneath the logo sits the
image of a heart and text which says "Love Safe." It was always difficult to find appropriate images for workshops, images that might address the variety of identities and identifications present in the audience. This might be why I was more drawn to these images than to their slogans. However, I underestimated the impact of these mottoes. As Gilman points out, the hidden message of the posters, one that we attempted to address during workshops, is that condoms represent caring. Such imagery: “removes sexuality from its brutal, coarse, ugly and destructive mode of representation. Sex is . . . sublimated into other categories such as ‘love’, because the visual vocabulary employed is taken from the erotic vocabulary of mass advertising” (1995, 144). I never did find posters that represented “sex as sex”. I find it difficult to begin to imagine how such images would resist commodification.

Love, empathy and compassion. These words are proposed in various ways during AIDS workshops. Taken at face value they often imply a quick fix remedy that might, if sprinkled with an appropriate dose of political will, eliminate stigma and discrimination. What am I called upon to do when I seek to dis/articulate the values and beliefs which inform this way of hearing/seeing/representing the other? Vetlesen articulates a self-reflexive process that recognizes the role of emotion in processes of self reflection: “. . . feelings incorporate and call for articulation and then for further articulation, engaging us in a process of self-interpretation . . . the perpetual activity of self-interpretation changes us: seeing ourselves differently, we become different - or at least are likely to (Vetlesen, 171). This calls attention to how what is viewed or heard is processed. Yet it is important to call into question the terms of this process to trouble the relationship between
emotion-based identification and action. I enter into this discussion, then, not to consider how to change the self, a task which may be impossible when face to face with racialized, sexualized, dis-eased, and dis-abled others, rather to reflect on how to engage in active, ethical reflection on one’s feelings in the face of another’s trauma.

Which calls for the need to recognize how terms such as empathy and love are constituted. Meyers (1994) defines empathy as a process which requires the ability to “imaginatively reconstruct another person’s feeling, but necessitates neither joining in nor endorsing the other’s experience” (126). Empathy, according to Meyers, “…seeks understanding of others and preserves independent judgment and agency” (34). If my ability to imaginatively reconstruct an other’s feeling is related to how I see the other then discourses which converge during the telling and hearing of HIV testimony affect my notions of who is worthy for moral reflection. As Gilman’s historical work makes clear, past moral categories might be repeated back for the viewer by and through present images of illness and disease. (And we know that reason-based empathy conflates seeing with understanding.) A question which surfaces for me, then, is what needs to be in place for an audience/viewer to question the limits and remains of perceptual claims in order to engage responsible action on the other’s own terms? Theorists such as Vetlesen, Meyers, Spivak and Silverman propose that moving beyond empathy necessitates a re-mythologizing of the terms of love in the ethical and in the political which, in turn, calls for reconsideration of the terms of the self in relation to community. But what might this entail as a practice, one which does not reinscribe idealized notions of love?
How would I approach a re-mythologizing of the notion of ‘love’ in political work? Vetlesen (1994) articulates ‘love’ as a particular way of seeing which has been largely defined by and through culturally normative representations where “our relations to significant others can also shape the standards by which we view ourselves. Being toward others is secondary to being toward ourselves” (1994, 160). According to Vetlesen, naming the terms of a love which enable reflection on the relation between perception, knowledge and ethical action when face to face with the other, requires a reflexivity which moves beyond Meyers’ question of “what is it like to be you?” (1994, 36) to consider how will I act in relation to this knowledge? Cultural memory image/texts, and current social and political relations, provoke identification during HIV testimony on particular terms, terms which are influenced by past and present moral codes which label PWA’s as deviant, primarily male, and detectable. If we are culturally encouraged to disavow such claims within ourselves, how does this impact on our sense of community? And what does love have to do with it?

Silverman (1996) writes extensively on the social and psychic process of idealizing the self through the construction of a distant, deviant other. She calls for a visual praxis which ruptures a narcissistic representational practice, and calls instead for a: “...(visual) practice that frustrates identification through its constant troubling of categories” (84), and renders its own activities legible. In this way, image/texts become the potential vehicle for a “spectatorial self estrangement,” one that has the ability to encourage the
"active gift of love" where the spectators relation with the self is altered and they look to their own involvement in conferring ideality (or not) on the other (Silverman, 89). She emphasizes the need for images which promote "distance" and attribute the other with the capacity to return our look to "thwart the drive toward possession" (Silverman, 99).

