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On the Threshold between Silence and Storytelling

The power of a story is shown through stories about a story.

—Jo-ann Archibald / Q'um Q'um Xiiem,
*Indigenous Storywork: Educating the
Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*

In her discussion of Walter Benjamin's iconic essay "The Storyteller," the important theorist of testimony Shoshana Felman observes that "[s]ilence, Benjamin knows well, is the essence of oppression and traumatization, but it is also something that escapes (resists) the master" (Felman 2002, 22). For Felman, the importance of testimonial discourse lies in its capacity to break the oppressive silence that "paralyzed, effaced, or deadened, those whom violence has treated in their lives as though they were already *dead*, those who have been made (in life) without expression, without a voice and without a face have become—much like the dead—the historically (and philosophically) expressionless (*das Ausdruckslose*)" (22–23). In this chapter, I examine how silence can be deployed both as a form of resistance and as a means to escape the psychic pain of a silence that prohibits putting into language the experience of trauma. Constitutive to the Indigenous humanities is an epistemic shift from European-based knowledge to Indigenous storytelling epistemologies. In the context of the production, reception, and comprehension of testimonial discourses, what this means is that Indigenous writers, artists, and filmmakers are recounting the trauma of colonial and Canadian postcolonial national violence through Indigenous storytelling practices. The impact of this epistemic shift is multiple, as Indigenous storytelling epistemologies challenge some of the presuppositions underlying

testimonial studies and its theoretical focus on "breaking the silence" as a necessary and inevitable response to colonial histories of violence. In documenting the significance of the impact of Indigenous storytelling epistemologies on testimonial studies, I hope to open the theoretical terrain of the knowledge of violence to the diversity of experiences of people who make up the modern nation and from whose histories emerge specific and timely knowledges of resistance and response to the history of colonial and postcolonial violence.

Today Indigenous writers and artists are using Indigenous storytelling practices to transform what was once "expressionless" into a language of experience that resists the reality of violence as an inevitable or essential determination in Indigenous life. In this language of resistance, "silence" exceeds its signification as a sign of repression and becomes, uncannily, a productive space to create a new language in which to give expression to previously unrecognized violence. With reference to the history of the residential schools, Indigenous storytelling practices contribute to making a new form, perhaps even a new genre, through which to gain knowledge about the specificity of violence that occurred in this context, knowledge that is reparative for writers, listeners, readers, and viewers.

Testimonial discourse is normally composed of autobiographical accounts of individual experiences of traumatic events. Such discourse is effective precisely because autobiographical testimonies make use of the underlying representational authority of an individual self whose testimony may receive the protection and security granted by the recognition of individual rights. The cultural construction of the "self" in an Indigenous epistemological framework, however, also places value on the individual's relationship to community and its kinship filiations and affiliations. This does not mean that questions of individual rights are irrelevant but, rather, that the speaking subject is accountable to and implicated in a set of kinship and community relations that includes, but also extends beyond, the individual self. Thus, one important aspect of this epistemic shift involves the recognition of a speaking subject that is situated in a field of multiple interrelations. As such the Indigenous testifying subject is neither fully subjugated by colonial or national state power, nor, for that matter, burdened by the need to heroically and individually surpass the realities of such powers. Being constituted as a speaking subject within an expansive set of Indigenous kinships opens up multiple connections with which to challenge so-called postcolonial state powers. In conjunction with current testimonial practices, Indigenous storytelling

contributes to the heterogeneity of strategies available to address social and political change. From the perspective of European epistemologies and their critical or alternative epistemic interventions, what this means is the field of epistemology has not necessarily or simply become more inclusive. Rather, the production of knowledge is entering a time when the limits of epistemological unities are becoming increasingly apparent, thus making possible the emergence of a field of critical epistemology studies that recognizes heterogeneous knowledges and knowledge formations. Due to the fact that “testimony” is being gathered for the recently established Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), an approach to testimonial discourse that takes into account Indigenous storytelling epistemology will be important for recognizing the heterogeneity of testimonial practices and the multiple possibilities they hold for healing and social change.

My intention here is to bring about an epistemic encounter between psychoanalytically informed testimonial studies and Indigenous storytelling epistemologies in an effort to delimit how the figure of “silence” is valued by both but for differing reasons—differences, I would add, that impact the construction of traumatized subjects and the history of colonial and postcolonial violence within reparative textualities, practices, and frameworks of knowledge.