How might it be possible to translate this into practice in order to consider broader questions of action and responsibility in relation to a broader community? How do image/texts which seek to counter racialized and sexualized representations shift the perceptual relation between cultural memory and image/text?

*But every place she went*
*they pushed her to the other side*
*and that other side pushed her to the other side of the other side*
*kept in the shadows of the other.*

*(Anzaldúa, quoted by Trinh, 1990, 328)*

When listening or viewing image/texts from subjugated people, how might I be encouraged to reflect on present relations to self and other through the partialness of another’s memory? Without resorting to foundational efforts how do I begin to pay heed to traumatic experiences which may lead me to an unspeakable place within myself, and, in turn, to an inability to act within a broader community? Again I come to questions which are beyond the scope of this thesis to fully explore at this point. However, attending and reflecting on the emotional reactions during AIDS testimony, and while viewing the WMP, might indicate which moral constructs describe the normal for me, but it may not necessarily lead me to action. What needs to be in place in order to
establish an ethical re-telling which calls into question the very terms of identification which disavow action?

Perhaps another way to consider the notion of estrangement is by further considering the relation between emotion-based perception, knowledge - formed by and through cultural memory - and responsible action. Much has been written on the psychoanalytic considerations of perception in terms of the self-same other relation, where the spectator sees an image/text in its denotated form signifying idealized properties that remain unattainable by the spectator, but nevertheless desirable. Silverman proposes the need to engage a ‘productive look’, one formed by and through the terms of an ethical relation with the other. To do so she claims that one must reconsider distorted, often stereotypical image/texts perceived by the viewer, by looking again differently. She states:

> there is nothing we can consciously do to prevent certain projections from occurring over and over again, in an almost mechanical manner, when we look at certain racially, sexually, and economically marked bodies. That does not, in and of itself, signify the failure of the ethical. The ethical becomes operative not at the moment when unconscious desires and phobias assume possession of our look, but in a subsequent moment, when we take stock of what we have just ‘seen,’ and attempt -- with an inevitably limited self-knowledge -- to look again, differently.’ (Silverman 1996, 173)

What, though, are the terms and conditions of looking again differently? How might such theoretically interesting notions actually be put into pedagogical practice? If how we see and perceive difference is influenced by a range of societal, moral and psychic codes
which are grounded in regulatory practices, then considering testimony as an image/text relation might offer an opportunity to historically locate how regulatory practices encourage self/same identification and discourage action in relation to a community.

Our thinking about perception reflects the social and political issues of a particular time and place. Mobilizing such knowledge into practice might provide an opportunity for the viewer to explore a range of conflicting and competing relations between the image/text and the viewer/listener to further consider the current and historical terms of identification and how such processes impede or assist action. For instance, a practice of seeing which disavows emotion, by considering only the social and/or political aspects of an image/text without taking into account the cognitive and psychic realm could easily maintain an autonomous and fixed subjectivity in the viewer leaving them with little reason to engage self-reflection. What is needed is a way to work by and through historically constituted image/texts to consider how social relations, institutional practices, disciplinary power, and epistemological frames might encourage singular, linear productions and interpretations leading an artist/viewer to engage a cognitive process to define, rather than a cognitive-affect process, to decipher and decode. Without such a process image/texts might reinstate categorical imperatives on the listener and the teller which, in turn, encourage distance and repudiation of the other and community. Silverman claims that a key to move an emotion-based response into one that includes responsible action is to disrupt the process of self-same identification. In the next chapter, I explore the role of image/texts in this process.
imagery is seductive
(Meyers, 1994, 52)
For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing... The very word erotic comes from the Greek work eros, the personification of love in all its aspects - born of chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony...

For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within.

(Lorde, 1984, 54, 55, 58)
winding up

The basics of ethics is not identification with those whom we recognize as like ourselves, instead the ethical relation inheres in the encounter with the other, the stranger, whose face beckons us to heed the call to responsibility.

(Levinas, year, 66)

emotions such a love or care are a certain way of seeing

(Netlesen, 1994, 166)

memory and identity support one another, they also sustain certain subjective positions, social boundaries . . . and power.

(Gillis, 1994, 4)

I look to the Women’s Monument Project and HIV testimony as guides from which to consider the relationship between emotion, perception and ethical and political action. Each are sites of remembrance to reflect on how meaning is made between self, other, and community. As image/texts they provide opportunity to rework, over a period of time, the relation between how we see, hear and act. As sites of inquiry and
transformation, situated within particular times and places, their tellings offer consideration of how we are located in shifting past and present positions as knower and known. They call for a radical questioning of the limits and remains of the frames of knowledge and perception and the social and political relations which produce particular meanings by and through their tellings. Both raise interesting questions about the relationship between image/texts, estrangement and political action.