Recognizing Postcolonial Violence

Of the many strategies deployed by the Canadian federal government toward disassembling the matrices of kinship affiliation and Indigenous community values, perhaps none were as effective as its combined efforts with the Christian missions in furthering the Indian residential school policy. By 1920, amendments to the Indian Act mandated compulsory school attendance for Indian children, often taken by force to residential schools located in unfamiliar sites away from their lands, their mothers and educators, their kinship affiliations and communities. Sometimes the web of connections stretched far enough in the children’s imaginations to wish to follow them back home. If caught, however, they would be severely punished; sometimes the threads that bound them to home were irrevocably damaged and severed, leaving the children in a foreign space that was profoundly disorienting.

In *Victims of Benevolence: Discipline and Death at the Williams Lake Indian Residential School, 1891–1920*, Elizabeth Furniss recounts the deaths of two boys who attempted to escape from a residential school:

In February 1902, when he was eight years old, Duncan [Sticks] once again ran away from the school. He was outside, working under the supervision of a teacher, when he and eight other boys ran off. The others were caught, but Duncan disappeared into the woods. His body was found the next day by a local rancher. Duncan had died by the roadside thirteen kilometers from the school. (14)

She also recounts the death by suicide of a young boy named Augustine Allan from Canin Lake: "Augustine committed suicide while at the residential school in the summer of 1920. He and eight other boys had made a suicide pact and had gathered together to eat poisonous water hemlock. Augustine died, but the other eight survived" (14). These incidents provide graphic testimony to the violence that existed within residential schools and the limited options for resistance available to the children. The TRC was implemented to address such events as these and other documented acts of cruelty and suffering administered within the schools on a regular basis.

The TRC was implemented on the basis of recommendations made in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996) to hold an inquiry into the schools, although the form that such an inquiry could take was not intended to be limited to only a "Truth and Reconciliation Commission." The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples itself gathered testimonial evidence through public hearings from 1991 to 1996 on the residential schools and other government policies affecting Indigenous peoples in Canada. Residential schools were viewed by the commissioners as one of the most significant government policy initiatives to have detrimental effects on Indigenous peoples. The authors of the report state: "Our research and hearings indicate that a full investigation into Canada's residential school system, in the form of a public inquiry established under Part I of the *Public Inquiries Act*, is necessary to bring to light and begin to heal the grievous harms suffered by countless Aboriginal children, families and communities as a result of the residential school system" (Canada 1: xxiii). In his testimony, collected by this commission, Phil Fontaine, then Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, called for disclosure of the residential school experience "to allow our people to begin a healing process. *Because in a process of healing, the first and most important step is disclosure.* So, there must be a process that will allow all of those people, the many, many, many people that attended residential schools, to allow them to begin to talk about their experiences,

so that they can begin to heal” (*For Seven Generations* CD-ROM, emphasis added).

In making its case for a public inquiry into residential schools, the report emphasizes that such an inquiry represents “an appropriate social and institutional forum to enable Aboriginal people to do what we and others before us have suggested is necessary: to stand in dignity, voice their sorrow and anger, and be listened to with respect” (Canada 1: 383–84). As Phil Fontaine insists, the reality of colonial violence must be disclosed, recognized, and accounted for; thus, he argues

As well, we feel that it’s really very important, as a matter of fact, critical to this whole process that, whatever transpired, whatever transpired, be recorded and it become a part of the public record, so that what happened to our people in residential schools, what was done to our people, will never be lost, will always be part of our memory, and it will always be there for people to see what was done to our people. (*For Seven Generations* CD-ROM)

To facilitate the documentation of the residential schools, the report also calls for the establishment of a national Aboriginal archive and library to house records concerning residential schools that would provide for researching and analyzing “the nature and effects of residential school policies on Indigenous peoples” (*For Seven Generations*). Important to documenting the “nature and effects” of residential school policies is the question of what constitutes “violence,” of what, in Fontaine’s repetitive phrase amounts to “whatever transpired.” What counts as a violent act is not only the subject of legal and legislative inquiries, it also depends upon the cultural constructions of violence and the political values attributed to those constructions. Violence or trauma is not always self-evident. In her essay “Forms of Judicial Blindness,” Shoshana Felman argues that the *failure to see trauma* is a condition of “structural exclusion from our factual frame of reference” (Felman 2002, 81). In her analysis of the O. J. Simpson case, Felman observes that some forms of the abuse of power, such as men beating women, can “[defeat] sight, even when it comes in contact with the rules of evidence and with the trial’s legal search for visibility. The political is thus essentially tied up with the structure of the trauma. It is to the structure of the trauma, therefore (and not simply to a different ideology), that our ‘eyes’ should be precisely *educated*” (83, emphasis added). Violence must be learned, it is not a given. When specific historical and social events call for restructuring our perceptions of reality, I

would suggest that the creation and implementation of new and different frameworks of knowing are key to *re*learning what counts as violence, to whom and in what contexts.