Adorno, as quoted in Cornell (1992, 17), has redefined the notion of communicative freedom from “the coincidence of love and freedom in which one part experiences the other not as boundary but as the condition for its own realization,” to “the art of disunion that allows things to exist in their differences and in their infinity.” It is from this notion of disunion that I consider the relation between emotion, perception, and political/ethical practice. Rather than placing emphasis on one’s similarity to the other, the emphasis within a ‘politicized love’ claims self sacrifice as the antithesis of mutual recognition (Meyers, 1994, 130). As Vetlesen says: “true empathy involves conscious awareness of the difference and the uniqueness of the love object” (1994, 204). This means that in order to be recognized and to recognize the other as worthy, one must first recognize oneself by and through the singularity of the other (Meyers, 1994, 128). This very notion calls into question the appeal to a cohesive self common to image/texts produced within and for social and political movements. Yet how possible is it for subjugated people, those who experience themselves as injured or wounded, to recognize themselves as worthy of and capable of political recognition?
Some time ago I was scanning journals in the library for recent writing on ethics. I came across an article entitled, “Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political” (Dillan, *Ethics*, January, 1997) which caught my attention. The author claims that the emotional dimensions of self-respect can be inappropriate, belief-dependent, and persistent. She describes the etymology of respect as: “to look again, to look back at” (131). From this the author derives that: “Respect is most fundamentally perceptual; a mode of seeing; as all seeing is interpretation, a seeing of something as something, as having a certain significance. Clearly, self-respect depends on interpretive self-perception. But more than this, the etymology urges the idea that self-respect is itself a mode of (normative) interpretive perception of self and worth” (241). What I find most interesting is that knowing and feeling one’s worth are not interconnected in the notion of self-respect. What is the role of image/texts constituted by and through social and political movements in structuring our sense of self and worth? How might they influence how a person understands themselves to be and to be aiming to become in relation to self and community? Erikson outlines how the impact of trauma effects notions of community where: “a sense of difference can become a kind of calling . . . estrangement becomes the basis for communality . . .” (Erikson, 1995, 198). If perception is prescribed by society, then, as Vetlessen outlines, an individuals’ ability to consider the other as other may be blocked: “the other is disclosed in a pregiven, fixed manner (1994, 194). How might an image/text which strives for estrangement impact an estranged and traumatized community, and simultaneously on ethical and political action from within such communities?
According to Vetlesen, one key to establishing an ethical relation with the other, one in which we “demand of others for others, ... and ourselves for others, something of the regard which we demand of others for ourselves” (1994, 160) is to include, in this equation, a discussion of the significance of our relation toward ourselves. Not until we establish an ethical/moral relation with ourselves will we be able to fully realize the other in their differences and uniqueness. How might a discussion on image/texts facilitate this process in pedagogical settings?

How can image/texts assist the viewer in moving beyond notions of an autonomous and detached self toward recognizing the self as separate from the other, yet still interconnected within community? Levinas’ notion of the ‘ethical subject’ would take up image/texts in a way that allows the other to be seen in their alterity. Moving beyond moral identification and illusory empathy require knowing the other as other in a move toward responsible/ethical action. Such an engagement would interrogate the foundations which compose the subject as whole and autonomous. Given what we know about the relation between trauma, self-respect and community, what is required of the reader/viewer to disarticulate the terms of the moral codes which inform such normative image/text relations?

if commemorative practice does not explicitly function to renew a reconstructed living memory for community, the potential insurgency in such practice will be greatly diminished. (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994, 12)
Attempting to set the stage for producing an ethical/political subjectivity by and through an image/text relation conjures Spivak's notion of fraying which I interpret as involving a surrender to a text in a way that acknowledges the requirements of a fully realized dialogic relation with an other (Spivak, 1993). Fraying pays heed to the in between spaces of meaning which exist between the saying and the said where "... what is not said structures what and how we hear" (Trinh 1990, 380). Seen as a frayed relation the notion of recognition moves away from a process which consumes the other on normative terms of identification and love, to one which sparks a dialogue and an openness within the image/text relation.