One way that the meaning of residential school violence has been recorded is through accounts such as the following, in which Eleanor Brass, for instance, recalls:

the worst atrocities happened during the winter when the children were quarantined to prevent sickness. No parents were allowed to visit. On one occasion, however, her father came by just as his niece had been punished for attempting to run away. Her hands and arms had been beaten so they looked like boxing gloves, and her ankles were shackled together. Walter Dieter's face became deathly pale when he saw the child, and he took the steps in a few leaps, burst into the principal's office, grabbed him by the scruff of this neck and dragged him downstairs. Though the shackles were removed immediately, nothing else came of the incident. (Grant 9)

As this brief excerpt shows, the recognition of just what constitutes "violence" within the institutional context of the residential school needs structural adjustment in the eyes of the school's principle. As Felman asserts, not only is it a matter of breaking the silence about the abuse at the schools but creating an "educated eye" capable of seeing the reality of trauma and the effects of its violent aftermath.

There are many avenues open to obtaining justice in the question of residential school violence. The fields of education, jurisprudence, and government policy have been at the forefront in the pursuit of knowledge about the schools as well as in bringing about changes in the public domain toward the sanctioned ignorance concerning "violence" in the residential schools. In the field of literary criticism, scholars such as Sam McKegney and Deena Rymhs have made significant contributions to examining the political importance of Indigenous literary representation of the residential school experience. In this chapter, I analyze the history of Indian residential schools in order to question not just the facticity of its violence but to extend the discussion to include an analysis of what constitutes the meaning of postcolonial state violence, its aftermath, and effects. This involves shifting the epistemic focus from documenting the impact of the Indian residential school system in which testimony is gathered as evidentiary material that supports already existing knowledge

of the facts to how Indigenous cultural practitioners, such as writers, artists, performers, and filmmakers, represent residential school violence within the epistemological framework of Indigenous storytelling practices. As an alternative to the rationalist project of epistemic containment achieved through the incitement to testify, in legal and nonlegal contexts, Indigenous storytelling epistemologies allow for the intervention of different frameworks of knowing that can undermine the injunction to turn cruelty and sexual violence, especially toward children, into a discourse to be easily reconsumed and fetishized within, for example, the potentially pornographic languages of colonial subjugation and victimization.

Breaking the Silence of Residential Schooling:
Shirley Sterling's *My Name Is Seepeetza*

In 2007, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was created to address the burgeoning number of legal cases before the courts demanding compensation for the detrimental effects attributed to what is called the “common experience” of residential schools and, especially, the “sexual or physical abuses or other abuses that caused serious psychological effects,” as stated on the settlement poster (see www.ahf.ca).

Knowledge of these forms of abuse has been available for some time now. Over the past three decades research on residential schools in the form of gathering testimony has taken place through interviews, recordings, and their publication. The education scholar Celia Haig-Brown was one of the first to produce an extensive study of residential schools in British Columbia. In *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* (1988), she analyzed testimony from residential survivors among the Secwepemc, also known as the Shuswap. Basil Johnston, a member of the Ojibway nation and a former student of the residential school experience, wrote an autobiographical account of his experience at the Garnier residential school in *Indian School Days*, and Agnes Grant gathered the stories of women survivors of residential schools, including Eleanor Brass and Rita Joe, among others, in *Finding My Talk*. Many of the women in this collection also wrote autobiographical and semi-autobiographical accounts of their residential school experience, such as Shirley Sterling's *My Name Is Seepeetza*.

Sterling's story is written in the form of a journal in which the narrator, Seepeetza, a twelve-year-old girl in grade 6 attending the Kalamik Indian residential school in 1958 recounts an aspect of her childhood that includes both her experience at home on the Joyaska Ranch and in the

institutional context of a residential school. The journal is prefaced with a set of two opposing drawings that map the landscape of her home and school. The maps, signed by Seepeetza, tell a story about spatial configurations of life, society, and culture in two very different sites of habitation. The ranch details an animal gravesite, trails, the location of the house and additional buildings, fences, the main road, as well as places that represent events such as "Missy's picnic spot," "dead calf tree," and "trees where the cows have their calves." Natural elements, such as the hayfields, the stack yard for hay, cottonwood trees, and the pond are loosely drawn with little concern for locating their place in more abstract and regular visual terms that would signify order and control over nature. Rather, human and animal touch in the markers, they have a proximity and contiguity that is lacking in the "other" map. The "School Map by Martha Stone," on the other hand, is drawn in such a way as to represent the routinization of people and the containment of the land in neatly divided spaces that separate people from each other by houses drawn as regular squares and rectangles. The geometry of life is figured by the striated spaces of agricultural and sports fields, living quarters, and outbuildings. Even the orchard is a geometric display of three-by-four rows as is an outdoor play area with a merry-go-round, swings, and teeter-totters, all detailed in a formal regularity as if to suggest that "playtime," too, was subject to order and routine—nothing is left to chance or the spontaneous movements of bodies that might come into contact with each other through the intimacies of play, learning, and joy.

Activities that might have generated an experience of freedom in bodily movement such as dancing are the subject of disciplinary regulation for Seepeetza. The book cover, shown here, depicts a photograph of three young female Indigenous children dressed in male and female clothes for Irish folklore dances. Underneath the image, the regular lines of a journal are filled with the cursive strokes of a practiced hand, neatly recounting that "[l]ast year Father Sloane took some pictures of us when we were in our dancing costumes at the Irish Concert. It was funny because I was smiling in those pictures. I looked happy. How can I look happy when I'm scared all the time?"

In recounting the experience of dance, Seepeetza narrates events in a style that emphasizes the communication of facts: "The concert we put on is like a variety show. We sing, dance, do choral speaking and some dialogue, which is talking. There are forty of us girls picked out by Sister Theo and Sister Superior. Some dress up like boys, but we all wear make-up

My Name Is SEEPETZA

Winner:
Sheila A. Egoff
Children's Book Prize
Shortlisted for the
Governor General's
Literary Award



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Shirley Sterling

Figure 1.1. Book cover of *My Name Is Seepetza*, by Shirley Sterling. Permission to reproduce granted by House of Anansi Press.

like rouge for our cheeks, eyebrow pencil, mascara, blue eye shadow and bright red lipstick" (74). In reporting on the concert, Seepeetza provides a hint of the struggle involved in these forced performances: "We practice so much on Sunday afternoons that I sometimes almost fall asleep on my feet, and my whole body aches. If somebody sings off-key, Sister Superior keeps us singing until she finds out who it is. Then she makes them practice over and over alone until they get us on key. . . . She hits the piano key hard to make sure we do it right" (74). It is only when she is in the woods alone that Seepeetza sings the songs "with no words" and has fun with the tunes as they mimic bird calls that echo through the woods (74–75). Even when the girls are praised in public media for their performances, that praise does not translate into a positive memorable experience for the girls. Seepeetza records that "Sister Theory cut [a newspaper article] out and saved it in a scrapbook" (75). At one particular event, Seepeetza remembers that when the girls struck up a conversation with other school dance troupes, the nuns came and stopped the interaction, berating the girls for leaving their dressing room (76).

When describing the abusiveness of the dancing events for the girls, in contrast to their purpose as a singular source of pride for the nuns who are obviously fulfilling a mandate to create a positive representation of the school to the white community, Seepeetza narrates an experience where she was ill and yet was still forced to perform (62–63). She also records Sister Theo's violent outburst during rehearsals: "The way Sister Theo yells at us reminds me of my dad when he's drinking. It scares me. . . . That time I caught the flu Sister Theo yelled at me and kept punching me on the back until I almost fell. Once she punched me and I got a boil on my back. I was scared to tell her, so I didn't" (63, 64). Perhaps the most pervasive emotion throughout the text is that of fear. In fact, the name "Seepeetza," the narrator informs us, is her given Indigenous name and means "White Skin or Scared Hide." Seepeetza notes, "It's a good name for me because I get scared of things, like devils" (77). We learn about Seepeetza's naming after the journal entry on the Irish concert (75–77).

In the book's dedication, Sterling includes a poem titled "Coyote Laughs." Coyote is a Trickster figure (see Fagan), and in Indigenous knowledges, the Trickster has the power to turn situations on their head, to transform them into something they are not. This method of reinterpretation represents a storytelling skill that requires transforming situations that appear dire and insurmountable into the opposite. In her poem, Sterling puts it this way:

Then somewhere in the pines
Coyote laughs—
Transforming night,
And welcoming the little star
That follows Moon.