Silverman challenges the notion of ideality conferred upon the other and instead embraces the concept of the "good enough". The "good enough" displaces altogether not only the idea of an intrinsic ideal, but also the fantasy of the fragmented body. In so doing, it deconstructs two of the primary psychic supports for difference (Silverman, 1996, 226). She claims that recognizing ideality as something unattainable yet desirable may be the key to the "active gift of love." Yet she presumes that it is possible for image/texts to confer the singularity of the other, one which disrupts my ability to idealize by "recognizing as my own something we would normally "abject" as other" (Silverman, 224), with representations which refigure subjugated peoples as powerful and beyond the confines of a particular stereotype. Doing so reinforces oppositional practices through reversal without shattering the adversarial frame itself. It also does not acknowledge how image/texts which produce notions of 'politicized love', and recognize the other's singularity, need to be backed by political organization and collective action,
as it is unknown how image/texts without such support might provoke change. Am I wrong in assuming that without such support any transformation that may occur by and through image/texts would fail from a lack of a tangible outlet?

How might such transformative image/texts be constituted? As Meyers states it seems unlikely that they will be effective if they are constructed on established aesthetic or moral standards (1994, 103). She too suggests the notion of estrangement, as a form of 'cognitive dissonance', to unsettle established ways of seeing which inscribe normative codes and keep the self/abject other relation intact. Clearly artists and other cultural producers have a key role to play in refiguring image/texts, but it is not clear if refiguring the image/text relation actually serves a disruption to established patterns of thinking, seeing, and feeling. More likely is it that practices of repetition, decoding and deciphering, along with poetic image/texts which resist appeals to a whole, are more effective approaches to refiguration then semantic reversals and ironic juxtapositions. Rather then dwell too long on limitations, though, what might be possible in pedagogical settings, made up of diverse audiences who might claim dissimilar levels of exposure to and interest in working with images, when inquiring into how an image/text relation might transcend the relations which exist within and beyond its frame? In other words how might we probe image/texts for their dynamic relations, in this case to inquire into the moral codes which presuppose identification and self-reflection, to consider image/texts as sites through which to come to terms with meaning, to push beyond one meaning into the realm of possible meanings (Lather, year, 61)?
Given the theme of this thesis it seems appropriate to further explore the notion of estrangement. How might it play out within an image/text relation of social and political movements? It could be assumed that a number of relations are at play within and beyond the frame of a dynamic image/text. For instance, as discussed earlier, the complexity of an image/text relation implies a simultaneous encounter with the poetic realm of cultural and collective memory, cognitive relations, as well as the poetic/emotional relations at play in the dialogic relation with the viewer. Image/texts, then, are sites in which a fluid and less coercive conceptual organization of terms are at play to transcend oppositional logic (Grosz, 1989, ixv). Yet, how might such fluid and poetic meanings be translated in political and social movements? Are there times when the focus should only be on the political outcome of an image/text relation? Or is much missed in such an assumption? Is it time to reconsider the separation between politics and poetics?

Image/texts might offer a way to trouble conventional frames of memory and politics. For instance, if the way in which we talk about the past is done through certain (normative) conventions (certain approaches to imagery, imagining, to political and social issues, to identity, to difference, to the normal) about how we perceive the past. In this way memory (cultural, collective, common), as constituted in the particular sites of the WMP and HIV testimony, is always a performance (account, production) of how it is that we tell. Perhaps the image/text relation could be a site to break through the retellings which conventional frames of memory produce, to create space for a viewing which provokes a rethought notion of self-reflection. 

\[15\] As discussed in Simon's History and Memory course. 1997.
If image/texts are capable of forming a series of relations with a variety of events, the challenge, then, is to not conflate one event over another (Simon, class discussion, 1997). Rather, the process involves decoding and deciphering, rather than figuring out, the fullest possible range of perspectives on what an image/text has come to mean in a particular context and our relation to it, to ourselves, and to the kind of community we aspire for. This might require a ‘surrendering’ to the image/text to explore one’s resistance to otherness and to action within a broader community. As Vetlessen says the object does not exist separately from the description given it. (1994) (How does this consider the impact of trauma?) Exploring the image/text relations produced by and through social and political movements provide sites to sort through and discover appeals to coherent narratives which overlook contradictions, multiple interpretations, and to ponder the implications of shifting stakes and investments in the production and consumption of image/text relations. In this way image/texts which produce a proliferation of meanings by and through memory, poetics, and cognition, might have more political and social impact toward change than those which reproduce existing categories. In an attempt to wind up a thesis which reveals my many contradictory stakes and investments in social change practices and image/text relations, I finish off intentionally inconclusive with a quote,

*Art expresses an ambiguity that provokes, not an explicitness that terminates wonder and analysis.*

*(Edelman, 1995, 64)*
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