Here the night of darkness is infused with a little light, such as that of a child, to follow in the footsteps of the Elders, the Moon. The light is also the infusion of hope into the otherwise traumatic and violent realities of residential school. In the narrative, Seepetza imagines the laughing coyotes when she recalls during her time in residential school a memory of camping out under the stars with her family (16). This memory soothes her fears and helps her to cope with the experience of being scared in the residential school. Seepetza's experience of fear is something that she is also able to use to protect herself. In one particular scene, Seepetza records a scene with Sister Theo in which she felt threatened, and, as a result, she was able to resist a potentially dangerous moment when she might have been subjected to sexual abuse:

I still don't like Sister Theo, though. Once she came into my tub room when I was going to have my bath. She told me to get my clothes off and get in the water. I wouldn't. I will not let anyone see me without my clothes on. When she yelled at me to take my bloomers off and get in the tub I looked at the DANGER sign up where the electricity switches are. She saw it too. I was thinking if she made me do it I would wait till she left, climb up on the pipe, touch the switch and get electrocuted. We stared at each other. Then she opened the door and went out. (83).

In this case, Seepetza's fear of imminent "DANGER" saved her, if not completely from Sister Theo's abuse then at least from the possibility of committing suicide in order to escape sexual violence. The fear caused by Sister Theo's abusive behavior was mobilized by Seepetza to prevent further violence and damage being done. In other words, her fear comes to work as a limit, as a way of stopping further fears from unleashing themselves, from prohibiting the internalization of such fears to the point of self-destruction.

In this reading of Seepetza's journal, I have pointed out both the making of "fear" as an emotion created under abusive and traumatic

conditions and its use as an experience and feeling to prohibit further trauma that could then lead to the complete breakdown of an individual's relationship to her or his sense of "humaneness" in the world.

Along with such works as Sterling's story, another notable text includes Mercredi Morningstar's *Morningstar: A Warrior's Spirit* in which she documents her experience of the intergenerational effects of residential school by providing a personal account of its effects on her grandmother's, mother's, and her own life journey. In recording these histories, these writers and educators engaged in specific methodological techniques, cultural protocols, and ethical questions in order to bring to light a traumatic and painful history of cultural genocide. The phrase often associated with this instrumental design to "assimilate" Indigenous peoples through such institutions as the residential school was "to kill the Indian in [the child], in order to save the man," a phrase attributed to Lt. Richard Henry Pratt of the US Army, who created the prototype of an Indian school based on the model of a prison for "pacified" Indians. He established the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania in 1878 with backing from the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (see Fournier; Churchill; and Milloy). As with the Indian residential schools in Canada, "students" were trained for industrial purposes where the emphasis was on agriculture and trades instruction for boys and domestic training for girls, sufficient to equip a servant class. As many of the writers mentioned here testify, there was little emphasis on academic instruction.

[In 1936] a fifteen-year-old girl from the nearby Shubenacadie Reserve refused to return to the school and gave the following statement to the agent and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police: "I have been going to Indian school for the past five years. . . . Before my holidays this year I was employed in kitchen for eleven weeks. . . . In the eleven weeks . . . I spent a total of two weeks in school. The Sister has beaten me many times over the head, pulled my hair, and struck me on the back of my neck with a ruler, and at times grabbed ahold of me and beat me on the back with her fists."

I have also been ordered to stand on the outside of the windows with a rope around my waist to clean windows on the fourth floor with a little girl holding the rope. When I told the Sister I was afraid to go out the window she scolded me and made me clean the window and threatened to beat me if I did not do it. This is being done to other children. (Qtd. in Paul 269)



Figure 1.2. Illustration by Vernon Gloade, “Four stories up and terrified.” From Daniel Paul, *We Were Not the Savages: A Micmac Perspective on the Collision of European and Aboriginal Civilizations*. Permission to reproduce granted by Fernwood Publishing Company.

It is perhaps, then, not surprising that Indigenous scholars in the field of education have been at the forefront of changing the educational system to meet the needs of Indigenous children and to create curriculum and institutional forms that are flexible enough to incorporate Indigenous approaches to knowledge. Jo-ann Archibald / Q’um Q’um Xiem, a member of the Stó:lō Nation, for instance, focuses her research on Indigenous storytelling and epistemologies in the context of her academic work as a social scientist. Her work, as I argue later, provides for the kind

of epistemological encounter I imagine that could address how to testify to the colonial and national institutionalization of the various forms of violence that existed within the residential schools. In the following section, I am particularly interested in how the concept of "silence" appears in the psychoanalytical testimonial studies of Dori Laub and in Jo-ann Archibald's discussion of Indigenous framework of knowledge. The concept of silence in these disparate sites of knowledge productions is not without significance for distinguishing the uses of testimonial discourses. For instance, is the idea of "breaking the silence," advocated for as a necessary good, meant to disclose violence in order to effect reconciliation across national and Indigenous jurisdictions? Or does its usefulness lie, not as a means to an end but as a way to construct a space of learning, witnessing, and communicating that is indeterminate and even, at times, resistive or ambivalent toward the injunction *to disclose*?

Indigenous "Storywork": Listening to Silence

In *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*, Archibald assembles a multilayered approach to Indigenous storytelling practices that includes recounting her experience with Western epistemologies in the field of education, learning about the principles and protocols involved in Indigenous storytelling practices, and negotiating the complex and challenging process of bringing Indigenous knowledges and storytelling practices into dialogue with Western methods of knowledge acquisition. With reference to the latter, she is especially indebted to those methodologies in the social sciences that provide her with ways of gathering information on Indigenous pedagogical practices. The effect of this multilayered approach is to demonstrate the teaching capacities of storytelling while simultaneously producing knowledge about the significance and value of Indigenous storytelling as a way of learning and knowing. In response to the "theorizing dilemma" of falling into some of the "misguided approaches of Western literary theory," Archibald seeks to avoid this "new act of colonization" by finding the theory embedded in the stories rather than applying a European-based theoretical approach to an Indigenous practice of knowing (26). Echoing the words of Kimberley Blaeser, she writes: "We must first 'know the stories of our people' and then 'make our own story too.' . . . we must 'be aware of the ways they [Western literary theorists] change the story we already know' for only with that awareness can we protect the integrity of the Native American Story" (qtd. in Archibald 16).

For a non-Aboriginal scholar such as myself, educated in the English literary tradition, the ethico-epistemic challenge lies in the dual process of *unlearning* the institutional, epistemic, and representational violences of colonization *and learning from* Indigenous storytelling about the interwoven fabric of reciprocity, respect, balance, and responsibility that informs an Indigenous approaches to reading Indigenous stories. What one learns is important, of course. Just as important, however, is how one learns. In her commentary on testimonial practices, Paula Gunn Allen writes that “bearing witness is one solution, but it is singularly tearing, for witnessing genocide—as with conversation—requires that someone listen and comprehend” (156). It is this combined activity of listening and comprehending that I want to expand upon in Jo-ann Archibald’s notion of Indigenous “storywork.”

For Archibald, Indigenous storywork demands a concerted interactive exchange between storyteller and listener. The participatory aspects of Indigenous storywork are also emphasized by Willie Blackwater, who, in his own documented testimony, writes about storytelling in the following terms: “If I did something wrong, my grandfather would tell me a long story, and I had to figure out for myself its meaning and what it told me about what I had done” (Fournier and Crey, 65–66). The importance of the participatory listener who must enter into the process of meaning making is also underscored by James Sakej Henderson when he notes that the “key rule is that the listener must accept that regardless of what information he or she may have requested, it is an Elder or Storykeeper that determines the best way to tell a story or convey the teaching the story contains” (158). A reader, without the requisite training in Indigenous storytelling, is likely to view such a situation as implicitly hierarchical in that the Elder, as the keeper of knowledge, is situated in a more powerful position than the listener. But this view decontextualizes the overall situatedness of the storytelling encounter, which is one where the storytelling and receiving dynamic is more like a gift exchange than that which takes places in the marketplace of commodification, dispossession, and appropriation—a point to which I will return.

One of the aspects of Archibald’s text that is especially relevant to research in testimonial studies is her attention to the concept of silence as she uses it to shape a particular set of connections between story, storyteller, and listener. Archibald emphasizes the gaps that open up between researchers and Elders in learning about Indigenous storywork. For example, the silence that lies between the question and the response, or the lack of a response, may indicate that proper protocols have not been

followed. In other cases, the question may be answered with a story and the questioner is left wondering about the significance of the story she has been told. In her initial research discussions with the Coqualeetza Elders' Group, Archibald experienced "long silences" after asking questions (88). She writes that at first she was uncomfortable with the silence and began to question herself as to why this was the response she was getting. What she learned was that

these silences were important because the Elders were thinking about the questions and preferred not to speak until they were sure about their answers. Silence is respectful and can create good thinking. They would answer with stories of personal, family, and community experience. Sometimes, a question was not answered when it was asked because the Elders needed time to reawaken their memories and ensure that what they said was the truth as they knew it. (89)

Thus, these gaps, these silences, serve several purposes. They open up space for the ethical insertion of cultural protocols such as respect and reciprocity or for thinking through what information or knowledge is required to answer a question. This silence also contains a process whereby meaning *unfolds* in the intertextual relations between listening and learning. The active relationship between storyteller, listener, and story gives meaning to Archibald's conception of "Indigenous storywork," an interactive process that brings people and story together to accomplish the work of comprehension. In other words, learning *to learn* requires a mutually beneficial and reciprocal *work ethic*.

Testimony and Indigenous storytelling have more in common than one might expect, precisely because both ways of knowing hold the unexpected as part of a genuine desire to reach out beyond the known. But what would it mean to engage in an epistemic encounter with the unfamiliar? In her work on testimony in the field of Holocaust studies, Shoshana Felman observes that "texts that testify do not simply *report facts* but, in different ways, encounter—and make us encounter—*strangeness*; . . . the concept of the testimony, speaking from a stance of the superimposition of literature, psychoanalysis, and history, is in fact quite unfamiliar and *estranging*" (1992, 7). Not only can the teaching and learning about testimony yield to an understanding of its pervasiveness as in "how it is implicated—sometimes unexpectedly—in almost every kind of writing" (7) but also of its uncanny attributes, whereby "the more

we look closely at texts, the more they show us that, unwittingly, we do not even know what testimony is and that, in any case, it is not simply what we thought we knew it was" (7). The defamiliarizing aspects of testimonial practices are, indeed, part of a process in which listening and learning are transformed into knowledge, but just what that knowledge is, is not always evident.

In her understanding of how meaning is made through storytelling, Archibald quotes the following detailed explanation by the Elder Wapaskwan:

There is a "surface" story: the text, and the things one has to know about the performance of it for others. The stories are metaphoric, but there are several levels of metaphor involved. The text, combined with the performance, contains a "key" or a "clue" to unlock the metaphor. When a hearer has that story, and knows the narrative sequence of it, there is another story contained within that story, like a completely different embedded or implicit text.

The trick is this: that the implicit or embedded text, itself, contains clues, directions—better yet, specifications—for the interpretation of an implicit text embedded in it. . . . A hearer isn't meant to understand the story on all levels, immediately. It is as if it unfolds. (qtd. in Archibald, 84)

As with the description of meaning making in storytelling practices, this passage contains a clue to its comprehension in the use of the metaphor of "unfolding." The story *unfolds* its meaning, which suggests multiple layers of meaning, as in the unfolding of fabric, as well as a temporal dimension to such a process; that meaning unfolds over time. This spatio-temporal aspect to constructing the meaning of story, its very "materiality," also puts into play a matrix of knowledge production. Of significance here is that meaning making via the social kinship of storyteller and listener is part of a communal activity. This does not mean that the individual story is collapsed into a larger whole. On the contrary, stories are part of a collective repository of knowledge that is more like a web of interconnected threads than a striated space demarcated by fixed lines. Within this web of meaning, spaces are constructed and provisionally framed by nodes of interconnection. These spaces, I want to suggest, constitute the silences in which meaning unfolds in Indigenous storywork. In other words, we are not dealing here with empty spaces, or empty silences; nor are we in

a fully bracketed spatial enclosure, because the space of silence is constituted by the corners of its intersecting threads, threads that, importantly, continue to extend beyond the frame and can thus shift and transform over time. This web site is always under construction and always generative as in the phrase, *pregnant with silence*.

As in life, writes Paula Gunn Allen, Indigenous cultural production "embodies the principle of kinship, rendering the beautiful in terms of connectedness of elements in harmonious, balanced, respectful proportion of each and any to all-in-All" (9). Given the readerly-writerly relationship elaborated by Archibald, I would suggest that the production of residential school testimony through governmental, legal, and scholarly practices (such as RCAP and the TRC), is not entirely disconnected from the cultural production of Indigenous storytelling. There exists an intertextual kinship of signification between them.

Taking into account Indigenous storytelling as a way to approach the history of the Indian residential schools provides a rich body of knowledge that can not only inform the diversity of people living in Canada about the effects of this historical event but also surpass its damaging legacy by revitalizing the Indigenous knowledges that were silenced and destroyed by the residential schools. Indigenous storytelling epistemologies also introduce to critical traditions of knowledge techniques to the study of Indigenous literatures. Indigenous storytelling is vital to recognizing a heterogeneity of practices, testimonial and artistic, that can also contribute to processes of healing from the destructive policies of the Indian residential schools.

Reparative Textualities

The desire to obtain wellness, to *repair* the self, lies at the center of reparative practices and their testimonial discourses. A key question, then, is how do the forms of knowledge we have at our disposal further heal or *repair* the violence suffered at the hands of postcolonial Canada? While one would like to say unequivocally that testimonial discourses restore notions of the human that can disrupt the circulation of the categories of the nonhuman and their violent attachments to "real" people, there are, in the end, no such guarantees. Testimonial discourses belong to an ontological schema of victimization; "victims" and "perpetrators" are socially constructed figures and require a logic of justification and legitimacy on the part of the law and the state to operate as the subjects of testimonial discourses. The relationship between victim and perpetrator is further

complicated by the imbrications and contingencies of various categories of experience including race, gender, class, and sexuality. Such contingencies tilt the scales unevenly between the opposition of victim and perpetrator, as well as within or across any given individual's identity in relation to another's. Reparative textualities persist in displacing this oppositional hold between victim and perpetrator.

The idea of reparative reading is explored, also from a psychoanalytical perspective, by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her important essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." In this essay Sedgwick argues that

No less acute than a paranoid position, no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic, the reparative reading position undertakes a different range of affects, ambitions, and risks. What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them. (150–51)

Sedgwick's essay is devoted to questioning the types of critical energies brought by academics to what are often politically charged areas of research and scholarly activism. Queer readings constitute the main focus of Sedgwick's discussion, but she is no less attuned to the significance of critical reading practices for "people subject to racist violence, and for people deprived of health care, and for people in dangerous industries, and for many others" (148). Today, to decolonize representational violences of the past and present requires some form of healing, not only on the personal level but also on a larger scale, as demonstrated by the current proliferation of reconciliatory discourses and truth and reconciliation commissions, globally.

Whether one is questioning the truth claims of testimonial practices, or using such questions to put different objects under scrutiny as in the move from testimonial text to political context, such forms of critical engagement are roughly similar in that they deploy what Paul Ricoeur aptly termed a "hermeneutics of suspicion." In her rereading of Ricoeur's theory of critical engagement, Sedgwick coins an idea of "paranoid reading," a mode of critical theoretical inquiry that undertakes to trace and expose the truth behind such devastating historical phenomena as AIDS.

In Sedgwick's view, paranoid readings are an essential part of an analytical process intent on the critical disclosure of systemic or naturalized and normative modes of oppression. They are representative of today's disciplined academic subject intent on revealing, exposing, unveiling, and disclosing the hidden violence of sociocultural formations. While this mode of analytical power stands as an example of "strong theory," Sedgwick nevertheless questions whether it can succeed in doing more than telling us about the mechanics of oppression. If left to do just that, the paranoid reading may produce an oppressively unnecessary rehearsal of the pain and violence of the oppressions it seeks to analyze. In other words, for all the value of a paranoid reading in bringing to light the hidden realities of social and economic dispossession, such "visibility" may result in further processes of reification and fetishism. For example, a paranoid reading of the reserve system in Canada may only see that system as a process of incarceration and in making such an argument actually represent the reserve in this fixed and immutable light, whereas many Indigenous people insist that the reserve is a more complicated space that also ensured some measure of control over and access to their territories. The always already assuming of the violence of colonization can also rehearse that violence in reflexively accounting for it. The anticipatory structure of such an analytical machinery requires that paranoia must be imitated to be understood, and it, in turn, enacts understanding only by imitation. While the paranoid reading blots out "any sense of the possibility of alternative ways of understanding *or* things to understand" (131), in the case of its reflexive mimeticism, it may also end up reproducing the same structure of violence that it seeks to trace and disclose but in another representational form. This is a serious problem, especially when it comes to critically engaging with alternative knowledges that do not share an interest in regenerating the position of "victim" (and thus also reproducing the position of the victimizer in a fetishized or possibly idealistic manner) but rather desire to exceed the victim/victimizer reflexive mimeticism of analytical violence; hence the need for reparative readings.

As Sedgwick writes, the reparative impulse "is additive and accretive. It's fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self" (149). In her own enunciation of the difficulties at risk in coming to terms with the reparative reading, Sedgwick offers up the following words of encouragement: