Empowering Voices:

Testimonial Literature and Social Justice in Contemporary American Culture

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I. On the Birth of a New Humanism: Testimonies, Research, the Human Subject and Its Environment

> "An old folk tale describes a conversation between Truth and Story. Truth complains that her messages are not heard; when people see her, their eyes slide away. Story replies, 'You are naked, ugly, and old. Although I am as old as you, I am well dressed and pleasing to the eye. People do not turn from me. They welcome me into their homes, they listen to my many voices, and they come to see for themselves what is true"
>
> – Elaine Weiss, *Surviving Domestic Violence*

Ranging from Holocaust testimonies to Latin-American *testimonios* and more recent writing practices like Misery Memoirs, personal narratives nowadays appear to be a signature expression of what Leigh Gilmore calls our contemporary culture of confession. Testimonies are a pervasive feature of our everyday life, whether they emanate from the news to describe trials and court situations or provide first-hand reactions and experiences, or from culture at large with this very current tendency to label its productions real-life or reality-show. On television, in the cinema, in bookshops, the audience is bombarded with stories inspired, if not directly based on, real-life events and facts. Such confessional impulses often meet with some degree of skepticism, even hostility; they are deemed symptomatic of our trauma-driven relationship to life experiences or they are rejected because they play on the audience's voyeuristic drives. Such reservations notwithstanding, it appears that a comprehensive appraisal of the global literary scene necessarily needs to address personal narratives in the form of the witness or testimonial non-fiction genre.

Within the last three decades, contemporary North America came to reinvent a socially focused genre of literary personal narratives. As direct offshoots of postcolonial concerns, these new editorial and writing projects emerged as a tool for the socially voiceless to secure some measure of agency in their contemporary social and cultural situation. These editorial and writing projects, published in the form of collections of personal narratives, fit in the process that is currently labeled social empowerment. Witnesses express a deep urge to share their story in the hope to denounce their experience of an enduring social injustice. The written word, primary a means for self-disclosure, serves to exorcise the suffering associated to this specific predicament. The narrators, thanks to the writing cure, engage in a powerful self-investigative gesture oriented towards resilience and renewed enfranchisement in regaining control over their life and environment. At the moment of publication, however, these testimonies come to be validated as authentic examples of the injustices they disclose.

These examples serve an educational purpose: raising the audience's awareness and opening deliberative fora for these issues to be discussed and for solutions to be hammered out and eventually implemented.

The collections I wish to call testimonials of social empowerment suggest that current approaches to literary criticism and the humanities at large need to develop an interdisciplinary methodology underlining how deeply culture and cultural studies are rooted in our everyday appraisal of the social world. Symptomatically, the term empowerment, which this research proposes as a general theoretical framework, has been adopted by numerous disciplines ranging from psychology (individual or social) and sociology to human resources management, politics and literary criticism. This research aims to demonstrate the pervasive social impact of testimonies on the contemporary American cultural stage. I argue that testimonials of social empowerment invoke multicultural humanistic values. They advocate the latter by means of an aesthetic of impact and an ethics of responsibility taking heed of the correlation between cultural productions and their social implications.

The Humanistic turn this research is indebted to was given one of its most compelling expressions in Doris Sommer's short article "Useful Humanism". It is out of a feeling of guilt over the seemingly socially irresponsible status of the humanities that Sommer decided to tackle the difficult question of defining "what good we do in the humanities" (1670). Having been engaged in this research for one or two years, I became convinced of the fact that the corpus I was dealing with was an undeniable example of the *good* humanities could deliver. Therefore, Sommer's article caught my interest. She observes that in a time "when the world [is] so urgently in need of practical contributions" (1670), she felt a growing uneasiness at answering her students' pressing questions over the direct or indirect outcome her "intellectual passions" (1670) could factually produce. Sommer found her answers in Gramsci and Arendt's lectures on Kant.

Arendt sees in Kant's development of a theory of the public sphere a foundation of subjectivity and intellectual freedom compatible with Enlightenment values. As of the late eighteenth century, choice had been made possible and had therefore become a human duty. Common people had, as a consequence, to be trained in developing their faculty of judgment. This training, Kant and Arendt argue, is "none other than aesthetic education" (1671). Subjective observations regarding a work of art are free from interest. They spring as second-order responses to feelings of pleasure or displeasure and, as such, are independent of the concerns that may differentially affect individuals. "Through aesthetic judgment, subjectivity makes a bridge to other subjects and promotes a shared sense of freely acknowledged value,"

(Sommer 1671) Kant contends. This form of 'common sense' is at the base of the creation of the public sphere. Schiller, Kant's disciple, brings the notion one step further. Since "the modern subject is an agent in creating a cultural and political environment," (1671) this common sense based on aesthetic judgments can serve modern agency. From Schiller's practical application to Gramsci's appraisal of culture as a possible means of "passive revolution," there is but a modest conceptual leap.

Sommer, henceforth, bases her hopeful understanding of the responsible commitment of the humanities in what is called cultural agency. Cultural agency, in this light, is a concept "that resonates with a variety of public practices that link creativity with social contributions" (1672). Sommer's enthusiastic approach to the concept—she indeed is at the head of the Cultural Agents Initiative—represents the professional contribution of the humanities to society. Symptomatically, she describes this contribution as at least twofold: as cultural agents in the humanities "we highlight particular creative practices, and we give those practices a theoretical spin" (1672). Humanists can indeed add value to society by noting and commenting the examples of art that help built the social lifeworld. I like to think of testimonials of social empowerment as such examples of art. Sommer insists that "drawing attention to undervalued creative practices" (1672) as proper variations for themes of research typically enacts cultural agency. This form of committed, creative, off-the-beaten-track research comforted me in carrying on this project of unveiling a renewed form of the non-fiction genre of testimony.

Sommer understands cultural agency as "an invitation to notice felicitous engagements as well as frustrating performances" (1673). The present research as well as the texts that compose its corpus stand, I think, as good examples of such an invitation, and also reveal both its inspiring and frustrating aspects. "The approach privileges the surprise of ingenious responses to difficult challenges," (1673) Sommer contends. Testimonials of social empowerment epitomize this ingenuity, including its capacity to foster empathic understanding in the polity:

> The objective for cultural agents is not a partisan victory but the development of 'thick political subjects' who participate in democratic life. Democracy depends on sturdy and resourceful citizens able to engage more than one point of view and to wrest rights and resources from limited assets. Nonauthoritarian government counts on creativity to loosen conventional thought and free up the space where conflicts are negotiated before they reach the brink of despair or aggression. (1673)

The space citizens desperately need to recapture is the public sphere—the deliberative forum upon which equality and justice need to be built. I am convinced of the soundness of these ideals—all the more so after having devoted my attention to texts that are their literal enactment. Whether we decide to call it cultural agency or empowerment through testimonies, the message these texts convey, just as the voices of the individuals they stand for, have a definite legitimacy in reaching their audience.

My first encounter with socially committed testimonies was due to the cinematographic adaptation of the *Freedom Writers' Diary*. Since then I have been working on a large corpus of testimonial collections produced in contemporary America from the 1980s to the present. As I mentioned previously, testimonials are part of a spectacularly productive literary branch of contemporary culture. As such, drawing clear boundaries around my corpus proved somehow arduous. I consequently decided to gather a corpus of texts based on collections of testimonies, as I am convinced that such collections, as they foreground a multiplicity of voices, display communicative capacities in their highest form. The volumes are also based on specific, active social projects. The corpus accordingly encompasses wide social and ethnic issues which allows me to consider my research as deeply embedded in contemporary concerns over multiculturalism and the question of justice.

My theoretical framework can be conceived of as a twofold procedural conceptualization of the texts, both psychosocial and aesthetic. The overarching concept of empowerment will serve as my theoretical groundwork. Scholars agree on the necessity to consider empowerment as a process rather than as a punctual accomplishment. As such, empowerment, in both its social and psychological implications, provides a binary approach to the writing practices examined in my corpus. Empowerment targets both the narrators, as representatives of the impacted community, and the readers. The texts appear enclosed in an ethical framework which is correlated to issues pertaining to social justice—a notion that, French philosopher Emmanuel Renault argues, is conceptualized as a reading of the discourses of people experiencing injustice. In Renault's perspective, the experience of injustice evokes negative feelings pertaining to social misrecognition—feelings which come to be foregrounded as substratum for transformative action. In such a frame, testimonials' social project may be compared to that of social movements. Renault indeed argues that social movements in implementing both practical and normative dynamics may indeed come to extend or transform the institutional normative aspects which have come to fall short of citizens' expectations. This research theoretical framework, though chiefly preoccupied with argumentative practices in the public sphere, will, nevertheless, accordingly seek to present

the social and psychological current conceptualizations in the frame of social organization and justice as an appropriation of the notions of agency, recognition, representation and identity politics mainly developed through Anthony Giddens's, Axel Honneth's and Nancy Fraser's theories.

In its individual stage, on the other hand, empowerment is expressed in the texts' potential impact on their author's resilience. Narrators, in their disclosure of the experience of injustice, often refer to the traumatic implications of such a situation. Their testimonies can thus patently be correlated to the concepts of the writing cure and resilience itself as developed by Boris Cyrulnik. Similarly, they appear as texts woven into the larger fabric of trauma literature. The texts, as I will endeavor to demonstrate, capitalize on trauma and victimization as contemporary floating signifiers, as developed by Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman. As the point is obviously to share experiences with people who might be suffering from the same predicament, the narrators handle linguistic, narrative and aesthetic features potently correlated with the belated expression of trauma. These features, however, are always conjured up in the larger positive frame of empowerment. Testimonials thus enhance the concepts of agency, capabilities, and responsibilization operating at the very core of engaged writing. As a consequence the texts debunk the negative preconceptions associated with trauma and victimization.

In their social stage, testimonials of social empowerment display a close correlation with the idea of the power of testimonies being equivalent to that of an admonition or a warning, as most scholars working on Holocaust testimonies suggest. Such an illocutionary function requires testimonials to occupy a place in the cultural and political fields which appears satisfyingly conspicuous so as for their messages to be heard. I consequently foreground Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action—the illocutionary force of speech acts oriented towards reaching understanding—as a theoretical framework for testimonials' actual discursive project. More than communication, the texts seek to engage the authors and their readers into a persuasive, that is argumentative, situation which would allow testimonials' illocutionary potential to be unleashed. As testimonials of social empowerment raise issues pertaining to the good life, the description of this argumentative situation can be identified in Habermas's conceptualization of the public sphere as the place where discourse ethics can be enacted. Echoed in the *never again* formula, the texts' aim is to foreground social issues which have remained sidelined from explicit discussion in the public sphere.

One of Habermas's followers came to re-contextualize her mentor's view in a multicultural frame, thus offering a more adequate theoretical background for testimonials of

social empowerment. Seyla Benhabib, indeed, set out to analyze human interactions in a narrative framework.[1] She considers actions to be part of a web of narratives from which individuals can weave out their own identity. Benhabib uses her concept of narrative action as a theoretical scaffolding on which she installs her recuperation of Habermas's discourse ethics in the public sphere. In accordance with Benhabib's theoretical view, one can describe testimonials' purpose as that of developing unofficial public spheres in which participants do not seek to reach agreement but rather to make room for a situation of open-ended interactive argumentation through which the universalization of the good life might eventually be approached through shared understanding. This understanding, as I will demonstrate with the inclusive approach to deliberative democracy developed by Iris Marion Young, may well be secured by political discursive formats larger than argumentation itself. Indeed, Young argues, contemporary political representation should also include greetings, narrative and rhetoric.

Based on these argumentative notions, the second section of this research's approach to the texts questions the actual format of their narrative construction. This questioning is mostly based on Kimberly Nance's work, *Can Literature Promote Justice?* She analyzes Latin-American *testimonios'* rhetorical formats in the hope to eventually explain the trend's regrettable outcome. Nance considers that the texts' rhetorically fragmented support of their social project is responsible for the audience's lukewarm reactions. I follow Kimberly Nance's suggestion that testimonials of social empowerment, as possible offshoots of Latin-American *testimonios*, are textual examples of a persuasive rhetorical project. However, what she considers to be an unfortunate fragmentation based on an incoherently divided reliance on rhetoric's deliberative, forensic and epideictic forms of discourse appears to me as testimonials' actual aesthetic abundance. Kimberly Nance proposes that rather than only depending on punctual "tropes of persuasion"(22) splintered among all three forms of discourse, *testimonios'* speakers in their hope to reach efficacy should have done with the only proper persuasive format, the deliberative *testimonio*.

I posit that testimonials' persuasion is based on more than tropes, and that their seemingly fragmented format not only effectively serves their social project (especially thanks to the juxtaposition offered by polyphonic volumes), but also testifies to the birth of a sound literary trend. Testimonials express persuasion by means of two textual threads guiding the narration. The texts primarily rely on an aesthetic of impact expressing implications which

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[1] Benhabib acknowledges her debt to Arendt in this theoretical decision.

pertain to notions of sincerity and authenticity—concepts I define on the basis of Lionel Trilling's writings. This impact is expressed both through resilience on the part of the narrators and through forms of productive identification on the part of readers. Second, testimonials of social empowerment deploy an ethics of responsibility. Embedded in the meta-ethical framework of discourse ethics, the texts foreground the necessary prevalence of responsible rational individuals who act as competent citizens. Again, responsibility is demanded both on the part of witnesses as it enacts their bond with the truth they disclose and on the part of the audience as they are now holders and messengers of the same truth. It is such a socially connected model of responsibility that I borrow from Iris Marion Young's social theory.

Because persuasion remains rhetoric's main application, it is through a specific rhetorical feature that the narrators fully develop these textual threads, that of *ethos*. *Ethos*, one of the three pools of rhetorical evidence available to the orator, resides in the textual identity constructed through the figure of the narrator. *Ethos* appears impersonated through four main paradigms in witnesses' narratives. These paradigms seem to correspond to emblematic literary trends—or social spheres—with which testimonials have been historically identified. The narrators' *ethos* with significant possible personal adaptation helps to develop four prototypical relationships with their readers aimed at triggering a productive identification with the narrators' predicament: the intimate, the forensic, the religious, and the activist. This research ends on a description of the possible applications of these paradigms through a number of case studies emanating from the volumes of the corpus.

I.1 The Corpus

I.1.1 Definition

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, in *Testimony, Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, contend that the twentieth century literary scene has seen the outbreak of a series of disruptions that led to a "crisis of literature" (xviii). The literary scene became witness to a "crisis of witnessing" (xvii). Within the postmodern and postcolonial era, the history of writing reached a new turning point. New identities, new voices, in the wave of ideologies based on recognition and representation, gained access to the literary world with the written word as their weapon. This need of proper recognition and representation, of course, took several formats. As Felman and Laub mention, Elie Wiesel argued that "[i]f the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle and the Renaissance the sonnet, our

generation invented a new literature, that of testimony" (6). In contemporary American society, it is indeed through their personal life-stories that the voiceless have come to speak. With works such as *The Freedom Writer's Diary* and the numerous volumes of the Voice of Witness series, testimonial literature has gained a new prominence carrying social implications. Testimonies have acquired the uncomfortable, yet impactful position of a means for social minorities to express their distress. The point of this first section is to propose a comprehensive definition of this new sub-genre. To this effect, previous literary criticism on testimonies and testimonial literature provide with a supporting frame. Testimonials of social empowerment can indeed be likened to the "new genre" (Gugelberger *Voices* 4) that appeared around the 1960s within Latin-American criticism under the designation of *testimonio*. However, before dealing with the postcolonial re-appropriation of the term, the notion of testimony itself needs to be circumscribed.

The term testimony is indeed constitutive of a number of social structures. Renaud Dulong identifies its fundamental status in the fabric of the lifeworld. And Paul Ricoeur, in addressing its position in the fields of history and memory, proposes a conclusive list of characteristics for testimonial speech acts. Since the corpus compiles specifically polyphonic works, the notion of collectiveness can also be addressed as a defining and structural characteristic of contemporary American testimonial literature. In a further reliance on scholars of the *testimonio,* collectiveness can be approached in explaining how recording subaltern voices can strengthen the minorities' impact on the audience.

These reception matters lead to question the issue of the literary status of the testimonial text. In spite of the fact that my corpus only compiles non-fiction works, their status as literature remains, as I will endeavor to point out, beyond doubt. It is by addressing their oral character that the actual emphasis on testimonies' writing procedures and rhetoric construction can be best demonstrated. Kimberly Nance, indeed, contends that if *testimonios'* speakers are not authors, they are nonetheless "generally talented speakers" (21). Editors insistently foreground the strength of the written word, but the volumes they eventually produce seem to keep an unbreakable bond with the primary oral dimension of the testimonial medium—as is obviously epitomized in the volumes titles. Some concerns over the process of transcription and editing are registered in my investigation of the exact status of this oral character, specifically as regards the social implications of testimonial literature and its privileged relation to the audience as a vector of authenticity.

I.1.1.1 Testimony

Whenever the term testimony is mentioned, legal, religious, possibly media contexts come to mind. Whether one is imagining a court of law, a form of ecclesiastic confession, or an apparently traumatically impacted person in front of a journalist's microphone, testimonies appear to be privileged instances of social communication. As regards to encyclopedic definitions, the legal dimension seems to be the dominant one. The Oxford Dictionary of English, indeed, defines testimony as "a formal written or spoken statement, especially one given in a court of law" (1823). This being said, testimonies are also a constitutive part of our common everyday life.

Renaud Dulong argues indeed that testimonies are a model for communication essential to human interactions. In *Le Témoin oculaire: les conditions sociales de l'attestation personnelle*, he endeavors to identify testimonies as "social object[s]" (11). As "[o]ral devices reconstituting past situations," testimonies are specific speech acts that constitute "an [unavoidably] economical process for invalidating information" (Dulong 9-10). [2] Actually, Dulong argues, "the phenomenon of testimony [...] is [...] more complex than implied by its definition as information transfer" (10-11). He, thus, defines eyewitness testimony as "an auto-biographically certified narrative of a past event, whether this narrative is made in *informal or formal circumstances*" (Dulong 43; emphasis mine). Testimonies as the transfer of autobiographical records of past events do not, then, seem to necessarily rely on structural rituals inherent to their production context. Dulong insists that his definition widens the usual scope of testimony by including "any report certified by its author's experience" (Dulong 43).

Dulong bases his broad-encompassing perspective on what he calls the testimonial "primary act" (12). The fact that the witness *decides* to verbalize her experience is constitutive of the speech act: "the neuralgic moment that specifies the phenomenon of testimony is the first moment of a witness's public existence, the primary act [...] through which somebody bears witness to something" (12). This primary gesture involves a deep-seated social dimension:

> The suggested perspective favors the accomplishment through which the witness is established within the public sphere, his designation as somebody who was present on the scene and his declaration of having seen something—an act associating a specific individual with an event in the past by a socially enduring link. (12)

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[2] I used the original French edition of Dulong's work. Each quote is in my own translation.

What appears specific of testimonial information transfers is that they confer to speakers the social status of the witness, thereby enduringly connecting them with past events. The witness is an individual who was present on a scene and saw something. But, the witness is *most importantly* the speaker who is now entering the public sphere by deciding to willingly share her report of the events by autobiographically certifying their existence. This definition of testimony based on the speaker's social status raises important issues of truth and reliability.

Paul Ricoeur, in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, addresses the key features of testimonial discourse that he directly derives from Dulong's sociological definition (Ricoeur 161). Ricoeur lists the essential characteristics of testimony in its everyday-life usage. In an interesting reversal of what can be assumed from encyclopedic definitions, he establishes conversational instances of testimonies as the "core" (162) of their legal and historical uses. He insists that his depiction is "an attempt at an analysis of the *essence* of testimony, while respecting its potentiality for multiple uses" (161; emphasis mine). Thus, in spite of his focus on an ordinary form, Ricoeur encourages the re-appropriation of his model when dealing with structurally formal situations. He bases his description of conversational testimonies on what, he argues, is the "crucial question" (162): that of their reliability. The characteristics he defines focus on the sensitive issues of trust and suspicion. For, indeed, both scholars seem to agree on the fact that testimonies, in spite of their status as economical means to convey information, remain essentially problematic in their authentication.

Ricoeur lists six components for testimonies in ordinary conversations. The first one bears on the two sides he considers "initially distinguished and articulated" (163) by the testimonial speech act. A testimony is constructed on "[o]n the one side, the assertion of the factual reality of the reported events; on the other, the certification or authentification [sic] of the declaration on the basis of its author's experience, what we can call his presumed trustworthiness" (163). Ricoeur links the assertion of factual events with testimonies' narrative format, which essentially involves the implication of the narrator within the reported events. Indeed, if not for this autobiographical implication, testimony would amount to simple information.[3] Even if Ricoeur readily agrees with Dulong in defining testimony as an economical means to convey validated information, both scholars also insist that "this information must be taken to be important" (Ricoeur 163). Since within testimonies, the

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[3] Ricoeur, here, refers to Emile Benveniste's distinction between narrative and discourse, where in discourse there is no such implication of the speaker and "the scene, so to speak, recounts itself" (163).

narrator asserts the factual reality of the event she is reporting and certifies the reliability of that narration by her own implication in that specific event, the event needs necessarily to be "significant enough in order to motivate the intensification presented by the narrator's involvement" (Dulong 44). These considerations notwithstanding, Ricoeur qualifies the implication of the speaker in her narrative as the supposed effort to "trace a clear boundary between reality and fiction" (163). It is thus from this first characteristic that a series of suspicions can be cast.

The second component delineates with greater clarity the specificity of testimonies by insisting on the fact that "the assertion of reality is inseparable from its being paired with the self-designation of the testifying subject" (163). Ricoeur argues that the witness is the first to declare his own status as a witness by using phrases such as "I was there" (163). Ricoeur creates a direct parallel with Dulong's testimonial primary act, which establishes a socially enduring link between speaker and event: "what is attested to is indivisibly the reality of the past thing and the presence of the narrator at the place of its occurrence" (163). Through the utterance "I was there," the witness is the first to declare her position as a witness. Interestingly, Ricoeur contends that this self-referential remark can sometimes be preceded by introductory comments that serve as a "preface" (163). Such a preface plays the crucial role of connecting punctual testimonies with "the whole history of a life" (163). Concepts of self-designation as well as individual life history open the sensitive issue of the affective handling of testimonies. Since testimonies are stories about selves, the emotional impact they take on for the witness may be very different from the importance the audience is ready to confer to them.

As a third component, Ricoeur mentions the fact that self-designation must be inscribed in a dialogical situation. It is *before someone else* that the witness testifies to the reality of her experience. Yet Ricoeur insists on the fact that, at the time of the utterance, the witness acts as a third party towards the other protagonists involved in the events they are describing. He links this explanation to the etymological definition of the word testimony, coming from Latin *testis* itself stemming from *tertius*, third. This is of obvious importance for the issues of empowerment and resilience. Indeed, it is in the position of the observer only that the narrator can acquire the necessary distance demanded by critical point of view. Ricoeur adds that this dialogical structure openly expresses the "dimension of trust" (164)

involved in the testimonial speech act.[4] The witness, when speaking, asks to be believed—"I was there, believe me" (164). Testimonies demand authentication, which can only be attained through the echoing answer of the audience who "receives […] and accepts" (164) the speech act. Ricoeur further argues that for testimonies to be received, they "must be appropriated" (176). This appropriation unfolds through an understanding "built on the basis of a sense of human resemblance at the level of situations, feelings, thoughts, and actions" (175). With the audience's answer, Ricoeur insists, "the testimony is not just certified, it is accredited" (164). Accreditation, however, reveals an ongoing process that eventually positions the witness on a continuum of trustworthiness, the extremes of which stand in the alternative between confidence and suspicion. It can, of course, be supported by factual considerations, among which many bear "on the most common conditions of bad perception, bad memory, or bad restitution" (164). However, it is also significantly sustained by personal qualities, an idea Ricoeur finds "disturbing" (164). The speaker is thus assessed on her quality to be habitually believed based on previous similar situations and the speaker's reputation.

The possibility of suspicion leads Ricoeur to formulate the fourth component. According to him, the need for accreditation "opens a space of controversy" (164). Within that space the possibility of several testimonies and several witnesses is postulated, as is the possibility of confrontation. In this controversial "public space"[5] (164), the witness is a person ready to be summoned anytime and to "answer what may turn out a criticism to what he says" (165).[6] The witness, interestingly, can anticipate this confrontation by adding a third clause to her primary declaration: "If you don't believe me, ask someone else" (165). The following component covers a moral perspective that "reinforce[s] the credibility and trustworthiness of

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[4] A dimension Jürgen Habermas necessarily sees in all forms of communication in the form of the validity claim of truthfulness. This parallel is further epitomized in the necessity for testimonies to be accepted by the audience. Habermas, indeed claims that for communicative speech acts to be efficiently produced, the addressee must accept them as such (see II.3.1.1).

[5] Dulong also remarks the necessity of mentioning the public space in order to delineate the social implications of testimony. For both scholars, this space corresponds to Habermas's understanding of the public sphere, in the sense of the civic forum enacting on the one hand the strict rules of discourses—Ricoeur's "general conditions of communication" (164) — and on the other political publicity.

[6] This pledge to answer criticism finds its parallel in Habermas's pledge to retrieve a speech act's validity claim (see II.3.1.1).

testimony" (165). This fifth component consists in "the availability of the witness to repeat his testimony" (165). Consequently, a reliable witness would be somebody who displays narrative stability over time. In order to display trustworthiness, "[t]he witness must be capable of answering for what he says before whoever asks him to do so" (165), Ricoeur contends. He likens this stability to the moral dimension implied by promise-making "more precisely to the promise that precedes any promise-making, that of keeping one's promise, of keeping one's word" (165).

Ricoeur's delineation and Dulong's project in his volume come to a sort of climactic fusion in the sixth and last component of Ricoeur's model. Ricoeur contends:

> This stable structure of the willingness to testify makes testimony a security factor in the set of relations constitutive of the social bond. In turn, this contribution of the trustworthiness of an important proportion of social agents to the overall security of society in general makes testimony into an institution. (165)

This institution, in an oxymoron Ricoeur himself acknowledges, is to be deemed a natural one, in the sense that this institution appears useful in distinguishing this common way of certifying an account from artificially constructed ones (e.g. in the criminal justice system or for journalistic or historical purposes). The natural aspect of testimony as an institution lies in the fact that trustworthiness contributes to the security of the social bond "inasmuch as this rests on confidence in what other people say" (165). Ricoeur sums up our natural tendency to trustworthiness in an emblematic formula: "First trust the word of the other, then doubt if there are good reasons for doing so" (165). Tellingly, Ricoeur considers this maxim as a competence of capable human beings: in granting credit to the word of other social agents, we make the lifeworld a shared intersubjective world. These considerations bearing on the institutional position of testimonies as a natural tendency towards trustworthiness and as guarantee of the social bond lets envisage the compelling use this specific form of autobiographical narration can be put to.

I.1.1.2 'Limit' Cases

Testimonies stand as important modes of communication in a number of different social situations ranging from conversational to institutional ones. Felman and Laub describe the legal use of testimony as the most traditional and routine usage in which "testimony is provided, and is called for, when the facts upon which justice must pronounce its verdict are not clear, when historical accuracy is in doubt and when both the truth and its supporting elements of evidence are called into question"(6). Witnesses, when summoned, must help

unveil the truth, whatever this sensitive concept may stand for. Testimonies, as Ricoeur mentions, indeed, stand on the difficult grounds that are supposed to separate facts from fiction. However, as can be demonstrated by further characterizing Dulong's approach, the arduousness of this position is intensified when considering the affective elements testimonies rely on.

In testimonies' commonplace conversational use, Dulong reports that the witness's affectivity has to enter the frame of interest. He insists on the fact that "one does not attest to banalities, but to what is of interest for the recipient, to what is out of the ordinary, what adds spice to life" (44). In fact, testimonies, by essence, seek to convey "personal facts that might move anybody" (45), at the risk of being sanctioned by a 'so what?' in the further course of the conversation.[7] Indeed, "[o]ne can say that the inclusion of a mention of affects is a demand of ordinary testimony, a way to signify the reason to tell" (Dulong 35). Dulong adds that "spontaneous reactions" (35) act as the "human core" (38) of testimonies. These reactions call upon the audience's sensitivity and eventually lead to a most probable "lesson to be learned" (35) from the words of the speaker. Testimonies may even become "vehicles for moral values" (16). In such cases, the witnesses take the status of the "public prosecutor" (16) producing a narrative that will call out to the audience as a judge.

When the mention of affect amounts to a moral lesson, the witness, as a public prosecutor, may conceive of her testimony as a mission, even a "destiny" linked to an "idea of call" (Dulong 94-95). This specific case is mirrored in Ricoeur's image of the historical witness, the one whose extraordinary experience "stymies the capacity for average, ordinary understanding" (166). In such cases, testimonies are produced with a specific purpose: assuring the persistence of the event they are testifying to. The testimony becomes "[a] trace of the past in the present" (Ricoeur 170). Testimonies, by essence, appear closely intertwined with the concepts of history and memory. Indeed, it seems indispensable to highlight a distinctive use of testimonies, which bears an undeniable trace of the immense significance of memory in our contemporary societies.

Twentieth century events, indeed, led to what Fellman and Laub dubbed a crisis in witnessing. Holocaust witnesses had to testify to inconceivable events and thus became repositories of memories that proved difficult, almost impossible, to evoke. In these "limit

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[7] Dulong recalls Herbert Paul Grice's cooperative principle and the specific maxim of relevance, according to which any statement should always further the purpose of the conversation and tell something to the addressee (175).

case[s]" (175), Ricoeur contends, the attested-to personal facts may move towards "literally extraordinary life experiences—which make for a difficult pathway in encountering the ordinary, limited capacities for reception of auditors educated on the basis of shared comprehension" (175). In such cases, the solitude of witnesses stands out. Ricoeur even remarks that some of them may "never encounter an audience capable of listening to them or hearing what they have to say" (166). This remark offers a possibility to hint at the issue of the witnesses' unfortunately often verified social misrecognition. Dulong classifies these limit cases into the specific category of "commemorative testimonies," which emerge from traumatic situations and institute witnesses as the "living memory" (16) of the event.

The best examples are for Ricoeur and Dulong testimonies emanating from Holocaust survivors. However, Dulong mentions that his conception of commemorative testimonies can be broadened to "lives that have been marked by apparently lesser traumas but permanent altogether" (95). In these borderline situations, to testify becomes a duty, a mission the witness undertakes, but which leaves the events' mark on the witness's whole life. As stated by Dulong: "destiny that drove man to the border of humanity transforms into a vocation to bear the memory of chaos" (95). These cases shed light on the sensitive issues of catharsis and self-disclosure in testimonial discourse: "to be a witness, […] shows publicly as the completion of a function, but for the individual, it addresses the necessity of assuming the consequences of a biographical episode" (Dulong 96). This personal aspect, nevertheless, appears secondary.

The witnesses are moved to testify not only in order to acknowledge their experience of traumatic events, but primarily for this event to be denounced and later remembered. Conceivably, even, witnesses testify to prevent similar events to happen again: "to commit oneself to testimony requires a previous, probably subconscious, collection of encouraging signs coming from the background community[:] [i]t is necessary to have gathered convincing evidence that it is worth telling, that the future cannot be the return of the same" (Dulong 99). Such testimonies, endowed with the moral and social mission to restore justice in the lifeworld, kept thriving all through the twentieth century. Soon to be appropriated by the subaltern or minorities, limit-case testimonies came to tackle postcolonial agendas in their effort to restore agency to wronged communities and to set the historical records straight.

I.1.1.3 From Testimony to *Testimonio* towards a New Literary Aesthetics

The term testimony expanded from this general definition with features anchored in sociological, ethical and historical considerations and moved to the literary sphere. In the

contemporary period, testimonial literature, in its most committed form, acquired considerable prominence in Latin-American post-colonial criticism. Georg Gugelberger and Michel Kearney point out that, "[i]n Latin America testimonial discourse is closely associated with revolutionary developments, and the official birth of the genre dates from the rich cultural production of Cuba in the mid- and the late 1960s" (5). The usual landmarks of the genre are Miguel Barnet's *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* (1967) and Rigoberta Menchù's *I, Rigoberta Menchù* (1983). Testimonial literature or *testimonio* appeared within the framework of postcolonial literary production. Emphatically, it "emerg[ed] as part of a global reordering of the social and economic contexts of power-difference within which 'literature' is produced and consumed" (Gugelberger and Kearney 6).

Postcolonial literature indeed questions fundamental Western assumptions such as the distinction between First and Third worlds, and the authority of the Western author's epistemological privilege. According to Gugelberger and Kearney "[b]asic to [that] reordering is a diminution of the distinctions between former centers and peripheries in the world capitalist system" (6). Literature that was heretofore produced by the powerful center now moves to the margins of the social global system. *Testimonio*, indeed, appears "[i]n contrast to conventional writing about the colonial situation, which is produced at the centers of global power and near the apices of class difference, [and] [...] is [composed] by subaltern peoples on the periphery or the margin of the colonial situation" (Gugelberger and Kearney 4). Testimonial literature is thus appropriated by the margins so as to write back to the authoritative narratives of the center. Subaltern people's aim through the use of testimonial literature is to "represent themselves either symbolically or by more immediate political means" (Gugelberger and Kearney 3). Representation, that which some contemporary scholars call recognition, now appears as the most invaluable asset in the struggle for justice on the global cultural and political scene.

Gugelberger and Kearney define these social and political goals in even more radical terms: "it is the desire to revolutionize which motivates the making of the testimony which is seen as a weapon on the cultural front" (9). In the post-colonial era, testimonies may, in effect, be considered a subsection of revolutionary literature. The written word is used as a rhetorical weapon in order to communicate political views. This revolutionary will is not, however, solely expressed through the need of changing a social or political oppressive situation. Drastic cultural transformation is also at hand:

> Testimonial literature continues this movement away from fiction. Testimonial literature is a cultural form of representation, which is forming not only on the margins

of the colonial situation, but also on the margins of the spoken and the written word and as such challenges conventional literary forms for the representation of subaltern people. (Gugelberger and Kearney 10)

Testimonial literature, in its contemporary re-appropriated format, thus aims at transformation in the largest possible understanding of the term. Moving away from the center on the political and cultural scene, the plight it is endowed with is that of giving a voice to the heretofore voiceless. This gesture is retained in the contemporary application of testimonial literature in American culture. Indeed, if in the postcolonial framework the focus of interest shifted towards the margins of the colonial borders, in American society these margins have been reinstated within a contemporary social context.

John Beverley was the first to advance a definition of *testimonio* in an article published in 1989. His definition, as he insists in the introduction of his book *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*, stems from the meaning of the Spanish word itself, which "carries the connotation of an act of truth-telling [...]—*dar testimonio* means to testify, to bear truthful witness" (4). In an interesting parallel with Ricoeur's concerns over the link of the testimonial gesture and the witness's life story, Beverley tells of the power *testimonio* gathers from authenticity:

> *Testimonio*'s ethical and epistemological authority derives from the fact that we are meant to presume that its narrator is someone who has lived in his or her person, or indirectly through the experiences of friends, family, neighbors, or significant others, the events and experiences that he or she narrates. What gives form and meaning to those events, what makes them history, is the relation between the temporal sequence of those events and the sequence of the life of the narrator or narrators, articulated in the verbal structure of the testimonial text. (*Politics* 4)

Echoing the general definition of the term testimony, Beverley strengthens the imperative of truth achieved through the immediacy of disclosing life-experience.

Beverley clarifies the ethical concerns of his explanation by insisting on the fact that even if *testimonio* is turned towards the "memorialization" (*Politics* 24) of the past, it also carries future implications. "*Testimonio*, [...] is an art directed [...] also to the constitution of more heterogeneous, diverse, egalitarian, and democratic nation-states, as well as forms of community, solidarity, and affinity that extend beyond or between nation-states," (*Politics* 24) he argues. The ethical implications of testimonial writing, though already present in the commonest form of testimonies, appear enhanced when transposed on the committed literary scene. Testimonies serve social and multicultural advancement.

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After proposing his considerations on the genre's repercussion on the lifeworld, Beverley characterizes the testimonial text:

> By *testimonio*, I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience. *Testimonio* may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following textual categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novella-testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or 'factographic literature'. […] The situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, implicated in the act of narration itself. (*Politics* 31-32)

Beverley emphasizes testimonial textual dimension by stressing its possible affinities with conventional textual categories, thus implying its newly gained importance as a literary genre. He, moreover, stresses the protean nature of *testimonio*, presenting it as a sort of hyper-genrewhose productions can appear in any number of stylistic and structural forms. [8] From its very first delineation, testimonial literature seems to have corresponded to a fragmented grouping of disparate literary works. So as to enter the genre, these works should share the only common characteristic of a first person narrative produced in a situation implying a sense of urgency. According to Santiago Colàs, this protean characteristic is of undeniable importance: "the mutability of its form, as determined by different contexts, ensures the *testimonio*'s continued viability as a form of cultural resistance" (170). This primary enthusiasm was unfortunately soon to be questioned, as shown by Kimberly Nance doubtful assessment of the text's seemingly incoherent reliance on a too large palette of rhetorical formats.

Two years after Beverley, George Yùdice, another leading critic of *testimonio*, advanced his own definition. This definition has often been quoted as it is presented in a succinct formula and offers an almost exhaustive (at least content-wise) description of the genre. His definition reads as follow:

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[8] Jean Norton Cru, in a similar gesture in *Du Témoignage*, lists the numerous genres or writing formats through which testimony can be composed. Similarly, testimonials of social empowerment can take on several formats, associated with a general preference for narratives.

[T]estimonial writing may be defined as an *authentic* narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an *agent* (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of *denouncing* a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and *setting aright* official history. (44; emphasis mine)

On a factual level, this definition exhaustively states the different components of testimonial discourse, insisting on the personal yet also popular and collective status of the story as well as on its social goals.

Yùdice, insists on *testimonio*'s aesthetic describing it as an aesthetic of "life practices" (49), an aesthetic that seeks to unite art and life. This aesthetic pursues the postmodernist aim to dismantle the master's previous cultural institutions: "testimonial writing provides a new means for popular sectors to wage their struggle for hegemony in the public sphere from which they were hitherto excluded or forced to represent stereotypes by the reigning elites" (53). By focusing on a strong, indeed almost immediate, correlation between literature and *authentic life*, subaltern writers can set free from previous authoritative Western literary shackles. The testimonial aesthetic, however, does not only serve the immediacy self-disclosure establishes between life and literature. Testimonial literature, which promotes the expression of personal experience, is also aimed to stand for the collective struggle of the community against oppression. This second aesthetic aspect is what Yùdice calls "the aesthetics of solidarity" (53). Consequently, Yùdice argues, the purpose of this twofold aesthetics amounts to "[c]onsciousness-raising" (54).

Kimberly Nance, manages to widen this aesthetic scope with insightful rhetorical remarks. She describes *testimonios* as a "subset of trauma narrative with social intentions" (8) and insists on the three major components that came to define testimonial literature in Latin America. She argues that testimonials rely on "a first-person narrative of injustice, an insistence that the subject's experience is representative of a larger class, and an intent to work toward a more just future" (2). *Testimonios*, according to Nance, because they support an aesthetic that deals with the authenticity of life practices in offering matter-of-fact descriptions of the sufferer, their suffering and the situation of injustice itself, stand as persuasive gestures. Through different rhetorical constructions that can be based on Aristotle's three paradigmatic types of discourse—the forensic, the epideictic and the deliberative— *testimonios* enact "tropes of persuasion" (22) that more or less adequately

allow for the consciousness-raising gesture Yùdice placed in testimonials' aesthetics based on life practices and solidarity to unleash.

I.1.1.4 Testimonial Literature in Contemporary American Culture: Testimonials of Social Empowerment

Yùdice's remarks on testimonial's double aesthetic aimed at consciousness-raising constitutes a sound foundation on which this research's concern with contemporary testimonial literature in American culture can be based; at least because it shows that this socially committed application of the testimonial genre has a history and at best because these critical considerations can find meaningful echoes in contemporary American productions.[9] Indeed Yùdice's double aesthetics expresses in testimonials through narrative weaving threads: an aesthetic capitalizing on the impact of authentic experience and an ethics significantly relying on a depiction of the responsible—hence solidary—social agent. The last three decades have, indeed, seen the birth and thriving of a new appropriation of a most committed form of the testimonial genre in the United States. Starting from what is arguably one of the famous examples, *The Freedom Writer's Diary* to the more recent and highly productive Voice of Witness series, dozens of collections of written testimonials have been published on miscellaneous subjects and in various formats with the hope of restoring social justice in an unequal society.

Testimonial Literature in contemporary American society appears as a historical and cultural *product of its time*. Above all, it represents the literary voicing of a democratic social project. Contemporary American testimonial literature, which I have come to call testimonials of social empowerment, can be defined as literary instances of deliberative democracy. These testimonials cover volumes of collections of narratives in any written form (including transcriptions of oral testimonies) of painful episodes of life-experience involving a perception of injustice by their narrator. The subjects, through their narration, are posited as witnesses portraying their experience of a situation of social injustice. Witnesses are urged to narrate in the hope to denounce and exorcize that present oppressive condition. The primary goals of their self-disclosure are on the one hand, their psychological and social empowerment as individual citizens and, on the other hand, that of their community as a whole. The witnesses' narrations, although telling first and foremost a personal story, are part

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[9] It seems important to acknowledge the meaningful history of the genre in North American history itself, most notably enacted by slave narratives.

of a project carried out in order to induce readers to engage in restoring social justice. Testimonials of social empowerment transpose the effort of including in political agency members of society who have been relegated to its silenced margins.

The double aesthetic instituted in *testimonios* as well as the persuasive political gesture they stand for are mirrored in their contemporary American equivalent. Still deeply endowed to a conceptualization of authentic life, testimonials' aesthetic is based on the overpowering effect overtly sincere descriptions and self-investigation can engage. At the basis of solidarity, empathy appears as the form of privileged identification the narrators seek to attain through their stories. Solidarity, in the form of responsible citizenship, stands at the core of the texts' ethical constructs. Empowerment in its psychological as well as social implications, expresses itself through the forceful imposition of raw experience as well as the necessary self-investigation testimonials demand of their readers. Rather than following Kimberly Nance's description of testimonial rhetoric in confining it to a sole possible reliance on one of Aristotle's three possible forms of discourse—the forensic, the epideictic and the deliberative—I propose to question their persuasive effort according to the rhetorical feature of *ethos*. In a paradoxical compliance with institutionalized forms for testimonial discourse, it is in constructing narrative personae complying with the expected usages of testimony that narrators manage to construct a privileged bond with their readers, that of empathic solidarity. This form of "enlarged thinking" (Benhabib, *Situating* 11) is thus instituted through four possible paradigms: the intimate, the forensic, the religious and the activist.

The remainder of this section is aimed at questioning the cultural, historical, and political environment that allowed the birth of such a renewed form of testimonial literature in contemporary American culture. Its peculiar reliance on collective formats will be questioned through testimonies' significant dependence on community belonging as well as on a renewed appraisal of the meaning of anonymity coupled with polyphonic cultural productions. In an impactful correlation between the singularity of the individual and the commonality of human life-experience, testimonials of social empowerment stand as crucial examples of the current engagement of literary productions with their social environment.

II.1.1.4.1 A Collective effort
Testimonials of social empowerment may, indeed, be taken to differ from a contemporary vulgarization of memoir and autobiography in the sense that the individuals who disclose their predicament in testimonials *literally embody* collective efforts for social empowerment through polyphonic volumes. Even though the genre assumes obvious personal and certainly

intimate dimensions because of self-disclosure, it is its position as a consciousness-raising tool that most emphatically stands out. In such an effort, it seems inconceivable to focus on only one individual, as representative as her experience may be. The judicial use of testimony follows a similar logic. Dulong emphatically recalls the judicial saying according to which— "*testis unus, testis nullus*"(163)—one witness means no witness. Collective corroboration is thus a defining characteristic of the testimonial format, as was indirectly demonstrated through Ricoeur's fifth characteristic. In order to speak to the many, many should stand up.

In this way, testimonials might be referred to as *polyphonic* volumes, in the Bakhtinian sense of the term. Though Bakthin coined the term in his conceptualization of the novel and novelistic discourse, polyphony remains a purposeful semantic addendum to the description of testimonials. Wayne C. Booth in his introduction to Bakhtin's volume on Dostoevsky contextualizes Bakhtin's view in a theory of society which emphasizes the "essential, irreducible multi-centeredness [...] of human life" (xx). Polyphony stands as "both a fact of life and, in its higher reaches, a value to be pursued endlessly" (Booth xxi). Bakhtin describes polyphony as a "basic structural feature" (*Dostoevsky* 5) of novelistic writing and characterization. The fascinating aspect of Dostoevsky's works, Bakhtin contends, resides in his ability at creating characters who remain "free people capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him" (*Dostoevsky* 6). This structural construct enacts "a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices", indeed "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (*Dostoevsky* 6). Bakhtin insists that these voices must remain independent. Polyphony allows for a plurality of consciousnesses in fact freed from authorial discourse. The novel materializes "a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (*Dostoevsky* 6). Testimonials of social empowerment are polyphonic in this exact sense. By multiplying witnesses, they debunk autobiographical representativeness and the (sometimes) overwhelming power of authoritative discourse. The witnesses' consciousnesses are presented separately, combine with each other in an effort to exemplify the universality of experience, yet preserve their individuality. As Booth contends, polyphony frees readers of the narrow subjectivity of character by achieving the "sublimity of freed perspectives" (xx).

This effort to throw light on a community is epitomized in testimonial discourse in itself. The necessity for the witness to acknowledge her belonging to a group—the group of other witnesses whose testimonies might conflict with her own, the group of her fellow survivors who might have decided to remain silent, the group of society in which her voice

has to be heard, or the larger group of mankind which she still needs to feel part of in spite (or because) of their specific experience—"constitut[es] an affirmation of the individual self in a collective mode" (Beverley 35). Régine Waintrater in "*Le Pacte Testimonial*" highlights this double belonging and presents testimonies as a "group process" which permits two specific groups to interact and enact the "persistent and invisible dividing line between those who know and the others" (67; my translation).

Ironically, this opposition between those who know and the others offers an interesting echo of Leigh Gilmore's concern with the contemporary popularization of previously elitist genres, which is hereafter developed. In the contemporary world, those who know are "the everyman and everywoman of the bad times that keep on coming" (17) and they are, as such, entitled to share their testimony, as were the knowledgeable elite of the days of yore. Waintrater's view of testimony as a group process coupled with its contemporary vulgarization mirrors current issues of consciousness-raising in deliberative democracy. Witnesses do not only seek to disclose their experience in fulfilling cathartic needs but rather in an effort to communicate in the public sphere. Testimonials place their other, their addressee, in the group of those who do not know. The witnesses, as representatives of the socially educated about injustice, inform the polity. Testimonies stand as a powerful political means with which a group of individual voices is being raised from the previously voiceless collectivity.

Similar concerns were, indeed, already voiced in the analysis of *testimonio*. The stress conferred to collectivity was then also to be understood as part of the postcolonial project of margins writing back to the center, debunking the figure of the western author. Fredric Jameson, in his groundbreaking essay "On Literary and Cultural Import-Substitution in the Third World: The Case of the *Testimonio*", contrasts *testimonio* with its most often mentioned western equivalents: the autobiography and the bildungsroman. This contrast strikingly echoes Gilmore's contemporary views on the evolution of autobiography and memoirs in the United States. However, Jameson's views propose a most interesting explanation for the choice of a collective testimonial format.

According to Jameson, the literature that emanates from the margins is characterized by "depersonalization or the return of anonymity" (185). Jameson, here, considers anonymity as the equivalent of the poststructuralist decentered subject, hence a "good anonymity" (185), not only suggesting "namelessness, facelessness [or] the indistinction of the mass" (185). Jameson presents this form of anonymity as one of the distinguishing characteristics of testimonials as regards autobiography. Turning to Philippe LeJeune's works on

autobiography, which insist on the structural link between autobiography and the proper name, Jameson further defines this anonymity in testimonial discourse not as "the loss of a name, but quite paradoxically—[as] the multiplication of proper names" (185). It is this profusion of personae that bestows its social impact on the polyphonic work. The audience confronted to that abundance of personal identities and experiences will be able to extract the common core of their narratives and consequently realize their quasi all-encompassing scope. This common core, which Ricoeur sees in a sense of human resemblance, might well correspond, as Dulong argues, to the affectivity developed in the texts.

Anonymity, in Jameson's understanding of the term, allows for the amplification of personal experience as well as the identification to a single character, hence facilitating the social goals of testimonial literature. Drawing from Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and polyphony, Jameson argues that "[t]he using of the speech of someone else [...] both dispels 'authorship' of the old centered-subject private-property type and institutes some new collective space between named subjects and individual human beings" (185). This new space, which can be conceptualized as a public sphere, "offers [...] a new conception of collectivity and collective life" (186) and serves the ideals of collective work for renewed social justice.

I.1.1.4.2 A Cultural Moment

Leigh Gilmore, in *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony,* addresses the thorny issue of the boom in self-writing our contemporary period came to witness. She, more precisely, focuses on the apparition of what has been successively named *Mislit* or Misery Memoirs. She investigates this spectacular appearance or reappearance of our cultural need for individual representation. She considers our contemporary era to have lapsed in "a therapy-driven culture of confession" (2) asking for cultural productions centered on the misfortunes of individual lives 'going public'. Though she seems on first inspection to agree with the large derogatory wave of criticism this genre created, she quickly comes to mitigate her viewpoint. She indeed seeks to investigate the cultural and historical evolutions which led to the current cultural situation. More importantly, Gilmore hopes to emphasize the creativity at the heart of these cultural productions. This creativity leads, she contends, to a necessary reappraisal of our previous generic concepts. Though Gilmore focuses on the genres of memoir and autobiography, her concerns nevertheless can apply to the similar evolution of the testimonial genre.

Gilmore considers four "contemporary and historical forces," (16) which served as ground for our current obsession with self-representation. She first contends that the recent boom in individual memoirs stemming from previously unpublishable authors is heavily indebted to the social and political movements of the past thirty years. Indeed, those movements "have made it possible for a broader range of people to publish accounts of their life experiences" (16). Previously silenced communities—Gilmore mentions women, people of color, gays and lesbians but also survivors of violence—appear to have pushed the envelope of self-representation in cultural productions. Gilmore also points to the important synergy those movements made possible between cultural productions and theory, creating a proper critical environment for these 'new' cultural productions.

The second factor, Gilmore contends, corresponds to our seemingly culture-bound contemporary confessional drive. According to her, "the media confessional, and also 'real life' media that posit *a naturalized speaker* who is simply telling his or her story, have come to permeate contemporary culture" (17; emphasis mine). Numerous examples embodied in reality-TV shows, testimonial talk-shows, or literary works come to mind. Everybody seems to take for granted that her fifteen minutes of fame—the narcissistic reward Warhol had so ominously foretold—should take the form of public self-disclosure. Interestingly, the man-in-the-street's confessional drive, far from being limited to TV shows, has come to colonize literary genres that where heretofore reserved to a 'serious' readership. Gilmore remarks indeed that autobiographies and memoirs, when they first appeared as literary genres, were somehow allocated to public figures, whether renowned writers, politicians or other famous historical figures. As a consequence, what becomes of interest in their contemporary reappearance is their popularization:

> Confessional practices pervade and, arguably, define mass culture (at least in the United States) and extend into scientific, legal and political statements and studies about the person. The efflorescence of talk shows and their mutating confessional forms has pushed forward another representative: neither celebrity nor the statesperson, but the dysfunctional and downtrodden, the cheated-on and cheating, the everyman and everywoman of the bad times that keep on coming (17).

This popularization obviously gave way to the contemporary critical contempt of the perverted voyeuristic re-appropriation of the genre.

Our contemporary culture therefore acts as a breeding ground for people to open up to the public whether they would be somehow expected to do so because of their social status or not. In direct correlation to this, Gilmore contends that the emergence of categories along the

lines of "personal criticism" and "creative nonfiction" (17) reinforced, as a third factor, the popularity of misery memoirs. Surprisingly, perhaps, she suggests that post-structuralism and its re-conception of previously institutionalized notions of language, agency and the human subject led to question the issue of representation and the self and to give birth to those somehow hybrid critical categories. In numerous overwhelming attempts to kill the subject, the deconstructive nature of the postmodern condition led to a paradoxical re-centering gesture on the self.

Last but not least, whether purist literary critics like it or not, Gilmore considers that the literary market itself acted as a "shaping force" (17) of this contemporary tendency. Consumerism and marketing apparently played an important role:

> Although it is unclear whether the market has led or followed, market demand currently encouraged marketing practices such as subtitling an author's first book 'a memoir' when in previous years it might have been classified as fiction, or selecting for publication a memoir by someone whose story would not have previously been expected to appeal to a so-called general audience. (17)

Gilmore's remarks on marketing strategies in the literary field are of undeniable interest, as can easily be proven by the appearance of *real life writing* bookshelves in bookstores during the past ten years. The audience seems to literally crave for a consumption of common people's stories. Such a conclusion would of course need to lead to a critical assessment of the commodification of the life experiences and misfortunes of others, yet this is beyond the scope of this research. The bottom line would simply be to realize that the convergence of social, political, cultural, academic and marketing factors has come to fully model "the current emphasis [...] on a person telling his or her story" (17).

Beyond these historical considerations, Gilmore also insists on a specifically local point correlated to American social philosophy. American individualism, she contends, plays no innocent role in the cultural boom of self-disclosure. Some of the concerns raised when criticizing contemporary misery memoirs revolve, indeed, around this seemingly questionable praise for individualism, in placing the traumatic experience of one individual on the forefront. Gilmore agrees that this focus on the individual leads to further issues involving the question of representation. Such a focus on individuality in memoir writing tells a lot of the current conception of representation in the US, all the more so in its political sense. This view proves of crucial importance in the case of testimonials of social empowerment. The complex dialogical relation between representation and an individualized form of governance, however, complies with one of the core principles of American social identity. Gilmore sees

this foundational principle as constitutive of the primary impulse for the production of contemporary self-writing in the United States. She remarks that:

> American individualism is informed by a democratic ideology of *e pluribus unum*. Stand up, it says, and represent yourself. Or, sit back and designate someone else to represent you. This intertwining of individual and collective representation demonstrates the close relation between representing yourself and participating in a representative structure in which one may stand for many (19).

This participation in a representative structure stands at the basis of the specific format of testimonials of social empowerment. In quoting the phrase of the Seal, Gilmore could not have imagined a better motto for testimonials in contemporary American culture. What the narrators seek to achieve with their testimonies, on the one hand, is obviously to stand up and represent themselves, so as to achieve recognition as proper citizens of American society and expose unbearable social situations. On the other, they literally enact the intertwining of the collective and the individual in physically producing one volume standing for many voices.

In choosing a polyphonic format, testimonials of social empowerment show that out of many voices, one same cry can be expressed. Out of numerous voices, it is the unity of American society as the target of a struggle for social justice that is foregrounded. Born form the contemporary juncture of cultural, social and political contexts, testimonials not only stand as representatives of a cultural trend but are also aimed at questioning political representation. In spite of their reliance on 'trendy' individual traumatic self-disclosure, it is not individualism that they seek to expose, but the no less American, ideal of deliberative democracy.

I.1.2. The Volumes

I.1.2.1 Organizing the Corpus

In order to facilitate the readers' perception of what testimonials of social empowerment refer to, this section presents the three projects which served as a final corpus for this research. Although the corpus was, at first, meant to be much larger, some amendments had to be made chiefly for the sake of the length of the final dissertation. The corpus was primarily composed of around twenty contemporary volumes, roughly starting in the 1960s up to the present day. The first abridgments were made when it appeared that the current period, as of the 1990s already but mainly in the years 2000, was particularly productive in this specific cultural area, so that these collections could, alone, serve as a representative corpus. Each volume was primarily selected because they obey a polyphonic format, uniting personal narratives

disclosing issues correlated with social injustices of any possible type. Since the preeminent point was to focus on testimonials as a non-fiction genre, particular attention was paid to avoiding anthologies of fictional pieces dealing with similar issues, or so-called mixed content collections coupling both fiction and non-fiction narratives, which turned out to be quite a common format. [10]

In spite of the difficulties in dealing with issues such as accuracy, truth and trustworthiness, the emphasis was meant to bear on narrative authenticity and authorial as well as editorial earnestness. These considerations made primary restrictions possible and directed the focus of the present corpus towards operative projects; that is, projects that display an active commitment to social change expressed through their published volumes as well as other activities. Although all volumes aim at participating in the national dialogue, those produced in or spurring larger social community-help contexts appeared even more useful for the research's purpose.

Secondary restrictions appeared mainly in the process of organizing the corpus in categories. The first attempt articulated as a categorization according to content. Content considerations were primarily targeted at the narrators' background community. The hypothesis was that the narrators united in specific volumes emanated from similar minority backgrounds to which specific issues of social injustices might correspond. In such a frame, issues of domestic violence, for example, would correspond to women seen as a social minority and gang and racial violence would correspond to ethnic minorities. The simplistic and stereotypical nature of these associations rapidly led me to abandon this categorization.

The necessity to define these minority communities rapidly exposed their internal complexity and all too often cross-referencing, as women, for example, could easily be part of ethnic minorities or other socially alienated groups. Moreover, some narrators did not factually fit any of these possible pre-defined minority communities. In the Voice of Witness volume on national security in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks entitled *Patriot Acts,* several narrators testifying to abuses are white educated heterosexual men—a stereotypical depiction of the majority. And, paradoxically, the initial corpus was sometimes lacking a proper representation of some minority communities; a proper volume on the disclosure of and life with one's homosexuality, for example, was absent in spite of the significant representation of

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[10] A good example of the mixed-content format is *Gangs: Stories of Life and Death from the Streets.* The volume couples real-life testimonies with journalistic reports and even excerpts from canonical literature as epitomized by Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange.*

members of the LGBT (official acronym for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community in volumes about other issues.

This critical redefinition of the term minority was eventually settled by linking volumes of testimonials of social empowerment with social movements. The community of narrators being plural was, in this perspective, no longer an issue as social movements symptomatically aim at uniting people from different backgrounds in a common fight against specific social issues, thus actually creating a new specific community united around one same struggle. The communities that were first surmised as being a base for the volumes were in fact born from the volumes' outreach. This, again, revealed the possibility of promoting volumes involved in larger social projects. These collective projects seek to tend to that community born of the volume's publication more consistently than other projects centered on the sole publication of a single volume, these correspond to what I call operative projects.

A second effort at categorization was then based on issues of social injustice themselves. This implied organizing the volumes in groups according to the type of injustice the narrators were disclosing. In this logic, collections that address issues pertaining to prison either covering living conditions (in men's or women's prisons and jails) or wrongful incarceration would be grouped together; collections addressing issues pertaining to gangs, street or school violence would again be grouped together under the header racial violence, etc. As handy as this categorization may appear, upon reading the witnesses' narratives one rapidly realizes that these injustices often appear to be intermingled in the narrators' lives. People who denounce their harsh living conditions in prison, in disclosing their life prior to incarceration often come to address issues of racial violence, battering, drug addiction or poor housing and/or working or education conditions. Indeed, if society has to be understood as a system, its flaws would accordingly run across all its different layers, one spurring the others. It is indeed common knowledge that social injustices often take the form of seemingly inescapable cycles combining elements that could be correlated to the three greater issues of redistribution, recognition, and representation. This being said, some volumes also appeared not to fit any single category but rather addressed issues pertaining to all categories at the same time (this is notably the case of *Voices from the Storm*, the Voice of Witness volume on the poor management of social help in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which contains testimonies from convicts almost drowned in their cells along with narratives from families blocked for a week in flooded streets and later relocated in squalid places).

This effort at categorization led to a new admission of failure. Though this idea could have been further developed, in creating a larger number of categories or in focusing on sub-

categories, the point of the research was to focus on the narratives' functional level as well as on their common rhetorical features. Moreover, as a majority of the volumes emanate from one same editorial source, the Voice of Witness series, it seemed senseless to separate these volumes according to different categories. Their shared editorial policy would have led to unnecessary repetitions in their textual analysis. Those shared features appeared, however, as possible starting points in comparing Voice of Witness's efforts with other, largely organized, editorial projects.

Indeed, the original corpus could easily be separated in isolated as opposed to more widely operative editorial and writing projects. Some collections appeared to stem from personal initiatives. Elaine Weiss, editor of *Surviving Domestic Violence: Voices of Women Who broke Free*, explains that her volume was born from her personal urge to interview "women who were once in an abusive relationship, who left their abuser, and who went on to reconstruct their lives" (5). This effort sprung up from her personal experience at the hands of an abusive husband. After having disclosed her story in an essay, she understood other women needed that same opportunity for disclosure. She realized that "as a writer, [she] could give voice to their stories, setting each down in such a way that its unique heartbeat could be felt" (10). Weiss's purpose in her volume is to pay tribute to these "women who survived" (8) as well as to inspire other women in the same predicament with these stories.

It is inspired from a similar personal urge to redress statistical wrongs that Paula C. Johnson decided to start the research project that ended in the publication of *Inner Lives: Voices of African American Women in Prison*. In this collection, Johnson frames narratives from currently and formerly incarcerated African American women within a wider anthropological research project. This project initiates with her analysis of "prevalent criminal law doctrine and sentencing reform in the face of the unprecedented rise in the U.S. prison population" and ends with her personal "recommendations for alternative approaches to address criminality and punishment in U.S. society" (5). Johnson contends that it is her personal experience that led her to address these issues as her position as former prosecutor and volunteer in women and children shelters allowed her to be "intimately involved in the criminal justice system" (ix). Her resolve was to set records straight as well as to help disclose detention conditions and malfunctions in the criminal justice system. She based her denunciations on her narrator's experiences. Her project nevertheless appears closer to an anthropological research, which peruses interviews and a form of oral history as sociological

data.[11]

If personal projects such as Johnson's and Weiss's can bear within themselves the possibility for future courses of action, others simply testify to their authors' hopes for prospective efforts. Natasha Tarpley, in *Testimony: Young African-Americans on Self-Discovery and Black Identity*, describes the testimonial essays she collected as a safe place where the social bond can be created through discussions and from which future solutions could spring. She starts out from her personal coming-of-age story through which she gained insight in her community's predicament:

> My hope for this book is that [...] it will be a resting place [...] for I hope it is only one stop of many, where we take account of and recount our experiences, and from which we gather up the strength to continue along the various roads we travel on this long lifetime journey. (10)

If in Weiss and Johnson guidance for future courses of action is explicitly mentioned, Tarpley's project rather resembles the first steps of an initiatory journey. Tarpley was still quite young (a law student of twenty-four) when the volume was published and one rapidly realizes that her coming-of-age story is no innocent choice as a starting point for this volume.

Similarly, some of these personal projects spring from the editors' effort to focus on the healing power of writing for the narrators themselves, rather than for directly fostering change in society. These volumes, again, arise from their editors' personal experience with writing's therapeutic function. Miriam Kalman Harris decided to edit the volume *Rape, Incest, Battery: Women Writing Out the Pain* after having herself experienced the writing cure in grappling with the trauma of her father's death. Understanding writing as the best tool for women to regain "Self Power" (xvi), she contends that "writing functions not only as catharsis of the soul but as a record of the heroic enterprise of regaining self-power" (xxii). She insists that her collection is not a recovery book but that "you, the reader, will witness the process of women writing their way from oppression to autonomy in their struggle to transcend the violence in their lives" (xvi). In this case, the process remains an inward-looking one in spite of the considerable emphasis laid on hope for improvement.

Harris's, Tarpley's, Jonhson's and Weiss's volumes have in common this personal urge to collect stories from people whose predicament the editors shared in one way or

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[11] This reliance on personal narratives seems to be a contemporary favored tendency in the social sciences as is notably developed in Daniel Bertaux's volume *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*.

another. These works, in spite of their collective format, remain individual-based in their editing project. These collections symptomatically oscillate between a focus on the numerous contributing narrators and a focus on the editors' personal efforts. The subtitles are symptomatic of this vision of a group of anonymous contributors: "voices of women who broke free", "voices of African American women in prison", "young African Americans on self-discovery", "women writing out the pain". However, the editors always seem to enjoy a privileged position that allows them to oversee the result(s) of the published project. Weiss's position as an author explains her right to (re)shape her narrators' stories. Johnson's prior position as a prosecutor permits her to draw conclusions from the narrators' experiences (see Part 1: Analysis of Experience, 19-49). Tarpley is presented as the catalyst of the narrators' expression of the "processes of becoming" (1). And *Rape, Incest, Battery* is introduced as resulting "from [Harris's] long process of collecting, selecting and editing" (volume's back cover). Though the final volumes display this community-like aggregation of narrators, credit for the publication seems to reflect solely on the individual figure of the editors. This circumstance crucially differentiates these isolated volumes from what I consider to be operative projects. These volumes, nevertheless, rightfully belong to the genre of testimonials of social empowerment. Suffice it to say that their reliance on rhetorical and critical tropes mirrors that which is found in the volumes that are presented in detail further down. These volumes, in their own right, also address a number of issues that are disclosed in the volumes of the operative projects and show a consistent parallel in their expression of the empowering potential of testimonies. My concern here is simply to address the large variety of formats that further research could help refine and detail.

Symptomatically, these first examples present the most eloquent characteristics of testimonials of social empowerment. The volumes gather personal narratives around the traumatic experience of an instance of social injustice and seek, in disclosing the narrators' process of personal empowerment, to enlarge public awareness and responsibility about these issues. These features testify to the texts' narrative weaving threads. The volumes' textual constructions function according to the development of both aesthetic and ethic narrative guiding lines: the first focuses on an interweaving of motives and tropes emphasizing the narrators' sincerity in disclosing authentic experiences (symptomatically embodied by the use and exploitation of the term 'voice') and the second focuses on the narrators' newly gained consciousness of their responsibilities as empowered citizens, which should entail a mirrored awareness-raising gesture in their audience.

If the isolated projects do indeed present the two most telling narrative features of testimonials of social empowerment, it is, however, their isolation that finally led me to focus primarily on fully operative projects. Projects such as Harris's, Tarpley's, Johnson's or Weiss's eventually correspond to one-shot publications. As the research demonstrated that testimonials of social empowerment often function in a way similar to that of social movements, these disconnected projects seemed less appropriate in detailing the texts' contribution to a social process. This being said, however, the theoretical findings this research develops can be applied to such isolated projects as well. The views previously exposed on isolated volumes, indeed, helped carve the final corpus that will be presented hereafter.

In reviewing the projects that can be considered operative, some common characteristics appeared strikingly opposed to more isolated, individual-based volumes. First, and in spite of the fact that titles and subtitles present close correlations to those of isolated project, contributors are presented as more active participants in the volume's creation and publication. Contributors are often presented as co-authors or even co-editors of the volumes as specified on the covers: "The Freedom Writers Diary, how a teacher and 150 teens used writing to change themselves and the world around them", "Teaching Hope, stories from the Freedom Writer teachers and Erin Gruwell", "Couldn't Keep it to Myself, Wally Lamb and the Women of York Correctional Institution—Testimonies from our imprisoned sisters", "I'll Fly Away, Further testimonies from the women of York prison", and finally the "Voice of Witness" name and logo (an eye inserted in a speech balloon) for the eponymous series (see fig 1-10). [12] These titles, subtitles, and names are symptomatic of the efforts of further involving narrators in the active operation of the volume and its outreach: their narratives do not only serve as raw data but offer the authentic voices of these narrators with whom readers win a chance to get directly in touch.

Second, these projects generally produce more than one publication, all genres included. Voice of Witness has published eleven testimonial volumes, one educational textbook, and one picture book since its creation in 2005; The Freedom Writers' foundation released two volumes of testimonies—plus a number of online testimonies and a tenth anniversary edition of the original diary; the writing workshop in Niantic gave birth to two

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[12] Narrators in the Voice of Witness project, as explained by Development and Communication director Juliana Sloane (see appendix), are considered as active editors of the transcribed version of their primary interviews.

testimonial volumes and still actively functions today within the institution. Focus on ongoing activities is crucial to these operative projects. As the point is to convince readers of the soundness of the project and the efforts it stands for, showing regular if not continuous liveliness appears essential.

The volumes published in the framework of operative projects display a deeper involvement in social activism. This involvement is typically expressed in the presence of these projects' mission statements. All the projects propose a formulaic statement of their aims and objectives as part of their communication strategy towards the greater public. These projects, significantly, put a heavy emphasis on the educative outreach of the volumes. It is in the frame of this educative effort that the different projects ended up creating specific organizations (the Freedom Writers' Foundation, Voice of Witness) which aim at the circulations of their published volumes as well as at intricate 'inter-media' communicative strategies. The organizations symptomatically cross-reference their productions in different media areas and seek contact with and through all possible contemporary media system. Both The Freedom Writers Foundation and Voice of Witness boast very active websites; all also propose press and teaching kits, as well as pages aimed for testimonial comments and references to possible contact and support through social networks such as Facebook or Twitter.[13] Donations are also possible and encouraged on both websites, as the organizations are non-profit foundations. The projects' communicative strategies are thus oriented towards an efficient publicity of their active status.

Even more significant is the projects' complete dedication to educative outreach both in high-school and academic environments. The Voice of Witness volumes all include appendixes aimed at further contextualizing the narratives as well as educating readers on the laws, statutes or statistics about the issue at hand. Both volumes that emanated from the York Correctional writing workshop propose a list of further readings on the matters explored by the inmates. The Freedom Writers Foundation and Voice of Witness offer document bundles to teachers who would wish to use their volumes, and all three projects offer the possibility of inviting the major actors of the projects' publications in classrooms.[14] The following pages are devoted to describing these operative projects in further details. I will first focus on the

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[13] Cf. The recent controversy on the ban of Lamb's first novel and *I'll Fly Away* in Connecticut prisons in August 2013.

[14] For the pedagogical document bundles see *The Power of the Story: The Voice of Witness Teachers' Guide to Oral History* and www.freedomwritersfoundation.org.

Freedom Writers Diary, the volume that served as a primary basis for this research. The next project to be presented will be the ambitious Voice of Witness Series and the five volumes that were selected for the final corpus. I will end with the publications emanating from the writing workshops from York Correctional Institution in Niantic, Connecticut.

I.1.2.2 *The Freedom Writers' Diary*: **Picking up a Pen rather than a Gun**

The Freedom Writers' Diary is the book that served to initiate the present research project. Published in 1999, the volume enjoyed considerable success in California, the United States and later worldwide with its cinematographic adaptation released in 2007. The volume, in many respects, may be considered a crucial representative of testimonials of social empowerment. The entries collected in the *Diary*, in spite of their pronounced individuality and highly personal tone, relate to diverse social issues that are, unfortunately, part of a large number of citizens' daily life. The adolescents who disclose their lives in the collection speak of universal subject matters such as racism, discriminatory education, poverty, gang and street violence, domestic abuse and addiction. Born from a classroom which was meant to gather "at risk," (Gruwell, FWD 4) "unteachable" (Gruwell, FWD 5) adolescents, the texts display a mature understanding of the social environment these 150 teens have been so eager to change with the help of their teacher. [15]

Production Context

It comes as no surprise that *The Freedom Writers' Diary* was eventually adapted into a movie since the production environment for this volume seems indeed to have been borrowed from a Hollywood scenario. In the fall of 1994, young teacher Erin Gruwell entered room 203 in Woodrow Wilson High school in Long Beach, California. Faced with a classroom she metaphorically dubs "as colorful as a box of Crayola crayons," (FWD 4) Gruwell was naïvely convinced that education could see past color and culture. However, Gruwell's arrival at Wilson could not have happened at a more peculiar time. Two years after the Los Angeles riots, racial tensions were still palpable. Moreover, due to integration policies Wilson High was a "reflection of a community in flux" (FWF *FAQs* 4).[16] Students from racially diverse

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[15] For the sake of concision, *The Freedom Writers' Diary* will be abbreviated as FWD in references.

[16] FWF *FAQs* refers to the PDF document bundle of frequently asked questions that can be found on the Freedom Writers Foundation Website.

neighborhoods were bused in Wilson each morning, which caused a significant change in the school's "traditionally white, upper-class demographics" (Gruwell, FWD 2). "African Americans, Latinos, and Asians now make up the majority of the student body," (FWD 2) Gruwell writes and Long Beach's infamously publicized position as the "gangsta-rap capital" (FWD 1) unfortunately facilitated an outbreak in gang activity. This public of "school 'rejects'" (FWF *bio* 1) was little inclined to learn about English or literature but rather keen on giving their "preppy" (Gruwell, FWD 2) teacher a hard time.

Erin Gruwell recalls the specific incident that turned out to become the cornerstone of new educational practices. Sharaud, the classroom bully, "became the butt of a bad joke" (FWD 2). A racial caricature of the boy, drawn with huge lips, was circulated in the room:

> When I got hold of the picture, I went ballistic. "This is the type of propaganda that the Nazis used during the Holocaust," I yelled. When a student timidly asked me, "What's the Holocaust?" I was shocked. I asked, "How many of you have heard of the Holocaust?" Not a single person raised his hand. Then I asked, "How many of you have been shot at?" Nearly every hand went up. (FWD 2)

Gruwell, appalled at what she saw, "immediately decided to throw out [her] meticulously planned lessons and make tolerance the core of [her] curriculum" (FWD 3). Her purpose was to have students "rethink their beliefs about themselves" (FWF *bio* 1). She determined to "bring history to life" (FWD 3). In spite of the fact that she had been told that her students were too stupid to read a book from cover to cover, Gruwell wished to shatter stereotypes and "decided to assign books written for, by, and about teenagers who lived during wars but were able to right the wrong by chronicling their own harrowing stories" (FWF *bio* 1). In a meaningful gesture, she chose, among others, *Anne Frank, The Diary of a Young Girl* and *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo*.

Taking advantage of the breach she cracked in her students' callous indifference, Gruwell organized a number of field trips. She notably took her students to see *Schindler's List* in Newport Beach at a predominantly white, upper-class theatre. This incident was not left unnoticed. A local paper, indeed, decided to run a front-page article about it, describing the poor treatment Gruwell and her students were faced with. The article even led Gruwell to receive death threats. Opportunely, the paper also led to more positive developments: professors from the University of California Irvine, upon their reading of the article, decided to invite Gruwell's students to a seminar with the author of *Schindler's List*. The seminar left such an impressive mark on Thomas Keneally that he decided to have the students meet with Steven Spielberg at Universal Studios. Taken in that positive turn of event, Gruwell "in an

attempt to connect with [her] class, […] gave her students journals with the hope of giving them a voice" (FWF *bio* 2).

The journals rapidly became a "forum for self-expression" which encouraged the students "to pick up a pen rather than a gun" (FWF *bio* 2). For, indeed, even though Gruwell managed to raise her students' awareness of tolerance within the classroom, their history of racial conflicts quickly raced them up when they went back to the streets. Anne Frank's and Zlata's diary, indeed, appear all the more adequate reading choices since a surprisingly high number of students testify to their life in an unexpected war zone:

> I've lost […] friends who have died in an undeclared war. A war that has been here for years, but has never been recognized. A war between color and race. A war that will never end. […] To society they're just another dead person on the street corner, just another statistic. But to the mothers of all those other statistics, they're more than simple numbers. (Diary 6, FWD 16)

Feeling more self-confident in disclosing their unimaginable ordeals to paper than to people, the students find a voice and realize how written words can serve as a proper repository for anger, fear and interrogations. Gruwell is thus faced with the emotional outcry of her students disclosing their "experiences of loss, hardship, and discrimination" (FWF *bio* 2). This outcry actually led Gruwell to realize a number of things, most notably the fact that "to some of these kids death […] seems more real than a diploma" (FWD 49). Though Gruwell acknowledges that war is not something she considered as "a domestic problem" (FWD 81), she decided to take at heart her mission to make a difference for her students.

During a symbolic "toast for change" (Diary 31, FWD 61), Gruwell asked her students to think about how they actually could change for the better: "we took fake champagne and plastic cups, and toasted to a clean slate, a second chance" (Diary 142, FWD 269-270). This event, again, appears crucial in the birth of the Freedom Writers and their diary. Gruwell speaks of her students experiencing "an epiphany" (FWD 79) that led them to contact young Zlata Filipovic and to invite her to Wilson. In Junior year, 1997, Zlata's position as the student's role-model bloomed up in a wider-encompassing writing project. This led to the actual decision to compile entries from the diaries the students had been keeping in a collaborative book. The students themselves served as the board of editors. Though Gruwell insists that the project "feels like the right thing to do," (FWD 140) some of the students' raised issues of personal safety. Although they wish to speak in their own voices, some need to protect themselves from possible violent retaliations in disclosing their experience. Gruwell proposed an interesting solution:

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> Since their fears are legitimate, I need to let them keep their anonymity. Some of their diary entries deal with subjects like murder and molestation. By using numbers rather than names when we compile our diary, I think they'll feel more comfortable and it will probably be safer for all of us. To ensure that no one embellishes or sensationalizes their stories, I'm going to ask them to sign a honor code. (FWD 140)

The final published version indeed retains the system of numbers rather than names, except for Gruwell's. Similarly, as Gruwell's wish was to have students edit one another's stories, she thought handwritings could give away the narrators' identity. Businessman John Tu, the students' benefactor, thus provided them with a set of computers.

It is after seeing a documentary on the Freedom Riders' movement "who fought racism by riding the bus" (Diary 75, FWD 156) that the students decided that their writing project amounted to fighting racism with writing and that they named themselves Freedom Writers in honor of their role-models. Their hopes are then attaining summits:

> I think now that we're 'Freedom Writers,' we're taking the 'freedom writing' part to heart. We've decided to bind all our diary entries [...]. [W]e felt that someone should hear our voices, but who would be the right person to listen? We wanted to shoot big! The mayor? No. The governor? Hell no. [...] The President? Nah. We wanted somebody who had a direct effect on education. Ms. G mentioned some guy named Richard Riley. Supposedly, he's the top dog in his field. (Diary 76, FWD 157)

Richard Riley, who was at the time Secretary for Education, was staying in Washington, the Freedom Writers decided to make the trip up to him and indeed presented him with a copy of their Diary. This step was the first of a series that would lead them to their deserved recognition.

During, their senior year, the Freedom Writers received the Spirit of Anne Frank Award, a scholarship for students who "combat discrimination in their own communities" (Gruwell, FWD 221). The long hours they kept spending in editing their diary were eventually rewarded with a publishing contract. Diaries 120 and 121 directly mention the publishing project and introduce the readers to their book agent, whom they, in a playful street-like metaphor, renamed their "pimp" (233). The narrator of Diary 121, however, maturely informs on the consequences of publication: "It is scary to be launched in the publishing world. I hope this will be the beginning of a new me" (235). The students were also featured in an episode of ABC's *Prime Time Live*. Their *Diary*, published in 1999 by Doubleday, eventually became a number-one-ranked *New York Times* bestseller. After graduation, the students engaged on an Ambassadors of Tolerance Tour that led them to

England, Poland, the Netherlands, Bosnia and Croatia. In 2007, director Richard LaGravanese, released his movie adaptation of the students' story, which led to the volume's international recognition in spite of the Freedom Writers' regret of not having been further translated.[17]

The book's reception was undeniably forward-looking, Gruwell in her preface to *Teaching Hope* tells of her students' and her own realization of the power of their words:

> We didn't anticipate that so many readers would identify with [the students'] tragedies. Our readers were no strangers to depression, addiction, abuse, alienation, and disappointment. *The Freedom Writers Diary* united their voices in a way that spoke to each person who read the book. (xx)

These remarks tell of the powerful message and meaningful gestures the volume is meant to stand for. Through these teenagers' narratives, it is the necessity to bear witness that is imposed, the challenge to "never stand idly by" (Gruwell, *Teaching* xx).

About the Mission

Since the creation of their Foundation, the Freedom Writers have sought to "innovat[e] the classroom" (website motto). However, the volume collecting their diary entries was, before that, already meant to convey a meaningful message to the community. The main significance of their work is to "reaffirm the power of the written word" (Gruwell, FWD 141) in showing that writing can be used "as a form of empowerment" (Epilogue, FWD 275) as opposed to the destructive recourse to violence. Student Thomas Jefferson's[18] letter to Zlata explains how his and his fellow Freedom Writers' purpose spells out:

> They say America is the 'Land of the Free and Home of the Brave,' but what's so free about a land where people get killed? My name is Thomas (Tommy) Jefferson from Wilson High School in Long Beach, California. I am a fifteen-year-old teenage boy whose life seems to be similar to yours. [...] Now that I have read you book, I am educated on what is happening in Bosnia. *I would like the opportunity now to educate*

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[17] The bundle of FAQs on the website mentions versions in German, Japanese, Mandarin, Korean, Greek, and Spanish.

[18] Jefferson's letter is integrally reproduced in the *Diary*. It seems surprising that his name would be so overtly disclosed since the editorial policy of the *Diary* was clearly centered on anonymity. There is no mention of a pseudonym, I am thus unable to confirm whether this corresponds or not to the student's actual identity.

people on what is happening in my 'America' because until this 'undeclared war' has ended, I am not free! (78-79; emphasis mine)

The Freedom Writers' project is obviously not limited to empowering the classroom.

More importantly, their mission is about educating the public. This education takes two different forms: on the one hand it is based on the description of the students' unimaginably ghastly experiences of what Gruwell calls *domestic problems*, on the other it seeks to question labels, the negative power of media and stereotypical misconceptions. Through their efforts, the students managed to "discredit all of the stereotypes" (Diary 142, FWD 270) that were imposed on them, as well as to prove everyone's disparaging assumptions—among which some of their own—wrong. Interestingly, from the beginning of their project, the educational value of their mission was foregrounded. Education, indeed, remains the most secure basis for empowerment and the acquisition of the responsibilities it entails.

Symptomatically, the Freedom Writers' meeting with Secretary Richard Riley, serves as one of the most significant symbols of their fight for the empowerment a proper education, at all ages, can accomplish. By reading the Freedom Writers' Diary, the students' hope is that the audience will show a similar ambition and "care about the future of kids in America" (Diary 89, FWD 175). In spite of the evolution of stereotypes, "from 'bonehead', to 'remedial', to 'basic'" (Gruwell, FWD 30) and the tendency to cover up discrimination under politically correct terms, society's labels keep their derogative power. Rather than trying to accept their defining and disparaging dimensions, Freedom Writers wish to thwart them. Their message is that justice is possible in the form of a truly-accessible-to-all education, stereotypes or social and ethnic backgrounds notwithstanding. In the most hopeful sense of the term, these students found their purpose in life: "that purpose is to make a difference and stand up for a cause" (Diary 75, FWD 154).

Most importantly, the Freedom Writers' purpose is one that they wish to expand to society as a whole. Even if their diaries were at first meant as a private, primarily very intimate, then classroom, forum that permitted the students to disclose their traumatic life stories, the fact that the entries were eventually circulated is meant as a psychologically and socially cathartic gesture. Significantly, one of the frequently asked questions the Freedom Writers are faced with is whether their story can or could help other students. The answer seems irrevocable: "the [Freedom Writers] hope students who have struggled with violence, abuse, the loss of a family member, or learning disabilities will read this book and see that they are not alone" (FWF *FAQs* 2). Symptomatically, "people should hear what [some

students] go through and understand that no one comes from a perfect home" (Diary 79, FWD 160). This powerfully cathartic and empowering hope is epitomized in the last line of the volume. The Freedom Writers, indeed, end their list of acknowledgment as follows: "And to you, *the reader*—we now pass the baton to you" (FWD 280).

Outreach

Interestingly, the Freedom Writers' mission did not stop with the sole publication of the volume. The non-profit organization, the Freedom Writers' Foundation, was created in 1997. A primarily educational organization, the foundation seeks to further Gruwell's and her former students' efforts to brighten the instructional future of kids suffering discrimination in the United States. The foundation's mission statement is presented in a progressive tone: "Our mission is to empower educators and students to positively impact their own lives and the world around them" (FWF website). The foundation's actual outreach is, thus, twofold; aiming both at an educator and a student public. The purpose is to "train teachers to empower their students" (FWF *FAQs* 1). In presenting the website as "a community like the one [the students] formed in Room 203, where people feel safe, accepted, and understood," (FWF *About* 2) the foundation hopes to "close the education gap" (FWF *FAQs* 1) by encouraging classrooms in which students feel engaged and teachers supported.

Their education mission appears significantly productive. Apart from teachers training workshops, scholarships, curricula, seminars, lectures and classroom discussions, the foundation's activities led to a tenth-anniversary edition of the Diary and the publication of a second volume of testimonies in 2009. Emanating from The Freedom Writer Teachers, this time, *Teaching Hope*, tells of the challenging yet inspiring experiences of teachers faced with issues unfortunately similar to the ones the Freedom Writers disclosed in their *Diary* ten years earlier. The book was born from the first teachers training workshop Gruwell organized. She recruited 150 teachers across the United States and Canada in the hope to plant "the seeds of revolution" (*Teaching* xxi). The result of her ambitious project is thus an anthology of these teachers' testimonies—of "their very human stories" (*Teaching* xxiii). The volume's purpose is analogous to that of the *Freedom Writers' Diary* with the sole difference that the point of view is focalized through that of educators. Significantly, the Freedom Writers' mission is mirrored in the Freedom Writer Teachers' words and hopes. This second volume ends in an evocative quote from Margaret Mead that epitomizes the eventual social outreach not only of these two volumes, but of what all other testimonials stand for: "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that

ever has" (352).

Narrative Presentation

As previously mentioned, the entries in the *Diary* are numbered for the sake of anonymity.[19] Except for Erin Gruwell's name (and Zlata Filipovic's preface), no other contributor is identified. The diary entries are thus numbered and organized chronologically. The entries cover Gruwell's 150 students' four-year High School curriculum, from the Fall term of 1994 to the Spring term of 1998.[20] Temporal landmarks are represented through Gruwell's own entries labeled according to the semester. The diary is consequently approximately separated in eight different sections. Gruwell's contributions, each time, serve as a sort of introductory text broaching the main issues developed in the following narratives. The first diary entry is preceded by a note:

> Each teenager played an integral role in developing the diary entries—reading, editing, and encouraging one another. To protect their anonymity and *illustrate the universality of their experiences*, we decided to number each diary entry rather than attach a name. The students have shared their life experiences freely, *without inhibition*. (6; emphasis mine)

This inaugurating comment tells of the students' will to disclose their story, and more significantly of their explicit reliance on the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility.

The fact that the students, in spite of their anonymous contribution, sought to disclose their predicaments and/or accomplishments without inhibition undeniably strengthens their commitment to sincerity. Likewise, this uninhibited freedom of expression vouches for the texts' authenticity. The Foundation website adds relevant comments about the notion of authenticity, "the diary entries are all original entries [as opposed to possible edited versions

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[19] Entries in *Teaching Hope* follow the same anonymous process. Entries are numbered form 1 to 150. The only significant difference is that this second volume contains a list of contributors in the appendixes.

[20] This editorial choice for organizing the narratives is, again, mirrored in *Teaching Hope*. The testimonies are organized in six separate sections, each embodying significant "psychological phases in a teacher's year" (xxv): *Anticipation* of the first day at school, the *Challenges* of *Engaging* students, school year intrinsic *Disillusionment* and *Rejuvenation*, and the eventual student's *Empowerment* by year's end.

of several entries] and were edited by fellow Freedom Writers for grammar and not content" (2). The referential authenticity of the students' stories has thus been strictly preserved. This authenticity obviously also serves the emotive aspect of the students' rhetoric.[21] Gruwell, in her introduction to *Teaching Hope,* tells of the powerful opposition she discovered between literature and reality through the authentic description of experience upon her entrance in room 203:

> I had planned to teach my students about Shakespeare and his sonnets and about Homer and his tale of an odyssey, but I quickly realized that my students couldn't care less about figurative language and metaphors. At fourteen, everything in their lives was literal, focused on reality. When you feel the pang of hunger in the pit of your stomach, that's reality. When you are shot at on your way to school, that's reality. When you have been a pallbearer at your friend's funeral, that's reality. (xvii-xviii)

Gruwell's insistence on what reality is, how it feels like, enhances the emotionally evocative authenticity of her students' stories.

When readers are confronted with the student's narratives, they might gain a directly emotive access to the authenticity of the narrators' reality. On the other hand, this pledge to sincerity and authenticity powerfully supports the students' understanding of the ethical impact their diaries could or should exert. The insistence on the universality of the students' experiences obviously refers to the two crucial conclusions readers should draw. First, these narratives depict blunt instances of social injustices that run rampant in our societies and need to be addressed. Second, if these students did indeed become empowered, the same process can be implemented in other similar situations.

If the students' entries do not comprise titles, they have nonetheless been labeled in the volume's Contents. A quick look at these headers provides a telling indication of the topics developed in the volume: "Racial Segregation at School," "Buying a Gun," "Gang Initiation," "Juvenile Hall," "Testifying in Murder Case," "Teenage Alcoholism," "Doing Speed," "Race Riot," "Domestic Violence," "Child Abuse," "Abortion," "Teenage Pregnancy" (vii—xii). These examples testify to the social issues these adolescents hope to expose. Their diary entries, however, also speak of the empowering process they have gone through: "Lesson on Tolerance," "Toast for Change," "'I am a Human Being,'" "Getting a Job," "Catalyst for Change," "Freedom Writers Unite," "Contemplating College," "Finding a

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[21] The term emotive is here understood in the sense of I.A. Richards opposition between the emotive and referential functions language can fulfill through rhetoric.

Mentor," "Being a Mentor," "Attitude Adjustment," "Breaking the Cycle," "Overcoming the Odds" (vii-xii). There are also references to the cornerstone events that led to the Freedom Writers' notoriety and their publication: "Teen Diarists," "Zlata," "Meeting a Holocaust Survivor," "Day of Tolerance: a Field Trip," "Student Editing," "Freedom Riders," "Freedom Writers have a Dream," "Book Agent," "Getting Published," and of course, most emphatically, the last entry tells of their "Graduation" (vii-xii).

The Freedom Writers' policy of anonymity is both appropriate and frustrating. Anonymity, indeed, has this persuasive impact of validating the narrator's voice in a way that feels at the same time unique and possibly universal. As Jameson explains, anonymity in the postmodern era, rather than testifying to the disappearance of the individual, refers to the multiplication of proper names. Their absence in this volume is all the more telling: these speakers could virtually refer to anybody. Though these voices' individuality remains indubitable, it seems, at the same time, to engage the universalizing nature of diary writing in the sense of disinhibited, because intimate, self-disclosure to pen and paper (or keyboard and screen). This universal status of the diarist is epitomized in the texts' identical opening formula, "Dear Diary". At the same time, this universalizing effort does indeed appear frustrating. Each "Dear Diary" opens a new investigation aimed at discovering the narrator's identity. If, most of the time, elements from the narration provide a few clues about the narrator's gender or ethnicity, some texts make any degree of recognition impossible. Interestingly, this anonymity does not impair the texts' potential of creating a bond with their readers. This bond is, by the way, sometimes directly engaged by the use of the second person singular pronoun. Indeed, the 'dear diary', discreetly at first, and more candidly as the texts wind on, becomes a 'dear reader', where the 'you—diary' transforms into 'you who are reading these words'.[22]

With a colorful gamut of styles, ranging from street-gang colloquialisms to code switching, poetry and novelistic writing, the Freedom Writers' diary is a prime example of the stylistic diversity the genre of testimonials of social empowerment stands for. In spite of the shortness of the entries (from two to four pages), the students managed to offer powerful narrative pieces and to convey their sense of distress and hope.

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[22] For a more detailed exploration of these questions and the shift from the genre of diary writing to that of testimonials of social empowerment, see Louckx.

I.1.2.3 The Voice of Witness Series: Empowering the World with Oral History

The Voice of Witness non-profit book series was created in 2004 by author Dave Eggers and physician and human rights scholar Lola Vollen. Their ambitious project of "illuminating human rights crises through oral history" (website motto) was taken over in 2008 by Mimi Lok who became the series executive director and editor. Voice of Witness appears the most productive of all the projects that were reviewed in the course of this research with no less than 12 publications in their 9 years of existence. An upcoming thirteenth volume is announced for May 2014—*Invisible Hands: Voices from the Global Economy*. As active as the series may be, their staff is nonetheless rather limited and their premises modest. I had the chance to meet with their former Communication and Development Director, Juliana Sloane in October 2013 (the complete interview is reproduced in the appendixes). The close relation of the series to their publisher, Mc Sweeney's, nevertheless gives them wide media coverage; the numerous reviews of which the different volumes have been the object testify to their undeniable success.

Production Context

The volumes published within the Voice of Witness series differ from the other ones in the corpus in some respects. They nevertheless embody the powerful position, as a non-fiction niche, testimonials of social empowerment occupy in contemporary American culture. Journalist, Ruth Gidley, in her 2008 article on *Undocumented America*, tells of the volumes' against-the-current status: "In a time when history is told in cheap television re-enactments, if at all, and personal tragedy is gobbled up in rapidly digestible magazine photos and reality shows, this project goes against the grain" (2). In spite of their professed close correlation with oral history, the editors' purpose remains that of educating and empowering the audience on human rights injustices "through the stories of the men and women who experience them" (VOW *about*).[23]

A significant difference between Voice of Witness and the other examples of the testimonial genre is their interest for not only domestic but also global human right crises. Eggers vows he is interested in "the human impact of the giant foot of misplaced government" (qtd. in Cooke 3) and indeed explains how the project was first born with

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[23] Voice of witness will be abbreviated as VOW in the references. All quotes excerpted from the series' website will be referred to by means of the section where they can be found; about, books, home,…

interviews he conducted in Sudan with Valentino Achack Deng and women who had been enslaved during the civil war. [24] *Out of Exile*, the Voice of Witness volume compiling the women's narratives, was published in 2008 and was the series third volume. The basic project was thus meant to investigate human rights crises abroad and evolved so as to also encompass domestic issues of justice in the hope to arouse "America's conscience" (Cooke).

Mimi Lok, Voice of Witness's current executive director, describes the series functioning in the sense that "[their] work disrupts established narratives" (*megaphone*). Eggers, in his interview with Justine Sharrock, describes the series line of action in a similar way when asked why he regards oral history as a completive answer to injustices. He considers that oral history offers more than nonfiction and historiographic narratives (*i.e.* what one finds in the volumes' introductions and appendixes):

> I think that the two forms can coexist. But one thing that you don't get sometimes from the more clinical or academic books or nonfiction books that are more policy oriented is that you don't get to hear the person's voice; you don't get them as individuals. [...] And with oral history and especially in the way we are trying to do it, the people are given a full voice. You hear about them as individuals in all of their complexity, not as cardboard cutouts meant to advance whatever political agenda or point that the author is trying to make. (3)

The series seek to offer the authenticity of experience as a response to possibly misconstrued interpretations of facts and events. Especially in the case of *Surviving Justice,* Eggers, tells of the dangers of the stories the justice system has concocted for the narrators (Cooke 2). The project is "a partnership between the people telling their stories and the people transmitting them to the reader" (Eggers qtd. in Gidley 2). [25] In a fashion that is compatible with the concept of the "chain of trust" as defined by Sloane, readers can "hear primary sources" (Eggers qtd. in Sharrock 1) in the most immediate way.

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[24] Achack Deng is at the center of Eggers' second book *What is the What* a part-fictional memoir Eggers wrote based on Achack Deng's story.

[25] William and Richard Ayers describe oral history as a "space between" (6). "Oral history," they argue, "is not an adjunct or a poor cousin to 'real history' [n]or is it pure fiction, an imaginary tale spun out with no relationship to any external referent whatsoever" (6). "Rather," they conclude, "it is a necessary third *thing* with its own integrity, demands, traditions, and base: it is engaged in a history of moments, as well as interested in a history of memory" (6).

Though Eggers mentions that the project was actually born in Sudan, the first two volumes, in an inward-looking gesture, dealt with domestic human rights crises. From the twelve volumes published up until now, seven bear upon issues of social justice on the American soil: *Surviving Justice, Voices from the Storm, Underground America* (later published in Spanish *En Las Sombras De Estados Unidos*), *Patriot Acts, Inside this Place not of It, Refugee Hotel,* and *High-rise Stories.* Among these, the present research retained five. Since *Refugee Hotel* is mainly composed of pictures and *High-rise Stories* was published quite late in the development of the research, I chose to focus on the first five volumes. The issues exposed in the volumes refer to "human rights crises that are contemporary, ongoing, and not nearly documented enough," Sloane insists. It is with these three decisive features in mind, that Voice of Witness editors skim through submitted project proposals.

Sloane depicts the series process for contacting narrators as a "chain of trust". Either when they are faced with spontaneous proposals or when they come to contact a person that editors or family members recommended, the procedure remains a very human and "organic" one (Sloane). Indeed, William and Richard Ayers describe the process of oral history interviews as a dialogue that "depends on relationship more than technique" (6). Eggers explains that in spite of the assumption that "those who have witnessed or been victim to these human rights abuses would be reluctant to talk" (qtd. in Sharrock 2), he realized that tackling these possibly "re-traumatizing interviews" (Gidley 3) actually revealed to be particularly enriching encounters. Giving these narrators an actual chance to speak and to be listened to as long as they will talk urge people to "become very serious and willing to open up" (qtd. in Sharrock 2). Mimi Lok tells of the reasons that may lead speakers to come to them:

> People who speak to us do so for various reasons. Sometimes, it is just to be heard. Sometimes, it is to be believed. Some people feel that if they tell their story and other people hear about it maybe it won't happen to someone else. (*megaphone*)

This process is, of course, crucially different from what characterizes the two other projects that were selected for the final corpus. Whereas, in the case of *The Freedom Writers' Diary, Teaching Hope, Couldn't Keep it to Myself* and *I'll Fly Away,* the volumes compile narratives that the contributors wrote and edited, Voice of Witness's volumes are primarily based on oral history interviews that are "edited for length and clarity, and shaped into first person narratives that seek to engender awareness, empathy, discussion and advocacy"

(Mayotte, *Power* 12).[26] The editors' job is thus to transcribe these interviews and edit them "brick by brick" (Eggers qtd. in Sharrock 3). Narrators are nevertheless actively involved in the editing process, their approval is sought several times over the evolving drafts, and final drafts are published only upon their eventual agreement with the form and content of the narrative. Narrators are also free to withdraw from the process any time. Sloane is positive in describing that these situations may arise; some narrators do not realize how painful and intimate the disclosing process can reveal to be. So as to avoid these sensitive situations, Sloane explains that interviewers try to multiply the number of interviews in the hope to keep a follow-up assessment of the narrator's state of mind. This being said, the number of interviewees always outgrows that of the stories in the final volume, Sloane talks about a fifty percent rate (sometimes even higher): for ten stories published, probably twenty primary narrators have been approached.

The "chain of trust" which serves as the founding ground for the partnership these interviews represent is not only meant to reassure narrators. The atmosphere of faithfulness has to be secured on the part of the editors and readers as well. William and Richard Ayers, in their foreword to *The Power of the Story*, describe the powerful invitation these interviews represent: "the interview is not an intrusion, or a designated therapeutic moment; it is rather the opening of a narrative space that people may choose to enter or not" (7). "It is an invitation," they argue, "not a destination" (7). Primary interviews are thus always followed by a fact checking process: each narrator's story is checked and editors "go back to them with any anomalies they uncovered" (Gidley 3). In order to warrant the sense of authenticity and immediacy these stories are meant to convey, accuracy proves a treasurable concept. This striving for accuracy is also closely linked with the wish for some narrators (most notably in *Surviving Justice* and *Inside this Place not of It*) to be believed. One must not forget that the central ambition in these volumes is to disrupt authoritative established narratives. In rendering unto Caesar's that which is Caesar's, these stories are rendered unto their 'true' narrators, "the person who lived—and still lives—the events, not the historian" (Gidley 3). Accuracy appears then as crucial as authenticity and Eggers describes narrators' ultimate form of gratitude for this ultimate form of recognition: "We've had so many of our narrators say,

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[26] Juliana Sloane, however, mentions specific cases where interviews could not be carried out for material reasons and where letters and other written sources were then included in the shaping of the final narrative.

'Thank God, there it is. No one can take it away, no one can alter it, at least I know, there it is told correctly, accurately, and fully'" (qtd. in Sharrock 2).

About the Mission

Though their motto seems to say it all, "Illuminating Human Rights crises through oral history," the actual mission of Voice of Witness may be further specified depending on the volume's issue. Moreover, this mission can also be adapted whenever the volume comes to be published with the assistance of third-party organizations. Voice of Witness's website offers the following detailed description of the series' mission:

> We aim to:
> - Empower those most closely affected by contemporary human rights injustices.
> - Engender greater awareness, discussion and action in response to these injustices.
> - Provide our readers—from high school students to educators, policy makers and advocates—with compelling, reality-based human rights documentation that can be used for teaching, training and advocacy. (*about*)

Voice of Witness's highly elaborate mission statement summarizes the main points that can actually be applied to any all-encompassing project volumes of testimonials stand for. Whether a powerful educational tool, as epitomized in *The Freedom Writers' Diary*, or a form of activism based on awareness-raising, as embodied in *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* and *I'll Fly Away*, the eventual effort is oriented towards the empowerment of impacted communities and social action against injustices.

Mimi Lok, in the informative video created for the Smithsonian Ingenuity Award, tells of her personal understanding of this mission: "in the field of social progress, I would define ingenuity as finding ways to share personal stories of individuals who wouldn't otherwise get heard". More than simply raising awareness, Eggers talks about the "need to wake up" (qtd. in Cooke 6) Americans' conscience. William and Richard Ayers insist that "the Voice of Witness series offers a break with the tendency in American culture toward narcissism and passivity" (6). [27] Much in the sense in which the Freedom Writers challenge their readers to never stand idly by, Eggers' and the Ayers's challenging wake-up call is centered on a sense

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[27] This statement about narcissism recalls and offers a meaningful answer to the contemptuous remarks that have been raised against writings based on self-disclosure. Because they enact Jameson's multiplication of the proper name, narcissism can no longer be invoked.

of personal responsibility. A personal responsibility that faced with such sensitive issues amounts to liability:

> Without that, what [these people] went through [...] could easily be forgotten. That's the worst crime of all—not only to have suffered, but that it never goes mentioned, it never gets reported, there's no record of it, and the perpetrators get away with it. It's the same reason the International Criminal Court exists and any number of human rights groups bear witness through storytelling and documentation: that such things go unaccounted for and maybe can be prevented from happening again. (Eggers qtd. in Sharrock 2)

Eggers's remark refers to the solid bridge that Régine Waintrater considers testimonies to construct—because of their advisory potential—across the gap between the group of those who know and that of those who do not know.

Lola Vollen describes, in comparable terms, the primary impulse that led her to co-found the series with Eggers as her "wish[...] [that] others could share the burden of knowing" (9). Indeed, it is during a health mission in Bosnia, after the ethnic cleansing in Srebrenica, that Vollen realized "the transformational power of first person accounts to convey the profoundly unsettling realities of life for today's victims of systemic injustice and abuse" (*transformation* 9). Vollen's personal understanding of the powerful transformation other individuals' story can bear upon us mirrors the organic invitation expressed through interviews: "my own theory on the origins of the transformational power of firsthand account is quite simple: just as we are wired for language, we are also wired to relate to the raw reality of others that we are exposed to in meaningful ways" (*transformation* 10).[28] The burden of knowing is in fact epitomized in the powerful bonds a shared experience of reality may weave. Though this may seem a heavy burden, there is apparent personal empowerment to be derived from this all. "There's inspiration that comes in knowing that these stories will make their way into the world" Eggers contends (*megaphone*).

The Voice of Witness agenda is also epitomized in the partnership, the chain of trust, the series is based upon. There is a heavy sense of responsibility and personal duty in the effort to offer accurate but also authentic narratives. The volumes are not "compendi[a] of misery, [but] [...] collection[s] of voices" (Eggers qtd. in Gidley 3). Real efforts are thus put

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[28] What Vollen calls being wired recalls Ricoeur's sense of human resemblance that can solely explain testimonial authentication as well as Benhabib's understanding of the social world as a web of narratives.

in conveying the narrators' "exact words" (Gidley 3). Eggers is positive on the important fact of having Voice of Witness volumes contrasted with the "authoritative, professorial textbook voice" (qtd. in Sharrock 2) usually found in academic or political nonfiction narratives. Oral history aims at giving a full voice to impoverished or traumatized communities. Indeed, the volumes can be considered as thresholds opening onto new (unofficial) public spheres that will trigger transparent discussions on issues of social justice. Though the point is always to denounce systemic malfunctions, solutions are never spelled out authoritatively. Much in the sense in which Voice of Witness seeks to propose documentation for education, training or advocacy, testimonials of social empowerment offer personal narratives as starting points for collective discussion, reflection, and, hopefully, action.

Outreach

The educational agenda of Voice of Witness is undeniably its most significant outreach. *The Power of the Story*, the textbook for teaching oral history by means of examples taken from the Voice of Witness volumes was first published in 2011; a second edition followed in 2013. The goals of the guide, as well as of the Voice of Witness Education program, "are to provide educators with the tools and resources for teaching oral histories from the Voice of Witness series in the classroom, and to provide step by step instructions for the creation of oral history projects with students" (4). Eggers is, indeed, convinced that "it's a uniquely powerful way to get kids interested in subjects that otherwise could be made very dry and boring and unpalatable" (qtd. in Sharrock 1). These stories allow for a greater level of empathy and "inspir[e] compassion, outrage, and a deep connection to what it is to be human" (4). Bringing oral history in the classroom triggers "a liberating experience" (4). Students are transformed by the power of the story and "empower[ed] […] with an inclusive and participatory vision of the world" (4).

From the different projects compiled in this research, the Voice of Witness education curricula are probably the most representative of the skills the term social empowerment refers to. The various theoretical sections developed hereafter on power, empowerment, justice as redistribution and recognition, or trauma and resilience all make plain the part of reality these volumes seek to unveil. Symptomatically, the present research demonstrates that these testimonials develop as rhetorical constructs based on instances of Habermas's communicative action and, as such, trigger an effective bond of empathy and responsible commitment. These communicative actions transposed on the social level all develop in persuasive speech acts woven into the open-ended discussion deliberative democracy is based

on. *The Power of the Story* is aimed at transporting these crucial concepts into the classroom: "An oral history classroom that fosters listening without judgment and with compassion creates an environment that is open-ended, question-based, and intensely democratic" (4).

In spite of its definite care for the committed citizenship of future American generations, the Voice of Witness series proposes a variety of other training programs and events meant on the one hand at publicizing their publications, and, on the other, at disseminating the transformational and empowering process of oral history. Indeed, oral history workshops are organized for social workers, volunteers and other individuals involved in the active evolution of their community as well as for disenfranchised groups or trauma victims. Through their numerous collaborations with associations and organizations, the Voice of Witness series also participate in the effort to inform the wider public on the already existing lines of action against the systemic injustices they seek to denounce. Just as any other project of testimonials of social empowerment, the efforts of Voice of Witness are all focused on social change and the creation of "a more empathic society" (*Power of the Story* 4). Much in the sense in which Derrida came to create an analogy between friendship and the equality justice is meant to stand for, testimonials of social empowerment praise solidarity and empathy between fellow human beings as the most reasonable possibility for a conjunct journey towards social change.

Narrative Presentation

The five volumes that were retained for the final corpus of this research are the ones that focus on American issues and were published before 2013. *Surviving Justice: America's Wrongfully Convicted and Exonerated*, first published in 2005, was the first volume of the series and the only one conjointly compiled and edited by Eggers and Vollen. *Voices from the Storm: The People of New Orleans on Hurricane Katrina and its Aftermath*, followed in 2006, Lola Vollen was here accompanied by Chris Ying in the editing process. *Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives*, first published in 2008, edited by Peter Orner, is, by far, the series' most successful volume. It is now running on its fifth reprint and has received most laudatory criticism. Both published in 2011, *Patriot Acts: Narratives of Post-9/11 Injustice* and *Inside this Place, not of It: Narratives from Women's Prison*, respectively edited by Alia Malek and Robin Levi and Ayelet Waldman, close this selection. Though close readings of some of the narratives will appear after the theoretical section of this research as a series of case studies, I will, here, briefly delineate, the common features of the editorial policy of Voice of Witness volumes in the presentation of the narrators and their narrative.

The overall structure is pretty much identical in all five volumes. *Voices from the Storm*, however, is somewhat of an exception. All four other volumes propose a foreword, in addition to the usual introduction by the editors, previous to the body of the first-person narratives *per se*. Symptomatically, the individuals selected to write the foreword through their social and literary achievements embody the specific systemic injustice the volume aims to denounce. Scott Turrow, a lawyer, fiction and non-fiction author, prefaces *Surviving Justice*. The Mexican American poet, novelist, essayist, Luis Alberto Urrea who served as a relief worker in Tijuana and is thus acutely aware of border issues provides a foreword to *Underground America*. Karen Korematsu, daughter to the now emblematic Fred Korematsu, offers her father's fierce struggle for civil rights at the time of Japanese internment camps as a foreword to the injustices disclosed in *Patriot Acts*. And, finally, Michelle Alexander, law professor and author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, prefaces *Inside this Place not of It*. This reliance on forewords written by emblematic figures is, of course, meant as a further support to the editors' and narrators' cause. As if to validate the social and literary legitimacy of the narratives, these forewords enhance the sense of authenticity the texts are meant to convey.[29]

All five volumes, on the other hand, propose profuse appendixes following the body of first-person narratives. Faithful to their mission, Voice of Witness editors remain committed to providing their readers with documentation that may help enhance teaching, training, and advocacy. These appendixes range anywhere from statistics, to maps, interviews, law transcripts, timeline of events relevant to the injustice at hand, descriptions of domestic policies and reading lists. Any material that can be considered useful in further documenting the issues denounced in the book is considered worthy of inclusion. The appendixes often contain glossaries that may help contextualize the narrators' stories.

Only the first three volumes, *Surviving Justice, Voices from the Storm* and *Underground America* provide short notes on the methodology that underlay the shaping of the narratives. The note in *Surviving Justice* tells of the birth of the first volume of the Voice of Witness series. The book was initiated in a Journalism class taught at University California, Berkeley by Vollen and Eggers. The students edited the primary interviews. *Voices from the*

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[29] Interestingly, the *Freedom Writers Diary* is prefaced by the students' mentor Zlata Filipovic. A parallel process of validation can indeed be emphasized in that specific case, most emphatically in the sense that Zlata was the one to pass on the torch of the power of the written word to the students.

Storm, on the other hand, was born from an open call Eggers and Vollen put out for stories from survivors of Hurricane Katrina. In both cases, the emphasis is laid on the fact that the editing process only affected length and grammar, not the meaning or context of the narrators' words. *Underground America*'s note on methodology is prefaced with an editor's note with a wider focus. Apart from similar concerns over the faithful transcription of the narrators' words, the editor mentions the sensitive issue of anonymity. Indeed, for this volume more than any other, concerns aimed at respecting the narrators' anonymity were raised, knowing that these men and women risked imprisonment and deportation. Thus, the editor insists that "in almost all cases, the names of the narrators and their families have been changed to protect their identities" (17). Some other volumes include similar concerns, but in these sporadic cases, editors' notes are mentioned as notes at the beginning of the specific narrative.

The presentation of narrators differs to some extent from one volume to the other. *Surviving Justice, Voices from the Storm,* and *Patriot Acts* compile artful drawings of the narrators as a form of introductory gesture. In *Patriot Acts* and *Surviving Justice,* the drawings are used as a sort of front page. The drawings precede personal information about the narrator—name, birth year, hometown, convicted of, sentence, served years, and release date for *Surviving Justice* (fig. 16-19) and name, age, occupation, and place of interview for *Patriot Acts* (fig. 20-23) *Voices from the Storm* is again the exception. Indeed, it is the sole volume that organizes the first-person narratives as a chronological sequel according to the development of events. The narrators are first presented separately and offer a description of their life previous to the storm. The following turn of events is developed day by day and presented as bits and pieces of the narratives of some of the narrators. The drawings are first included in the section Life Before the Storm (7-41) and reproduced in a list of the narrators where they are associated with autobiographical information (fig. 24). For obvious reasons linked to anonymity and incarceration policies, these drawings are absent from *Underground America* and *Inside This Place, Not of It.* The drawings, nonetheless, play an important role in all three volumes where they are included. Though Juliana Sloane primarily assimilates them to editorial policies linked to design and more importantly intimacy issues, they enhance the immediacy aimed at through the authenticity of the narrators' voices. Looking upon these artful sketches, readers deepen their feeling of empathy with *concrete*—in Benhabib's sense—individuals.

The five volumes will be the object of extensive case studies at the end of this research. I will propose close readings of some of the narratives in order to emphasize the specific reliance on the testimonial narrative threads of the aesthetic of impact and the ethics

of responsibility. These interpretations will also offer paradigmatic examples of the different construction of the four *ethe*[30] testimonials rely on.

I.1.2.4 Wally Lamb and the Women of York Correctional Institution: *Couldn't Keep it to Myself and I'll Fly Away.*

These two volumes could be considered as in-between cases. While they can definitely not be fitted in the isolated category of testimonial collections, they fail to display all the features that can be characteristically assigned to operative projects. These two works, nevertheless, serve as proper inaugural encounters with this contemporary renewal of the testimonial genre. Respectively published in 2003 and 2007, *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* and *I'll Fly Away* present collected testimonial pieces of writing from women imprisoned in York Correctional Institution in Niantic, Connecticut (Connecticut's only maximum-security prison for women).[31] Though the two volumes might not qualify as fitting in operative projects because of their lack of a proper mission statement or communication platform testifying to ongoing activities, the texts they collect nevertheless testify to a critical, politically clear-sighted approach as regards the wider public's education about life behind bars and the efforts of disenfranchised subjects grappling with the criminal justice system. Because of their production within the frame of the prison's writing workshop, these narratives also testify to the literary craftsmanship testimonials of social empowerment may present. Moreover, their generic diversity offers interesting insights into the issues pertaining to testimony as an overarching meta-genre. The cover of the first volume represents a collage-like feminine figure (fig.1). This cover artwork fittingly illustrates the logic in which the texts' presented in both "anthologies" (CKITM, xiii) are organized. The volumes offer a mosaic picture of what testimonials of social empowerment refer to: a collage of individuals speaking in their authentic voices.

Production Context

Author Wally Lamb, in his introduction to *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* describes the birth of the writing workshops—the source from which both volumes were to spring up—through his

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[30] I will use this specific Greek plural for the term *ethos*. This plural is common in Francophone theory and is also the form that appears in Aristotle's *Rhetorics*.

[31] For the sake of concision in references, *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* will be hereafter referred to as CKITM and *I'll Fly Away* as IFA.

own testimony. Starting with personal memories linked to his childhood and younger life, Lamb explains his fondness for teaching, that "calling" which led him to "[find] special meaning in working with hard nuts, tough cookies and hurtin' buckaroos, [...] the walking wounded" (2). This meaningful reconstruction of the past as nursing future developments in the narrators' lives is typical of testimonials of social empowerment. The project started in 1999 when Lamb was contacted by York school librarian Marge Cohen. The institution was faced with "an epidemic of despair" (2) as several inmates had committed or attempted suicide. Lamb, in his introduction to *I'll Fly Away,* links this epidemic with Governor John G. Rowland's "campaign promise that convicted felons in *his* state would know they were serving time in prison, not vacationing at Club Med" (4; emphasis in the original). The effort of seeking help in facing this dreary situation led the Institution school staff to think about writing as a coping tool. Marge Cohen first approached Lamb, who, at the time, was readying for a book-tour in support of his second novel, in the hope that he would come and speak to the inmates about writing.

In highly personal and vivid terms, Lamb describes his first encounter with the inmates. After an "Orwellian entrance" (CKITM 4), Lamb meets with Dale Griffith, the English teacher who served as a liaison for the session. Having arranged the chairs of the room in a circle, Lamb and Griffith are ready to greet the inmates:

> Dressed identically in cranberry T-shirts and pocketless jeans, the women came in all colors, shapes, sizes and degrees of gender identification. Their attitudes ranged from hangdog to Queen of Sheba. Most had shown up not to write but to check out "that guy who was on Oprah." (CKITM 4)

From his first encounter with the inmates, as he writes in *I'll Fly Away,* Lamb realized the power of immediacy of a real-life experience: "it's one thing to read about the injustice of the American system; it's another to walk the grounds of an American prison" (4). Symptomatically, the first thing Lamb notices "[is] the predominance of black, brown, and cinnamon-colored skin" (4).

This had meant to be a one-shot session: Lamb was supposed to talk about writing, about his own experience with crafting fiction. As he describes, the reality of the encounter, however, produced an unexpected sequel:

> At the end of my talk, one of the women stood, thanked me for coming and pitched me a curveball. "You coming back?" she asked. Thirty pairs of wary eyes were upon me and my index card was back in my office. "Uh, well ... okay," I said. "Write

something and I'll see you in two weeks. Any subject, two pages minimum. Your drafts will be your tickets into the workshop". [32] (CKITM 4)

Lamb, then, describes his painful conquest of the inmates' trust as the sessions passed by. His all-too-real awareness about the inmates' skin colors upon his arrival was matched, he mentions, by the inmates' own noticing of *his* skin color and gender and the ensuing suspicion (IFA 4). These women—most of whom suffered different types of abuse at the hands of men while on the outside—have difficulties in offering blind trust to a white male. Lamb insists on the deeply sensitive aspect of the writing and disclosure processes that resulted from the workshop format. He mentions the "personal victories" of the "brave writers" who "have exchanged powerlessness for the power that comes with self-awareness" (5).

Lamb testifies to the close emotional bonds that eventually transformed the group into a sort of family. And it is from that "assemblage [...] simultaneously fractured and united, chaotic and ordered" (13) that the first volume was finally born. The previous quote corresponds to Lamb's personal depiction of the artwork that served as the book cover. It is in answering to Lamb's remark that "if we ever turned your stories into a book, [...] this would be the perfect cover" (13) that Griffith first mentioned the possibility of collecting the workshop members' pieces of writing into a 'book'. Lamb mentions in an interview that, when a book was first mentioned, it was imagined to be "a desktop-published, stapled-in-the-middle, photocopied pamphlet of a thing" (SeniorNet). The first intent was, then, for Lamb to "edit and finance the printing of a modest collection" (13). Lamb carries on with a vivid depiction of the inmates choosing the collection's title. In another reference to a seemingly inconsistent yet fateful episode, Lamb mentions a gospel he had heard during his first ride to Niantic. *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* was, thus, retained as the collection's title. Lamb finally explains that it is during a lunch with his publisher, Judith Regan, that the eventual decision for publishing the volume was made, all on the publisher's demand.

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[32] Lamb, at the beginning of his introduction, explains how he managed to counter his inability to say 'no' to countless time-consuming demands by using a scripted refusal he wrote on an index card taped to his phone. The card comes back as a recurring symbolic motif throughout his text, explaining how, ironically, the absence of the card actually made the creation of the workshop possible.

An Unexpected Consequence

In his introduction to *I'll Fly Away*, Lamb discloses the unexpected repercussions of the publication of *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* on the contributors' lives. As explicitly mentioned in the book, the inmates had been careful in complying with the 'Son of Sam' law and statute respectively enacted in 1977 and 1992 so as to avoid for the profits of the volume to be considered as profits made from a crime—a status that would have rendered this income accessible to the convicts' victims. The women's intention was to equally share the profits with Interval House of Hartford, a shelter for battered women in Connecticut. However, the week before the book's publication "Connecticut's attorney general Richard Blumenthal, at the behest of the Department of Correction, sued the inmate writers—not for the modest earnings [a total of 5,600 $ each] they would receive after they left prison, but for the entire cost of their imprisonment" (IFA 5). At a charge of 117$ per day, the final bills reached unbelievable amounts (up to 917,000 $).

In spite of his feeling of being faced with a battle that was already lost, Lamb decided to fight back, notably in nominating one of the contributors for the PEN/Newman's Own First Amendment Award. The Award is aimed for writers whose works stand out as safeguards for the right to self-expression and freedom of speech. Barbara Parsons Lane, whose testimony is presented in the case studies section, was awarded the price along with its 25,000$ reward. Far from raising the prosecutor's attention to the rehabilitative nature of both the workshop and publication, this led Blumenthal and Commissioner Armstrong to suspend the writing program, investigate Lamb's status as a volunteer and reassign Dale Griffith. Even worse, the women's computer disks were confiscated and their work eventually erased from the school computers (IFA 6-7). This desperate turn of events was finally defused thanks to the investigation carried out by CBS's *Sixty Minutes* and the ensuing broadcast: "when they aimed their cameras at Attorney General Blumenthal, he suddenly, if belatedly, understood the rehabilitative value of the women's writing and announced the reinstatement of the program and the settlement of the lawsuit" (7). Ninety percent of the women's testimonies that had been erased from the disks were also recovered.

This bitter controversy at the hands of the criminal justice system finally led to a rather positive outcome. The unpremeditated advertising and coverage in different media led *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* to an unexpected fame, which had its impact on schools and academic curricula: "[the book] has become required reading for middle school and high school students, sociology and psychology majors, and law enforcement officers," (IFA 8) Lamb remarks. The book has also been translated (Lamb mentions responses from the

Netherlands) and performances have been sourced from its content (in the Netherlands and in the U.S.). [33]

Most significant is the feeling of achievement expressed through Lamb's prose in his introduction to the second volume. If the introduction to *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* mentions the inmates' "personal victories" (5) over despair, post-traumatic stress disorder emanating from abuses and crimes, drug-addiction, gang-membership or mental illnesses, *I'll Fly Away* testifies to their community victories. Lamb writes:

> My former students—the *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* contributors who have served their times and been freed—are thriving. One, a recovering alcoholic who entered prison after a DUI fatality, now speaks to high school groups alongside members of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. She is in the tenth year of her sobriety. Another has become an advocate for the homeless at Fellowship Place, a New Haven-based organization that services the mentally ill. A third is a hotel chef. A fourth is a property manager for Goodwill of Austin, Texas. Barbara Parsons works at a plant nursery and cares for the elderly. Shy by nature, Parsons has become an articulate public speaker and an advocate for the victims of domestic violence and the rights of incarcerated women. (9)

I'll Fly Away, thus, on an interesting double understanding of the title, contains the words from these "imprisoned sisters" but more significantly carries the echoes of the voices of those who flew away and are now standing on their own two feet in further addressing the issues they already fought against in disclosing their personal histories.

About the Mission

Though the writing program that gave birth to these two volumes, cannot, for obvious reasons, boast similar communication means as the ones displayed in the other projects, their mission is nonetheless expressed in the narrators' stories and powerfully relayed by Lamb and the freed contributors in book tours, readings, questions and answers as well as radio and TV

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[33] The most notable example is *Time In*, an interpretation of the inmates' narratives in word, song and dance by the Judy Dworin Performance Ensemble. Since the beginning of the collaboration between the Ensemble and the women incarcerated at York, an art program was also created so as to tighten the bonds between the inmates and their children. For more information on *What I Want to Tell You: Children of the Incarcerated*, see http://www.judydworin.org/programming/bridging-boundaries/.

interviews. In an interview with SeniorNet, Lamb explains that as soon as a book was mentioned, the inmates were enthusiastic "about the possibility that something positive, something educational, might result from their hard work." In answering questions about what readers should 'look for' in the book and about the title for the first volume Lamb argues:

> I only ask that readers listen to the writers' voices with an open mind and a generous heart. If they do, I think the reward is that they'll come out of the experience with a deeper understanding of some very complex issues. [...] Hopefully, the title implies the necessity and the triumph of not only writing but of sharing too. These writers told some very painful truths. That they went public with them—first within our group and later to thousands of nameless, faceless strangers—is a testament to their trust in themselves and others and to their generosity. They truly want to be of service by helping others better understand. (SeniorNet)

His description of the inmates' deep wish to "be of service" in helping the larger audience understanding complex issues correlated with the criminal justice system as well as life behind bars echoes similar instances of self-disclosure that were aimed at furthering the achievements of social movements.

The concept of voice is, indeed, especially symbolic. Testimonials of social empowerment, in their aesthetic weaving of personal narratives, deeply rely on the narrators' construction of sincere and authentic rhetorical figures (*ethe*) that most symptomatically embody the voices of these narrators as individuals standing on their two feet in the real world. Voice, in testimonials, represents not only a specific rhetoric trope, which is meant to secure authenticity in backing up the narrators' sincerity, it is also the triggering factor for empowerment. Lamb, in his discussion of the inmates' efforts in finding their "writer's voice," (CKITM 7) testifies to this crucial interweaving of the technical and compelling nature of the witnesses' voice. Lamb quotes Donald Murray in defining what a writer's voice should stand for: "a writer's voice is forged from family background, ethnic heritage, childhood neighborhood, present neighborhood, and the writer's role in life[—][a]nd ironically [...] the more personal, the more individual you become, the more universally you will be read'" (CKITM 8). It is the universality of human experience that resonates in the individual voice testimonial narrators manage to convey.

In testimonials, individuality is similarly understood as the key to universality. The individual voices of contributors unite in describing the experience of universal injustices and the necessary fight that must be won against these injustices. Lamb explains how this fight can actually be *embodied* in the contributors' voices: "to imprison a woman is to remove her

voice from the world, but many female inmates have been silenced by life long before the transport van carries them from the courthouse to the correctional facility" (CKITM 9). In an emotionally climactic formula, Lamb explains that the essays published in the anthology are "victories against voicelessness" (CKTIM 9). This very idea applies to all volumes of testimonials. They all consist of collections of collective victories against the voicelessness the experience of injustice is most often associated with.

Testimonials of social empowerment share some of their most significant characteristics with social movements. The use of self-disclosure as a means for consciousness-raising has been a recurrent feature of the history of social activism in the fight against social injustices (from slave narratives to consciousness-raising, feminist groups and Latin-American *testimonios*). Activism is, indeed, part of the primary project in the publishing of volumes of testimonials. *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* and *I'll Fly Away* display these same activist features, which form the narratives' ethics of responsibility. Lamb indeed explains that even if the contributors do not directly address their crimes, the purpose of the personal stories they tell is to point up systemic malfunctions in the American criminal justice system and in American society at large. The women inmates seek to address numerous "complex issues" (Lamb) in debunking the 'us vs. them' understanding of incarcerated as opposed to free people. Most inmates, in their prose, address issues of living conditions when incarcerated, insisting on traumatic or humiliating episodes—most of them describe strip searches or the investigation and occasional confiscation of their mail. Parsons Lane describes having to attend her son's funerary wake in shackles during her second year of incarceration; Bonnie Foreshaw speaks about racism and discrimination, notably the ban on wearing skirts (a demand she had made out of religious beliefs). Both volumes aim at raising awareness about the realities of prison life as opposed to its prejudiced misconceptions.

Lamb calls himself "the accidental activist" (IFA 10). Though he insists that he does not campaign for the early release of the workshop members, his work with the women inmates led him to question "a justice system that's racist and biased against the poor" (SeniorNet). "We have called into existence the prisons we wanted[;] I am less and less convinced they are the prisons we need," (CKITM 17) he says. The volumes' mission is thus to question the criminal justice system and the inhumanity of the prisons it created. Lamb compellingly summarizes possible answers to the issues raised by contributors in what could be a telling mission statement:

I think we should [...] reinstate rehabilitation as a primary objective of imprisonment and rethink the pendulum's swing toward a more punitive model, [...] invest more in

alternative-to-incarceration programs which are less costly and which reduce recidivism, [...] reckon with the reality that addiction is a disease and respond accordingly and [...] stop using our prisons as dumping grounds for the mentally ill. That's just for starters! (SeniorNet)

The most significant answer to the inmates' mission is the fact that "the women's essays triggered [...] initiative[s]" (Lamb IFA 8). SeniorNet members, who as from the moment of their interview with Lamb inquired about what they could possibly do to become involved in the inmates' lives and fight against social injustices, have been collecting and shipping books to American prison libraries. And, more importantly, Blumenthal eventually and rather ironically managed, with the help of key legislators, to have the state of Connecticut ban the possibility of suing inmates for the cost of their incarceration in response to rehabilitative work.

Narrative Presentation
The testimonials collected in *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* are presented as a series of personal narratives disclosing episodes from the lives of the women inmates. These episodes range anywhere from childhood experiences (whether disclosing enlightening or dismal developments) to moments of their incarceration and memories from their grappling with the criminal justice system. These essays adopt formats ranging from linear narratives to diary entries and multi generic structures interweaving pieces of narrative with poetry, song-writing, even drawings. The book is divided into sections, each one reserved to one specific contributor. Though the format of the pieces in *I'll Fly Away* is similar to that of the first volume, this second publication differs from the first in the length and number of the contributions it collects. This arrangement significantly explains the absence of multi-generic pieces. If the first volume gathers the voices of ten inmates and thus features longer pieces of their writing, the second comprises the narratives and poems of almost the double number of contributors and thus features shorter texts. Moreover, the contributors' pieces in *I'll Fly Away* are organized in sections based on the type of content the narrators disclose—'When I was a child...', 'Gifts My Family Gave Me', 'Broken Dolls and Marionette', 'Crime and Punishment', 'I'll Fly Away'. This format, because of the shortness of the texts, makes it possible to present several pieces from one same contributor in different sections. Those multiple entries somehow cancel out the necessity for multi-generic writing. If the narrators in *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*, because they were assigned a personal section, had to propose an

essay displaying their manifold literary skills all at once, the content sections in *I'll Fly Away* allowed contributors to propose prose in one and poetry in another.

Lamb describes the volumes as anthologies of essays he associates with the genre of the memoir. In his interview with SeniorNet on *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*, he indeed explains that he considers autobiographies to correspond to entire lives whereas "memoir[s] offer[…] vivid slice(s) of life". If, according to Lamb, autobiographies focus rather on facts, people or places, memoirs explore the "emotional terrain"— "the more objective external, as opposed to the more subjective internal". The essays gathered in both volumes are indeed slices of life, pieces taken from the lives of concrete individuals which, when put together, create a mosaic image of the figure of the generalized other (in Seyla Benhabib's sense of the term)—in this case, the other who stays behind bars. These slices of life, though vividly authentic in both cases, differ in their treatment of individuality and the generalized image of the other depending on the volume's arrangement. *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*, because it presents the narratives as chapters associated with one identified inmate, allows for a greater linearity in the audience's reconstruction of the narrators' past and present predicaments. The reader is then free to create parallels between these individual lives. *I'll Fly Away* also proposes slices of life attributed to individual narrators. But because of their organization in bundles associated with themes, and because contributors were allowed to propose pieces in all five sections, these incident-focused scraps urge readers to reconstruct by themselves the fragmented image of the inmates' individuality. Faced with the parallel presentation of these lives, readers are invited to focus on the different voices speaking of similar events. In both cases, however, the texts focus on the emotional terrain on which the life narratives unfolded, on the subjective internal stories of women behind bars.

The testimonials that emanate from York's writing workshop are in-between cases in a number of different respects. Precisely because the narratives emanate from women attending a writing workshop, their literary craftsmanship *appears* enhanced as opposed to the texts collected in some other volumes. Compared to narratives taken from Voice of Witness collections, for example, (some of) the narrators' contributions sound less spontaneously oral and more deliberately constructed in regards to what Lamb calls "dramatic scene[ry]" (SenioNet). Lamb considers dramatic scenes to be made of "characters, dialogue, descriptions, action and reaction [as well as] interior monologue" (SeniorNet). He encouraged inmates to use these different narrative features in their effort at disclosure, the point being to have readers experience the inmates' stories through their five senses.

Interestingly, narratives from collections that involve witnesses who are less trained in using such literary techniques are not deprived of detailed realistic descriptions, complex characterization, lively dialogues or compelling monologues approaching the beauty of modernistic stream of consciousness. The difference lies rather in the care and time that was devoted in *exposing*, rather than *naturally using*, these techniques. Lamb in his introduction to *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* spends time describing, with telling examples, the sometimes painful, editorial process through which the women who contributed to the volumes had to go for their pieces to be satisfactory for publication. Though exposing the contributors' literary craft is definitely not the primary purpose of both *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* and *I'll Fly Away*, it remains a definite underlying feature of these volumes (most notably expressed by the PEN/Newman's Own First Amendment Award won by Parsons Lane).

Both *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* and *I'll Fly Away* are presented as volumes mixing literary genres. In this respect, they can also be considered as particularized instances of testimonials of social empowerment. This feature, again, stems from their anchorage in writing workshops. The women, during the workshops, are obviously not confined to writing prose or narratives. As a consequence, the volumes propose beautiful examples of poetry along with diary writing, letters, essays, memoir and even autobiography—Diane Bartholomew's eventual project, unfortunately left unfinished because of her death due to cancer—and even autobiographical fiction: Michele Jessamy writes her own history in describing the experience of young Mo'Shay Shambly in the third person singular. This mosaic-like ensemble of literary genres even boasts a multimedia format. *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* presents the example of Tabatha Rowley who in *Hair Chronicles* craftily connects her drawing and song-writing with her memoir-writing-like prose (see further down). Brenda Medina, whose testimony is featured in the case study section, also proposes examples of her poetry as a frame to her prose about her life in prison. Though this mixing of genres is not totally absent from other volumes (e.g. *The Freedom Writers' Diary*), it is nonetheless a signature feature of the volumes from York Correctional Institution.

Finally, the two volumes are heterogeneous also in so far because of the rich and complex content authors seek to disclose. Because these women are incarcerated in a maximum-security facility, their questioning of the issue of injustice might sound surprising. As opposed to Voice of Witness volume *Surviving Justice*, which is aimed at denouncing major malfunctions in the criminal justice system by disclosing the experience of people who were wrongfully convicted, the stories compiled in *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* and *I'll Fly Away* emanate from women who were convicted for crimes they actually committed. The

question that may be raised then is to know whether these women do indeed have an injustice to testify against.

Living conditions behind bars is their first object of complaint. A number of the inmates' stories contain episodes about dehumanizing detention conditions that are not only rough but sometimes also overtly unfair. The women depict careless corrections officers, some of them even temperamental in their daily dealing with the inmates. All contributors depict the dreary, sometimes squalid, environment of the buildings on the institution premises. They speak of the insults, oral or other, and damaging preconceptions they have to face from the Institution and criminal justice system members. Psychiatrist Chanley Martin, in describing her first day in Niantic, explains that, because these women are considered "criminals [or] predators on society," because they "don't care about anyone else but themselves [and are] borderline women pushing the system and everyone in it to get what they want" she thought she might do better to " make a real difference just somewhere else" (22). Martin quickly revised these preconceptions because of her attending a performance during which the inmates shared their personal history. Similarly, Dale Griffith explains how labels often disparagingly stigmatize our differentiation of "bad girls" from the good ones (CKITM 335). Griffith states that statistics explain that "[o]ur future inmate has attention deficit disorder, or she is 'socially and emotionally maladjusted', or she exhibits 'at risk' behavior" (CKITM 344). Inappropriate preconceptions or sheer ignorance of psychological and social facts lead people on the outside of prison facilities to forget that inmates were human beings previous to their conviction and still are when locked out of the everyday world.

Indeed, the injustice that the inmates first and foremost testify to is the fact that society, as a whole, forgets about their belonging to the human race the moment they enter the criminal justice system through the door labeled 'defendant.' In identifying the inmates to the generalized figure of the dysfunctional, anomic other as a criminal behind bars, people forget that they were and still are individuals, with a concrete history and a family. Bonnie Foreshaw accordingly states that "people reading this book [should] bear in mind that we are human beings first, inmates second" (CKITM 209). The hope is that the audience's point of view can be effectively balanced between their vision of inmates as the generically frightening other and as the concrete reassuringly close individual.

Still, systemic and therefore deeply rooted social injustices pervade the inmates' testimonies as well. It is indeed important, in order to consider the inmates as the women they are, to take into account the way in which they address violence, racism, poverty, etc. as

important factors in their personal histories. Chanley Martin, in her account of the inmates' performance, insists on how their life experiences help not only understanding these women but more essentially relating to them: "They were I and I was them, just luckier … flesh and blood, feeling and thinking, honest and kind, regretful and strong. They were I and I was them, just luckier, so much luckier" (24). Statistics are, here, regrettably a trustworthy basis in listing the social obstacles these women experienced prior to their incarceration. The website Correction.com proposes a summary of the most important results of statistics on women offenders.[34] Results published by the 2006 Bureau of Justice Statistics reveal that women inmates had a higher rate of mental illness than men, 73 versus 55%. Among these mentally ill inmates, eight out of ten report physical or sexual abuse. Among the general population, six out of ten women report having been sexually or physically abused and 69% declare the assault occurred before they were 18. 73% of inmates report family violence and 40% declare they were using drugs. Addiction, domestic violence, sexual or physical abuse whether during childhood or later in life are but few examples of the injustices these women inmates may have experienced. In addition to these factors, poor education, poor economic backgrounds as well as racial discrimination are of definite importance as well. In 2010, Black women were incarcerated 3 times and Latina 1.6 times the rate of white women.[35] Lamb's first description of the members of the workshop as an artful brownish monochrome appears, then, even more telling.

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

If this section proposed a detailed presentation of the corpus, it did not offer a direct contact with the witnesses' narratives except for a few very brief examples. The narrators' texts will recur in the following sections in two different ways. Because of its position as the cornerstone of the corpus for this research, I propose to use the *Freedom Writers' Diary* as a guiding motif. Notably, epigraphic quotations from the diary entries will be used in order to introduce the theoretical section of the present research. Additionally, four of the narratives of *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* will be discussed at length in the case studies presented in section III. Each narrative will stand as a representative of one of the paradigmatic testimonial *ethe*. In structuring the case study section according to the four paradigms, I will propose a review

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[34] http://www.corrections.com/news/article/30166-statistics-on-women-offenders

[35] Figures taken from the Sentencing Project Fact Sheet,

http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc_Incarcerated_Women_Factsheet_Sep2 4sp.pdf

of a number of the possible applications these *ethe* templates can adopt. To that end, the examples taken from *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* will be compared with narratives from each of the five volumes of the Voice of Witness series.

II. Theoretical Frame

During the last two or three decades, due to the impact of postcolonial theory and of related social movements, the notion of *empowerment* has come to generate an ever-increasing interest. The term empowerment itself dates from the seventeenth century legal field, yet it appeared to conquer its modern recognition in the 1980s. Nicolas Denham Lincoln in his article "The Meaning of Empowerment" informs on the primary instances of the term: "the first recorded use of the word 'empower' and its derivations was in the seventeenth century by Hamon L'Estrange in his book *The Reign of King Charles*. This first usage was synonymous with the idea of authorizing or licensing" (272). Denham Lincoln mentions that this usage remains the current legal one. Though its first meaning was wholly juridical and authoritative, denoting the action of investing someone with authority, empowerment rapidly evolved in the general sense of enabling or permitting. Denham Lincoln references the coining of this specific definition in Milton's *Padarise Lost* in 1667; where the term means "to impart or bestow power to an end or for a purpose; to enable; to permit" (272). This definition is nowadays considered obsolete as informed by the OED. Since this notion was "concerned with the acquisition or withdrawal of power" (Lygo-Baker *et al.* 4), its appeal to social movements appears indubitable. The term was (re)appropriated in several fields of social studies, and seems nowadays to be inescapable whenever researchers or activists approach notions of social or individual struggle for gaining control over one's environment. Though the most extensive literature on empowerment seems to appear in psychological disciplines, whether individual or community psychology, this concept is also of current and frequent use in disciplines as varied as sociology, anthropology, social work, urban development, and corporate or human resources management. Empowerment is, arguably, derived from two primary sources. Wendy James, on the one hand, identifies "postcolonial left-wing community politics" (16) inspired by Paulo Freire's pedagogy. On the other, she informs on the political democratic necessity of "taking power away from the state and returning it to the people" (16). As such, empowerment "has [currently] become the term-of-choice to identify any group which [...] suffers a lack of power to influence the course of events to its own advantage or to move some group or organization toward some new level of power" (Kinlaw 1). This has led some scholars to consider the term as overused, even to some extent abused.[36]

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[36] See Levin and Swift for a discussion of the inaccuracy of the definition of the term and its use as "catchword among social activists" (77) as early as 1987.

It seems utopian to provide a comprehensive and unambiguous definition of such a broad-encompassing term, even though some of its features appear to be widely agreed upon in the different disciplines concerned. Empowerment seems to be universally considered as a process including a minimal time-span rather than a fixed state or status.[37] It can be approached either from the aspect of that ongoing process or from the aspect of the outcomes achieved through that process. There is also widespread agreement about the fact that empowerment implies both an individual and a collective notion of participation. However, it is when coming to the actual referent of such participation that definitions differ. Rather than proposing a long series of diverging, even to some extremes conflicting definitions borrowed from several disciplines, I propose to follow a general definition as a structuring support for the description of the social and psychological issues empowerment crystallizes.

Ellen Hawley McWhirter in "Empowerment in counseling" proposes a four-step delineation of the process of empowerment.[38] In spite of its sweepingly general scope, her definition has evidently been influential in later critical articles and offers a convenient overarching structure for a theoretical approach of the concept.[39] Moreover, since she deals with the specific practice of counseling, McWhirter interestingly tackles both psychological and social implications of empowerment. She contends that empowerment always needs to link the plane of the individual to that of the community. Asserting that empowerment necessarily needs to be differentiated from the sole notions of autonomy and efficacy, she considers that the process affects individuals primarily, then moves on to the community level through the enhancing of group identity and finally to the level of society as a whole by means of community participation. Her definition runs as follows:

> Empowerment is the process by which people, organizations, or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and (d) support the empowerment of others in their community (224).

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[37] If this is undeniably true for psychology (Rappaport, Zimmerman, Levin and Swift, Chamberlin), however, one can find the same kind of observation in sociology (Ferguson qting Yuval-Davis) and corporate management (Kinlaw).

[38] She also insists on the necessity of considering empowerment as a process and not a "one-time step" (227).

[39] See Rowlands.

McWhirter insists that the process is both "cognitive and behavioral" (223): powerless individuals need to first *decipher* the power dynamics before thinking about (re)acting. The first cognitive step allows the powerless to understand that their current plight, in which they are "unable to direct the course of [their lives],"(McWhirter, 224) is due to situation-bound social conditions resulting from specific power dynamics. As a reaction against the tendency by which others—or even themselves—tend to blame the victim, individuals realize that the problem lies in the structural features of the system itself.[40] They can consequently take the logical following behavioral step; that is seeking solutions that may be implemented through their actions.

This four-step process is at the very heart of testimonials of social empowerment and offers an elementary definition of the dynamics at work behind these projects' purposive use of self-narratives. Though McWhirter's definition seems a very convenient working instrument, it remains to be further elaborated. An accurate situational—that is spatiotemporal and social—delineation of each occurrence of the empowerment process would admittedly appear as the best possible way of faithfully presenting its actual scope. In the following pages, I propose to take under consideration some structural social features borrowed from sociology, psychology and philosophy, which allow a more accurate approach of the empowerment process, directly relevant to testimonials in the context of contemporary American culture.

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[40] For more information about this tendency to blame victims, see the discussion on resilience and coping in section II.2.2.1

II. 1 Becoming Aware of the Power Dynamics at Work in the Life Context

> "Look at us now, the sure-to-drop-out kids are sure to reach higher education. No one would have thought of the 'bad-asses' as high school graduates. [...] But we did even though the educational system desperately tried to hold us down. By labeling us at an early age, they were almost able to affect our school record for life. It wasn't until someone realized that 'tracking' is wrong that the stereotyped 'at risk' urban high school kids were given their chance. [...] We managed to make it past the superficial labels [...]. Not only did we make it past all these small obstacles, but also through a wide range of triumphs and tragedies."
>
> — Diary 142, *The Freedom Writers' Diary*

The process of empowerment implies a primary gesture which demands on the part of the individuals involved a cognitive assessment of the power dynamics at work in their everyday social environment. As a cognitive endeavor, this entails psychological achievements such as coming to grips with notions of domination and justice. At some level, this appraisal may require an unexpected unlearning of internalized assumptions or "positive misconceptions" (Dalbert 107) serving the situation of powerlessness. Since those individuals deal with power dynamics in their social environment, an approach of power structures from a sociological point of view seems not only recommended but necessary.

In this section, the basic opposition between the notions of *power over* and *power to* is first briefly exposed. I, then, move on to a discussion of Anthony Giddens's definition of social power in his theory of structuration. Giddens's theory presents an interesting approach to social structure in the sense that it inherently contains a possibility for future progress. Giddens's liberal model of the motivational and transformative nature of social power shows how social change can be based on primarily individual motives, which are later adopted by communities. Though Giddens is conscious of the possible domineering application social power may adopt in social structure, his model secures significant room for empowerment in the concept of the dialectic of control.

The most obvious expression of the, often alienating, social *power over* is noticeable in the hierarchy of institutions and their normative aspect, which is itself most meaningfully represented through the concept of justice. My next focus in this section is a discussion of the fundamental relationship between the notion of justice and the concepts of liberty and equality. A model I develop through Rawlsian founding egalitarian liberalism. Rawls's egalitarian model nevertheless remains too narrow in proposing the redistribution of resources as the sole scope for justice. I thus propose to enlarge this primary frame in developing Axel Honneth's model of justice as a strive for recognition and to further complete it with Nancy

Fraser's notion of representation. However, an approach solely based on a description of what social justice should be would fail in relevantly describing the situation or experience of witnesses *per se*. I thus finish this section on a reference to Emmanuel Renault's concept of 'experience of injustice' so as to describe the meaningful importance of situational and emotional elements in the subject's understanding of injustice. Renault overtly considers the experience of injustice as a meaningful basis for social criticism and normative transformation to be implemented. His frame of injustice stands as a convenient theoretical description of testimonials' way of structuring their social critical goal.

II.1.1 *Power over* and *Power to*

Approaching empowerment necessarily demands to understand the notion of power. Power, throughout history, has stirred the never-ending interest of social sciences like anthropology, sociology, philosophy, or psychology. More recently, it has also spectacularly gained the interest of literary and cultural studies. Jo Rowlands, in "Empowerment Examined," insists on the fact that the notion of power engaged many debates across disciplines and time. These debates led scholars to either define power as force or to list the various kinds of power at work "serving distinct purposes and having different effects in or on society" (101). Bemoaning the fact that such frameworks offer a "neutral" (101) understanding of power, Rowlands contends that "they make no mention of how power is *actually* distributed within a society" (101; emphasis in original) and seem to conventionally equate power with obedience or *power over*.

Angus Stewart in his introduction to *Theories of Power and Domination* seems to agree with Rowland. Stewart, quoting Bourdieu on his identification of the "symbolic force of dominant discourse," (1) argues that dominant conventional discourses in political and social theory have seemingly always been equating power and domination. Yet, he rapidly comes to mention that recent sociological debates seem to conceptualize power otherwise, emphasizing its enabling nature. Stewart identifies what he calls a "widespread disenchantment with both the forms and the possibilities of politics" (1) at the beginning of the twenty-first century as responsible for such a diametrical shift of interest. Stewart explains that the perception of pandemic corruption in public life and the proliferation of cultural minorities and of political agendas have led to consider notions such as "human empowerment […] understood as the enhancement of autonomy and solidarity" (1) as a universal interest. Stewart invokes the historical opposition between modernist ideas of justice and the political and the postmodern era, embodied in Lyotard's proposition to foreground "a justice of multiplicities" as opposed

to a discourse of power "obscuring differences and normalizing diversity" (3). Postmodernity advocates a "responsibility to otherness" which, when coupled to a "responsibility to act" (4), may lead to episodes in which *power to* or *empowerment* is emphasized.

Consequently, power can be first defined as dichotomized between two opposite forms, that of *power over*, i.e. an approximate equivalent of domination, and that of *power to*, i.e. an approximate equivalent of empowerment. Both of these display some general features, which are more or less universally recognized, all specific disciplinary or philosophical implications notwithstanding. Both Rowlands and Stewart consider the dominant approach of power as akin to that of *power over*: for Stewart "the strategic capacity to achieve goals" (6) and, for Rowlands, "the [extreme] availability of one person or group to get another person or group to do something against their will" (101). Either way, the strategic slant is of predominant concern: having power over implies having strategic capacities to implement or enforce it. Power is consequently presented as a relationship of the zero-sum type involving distinctions and inequalities in the agents' possibility for action: "the more power one has, the less the other has" (Rowlands 101).[41]

As Stewart contends, in the case of *power over*, "a politics of power necessarily becomes a politics of strategic success through appropriate resource mobilization" (6). From such a standpoint, empowerment as a process through which the rights of other agents also have to be respected seems precluded altogether. Contrary to this strategic, in the Habermasian sense, and rather pessimistic approach to power, the possibility of perceiving power as an enabling force seems to have currently gained an increasing interest. This *power to* which Rowlands considers as a generating capacity, is described by Stewart as "the expression of collective autonomy, conceived as the intersubjective generation of specific forms of solidarity" (6). *Power to* is then to be considered as a form of "action in concert" (Stewart 6)—what Habermas calls communicative action—and "is achieved by increasing one's ability to resist and challenge 'power over'" (Kelly qtd. in Rowlands 102).

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[41] Such a behavioral standpoint was developed by several anthropologists. Edmund Leach considers power as being part of "a luminal interface or contact zone between human beings" and Benedict Anderson theorizes power as an interaction between individuals "initiating a causal link between the behaviors of both [agents involved]" (qtd. in Overing and Rapport 338).

II.1.2 *Power over* as Entailing *Power to*

Becoming aware of the various power dynamics of a specific environment implies not only a descriptive but also a critical approach of the different *power over* and *power to* it encompasses. That is, it is only through critical analysis of the actual structures of *power over* that one may come to think of how actually *power to*—"the capacity to influence the forces which affect one's life space" (Pinderhughes qtd. in McWhirter 222)—whatever its extent, may be achieved. Once again, defining *power over* as a concept means untangling an impressive number of different conceptual positions which were formulated by scholars in several disciplines. Some of these are considered as dominant conceptualizations of power as domination. All of them recommend a social or sociological point of view, postulating that *power over* is a foundational characteristic of interaction with one's environment or one's fellows. The conceptualization of the production and reproduction of social structures seems then to be the core discipline for the analysis of *power over*.

Since sociology appears to be the most propitious methodological anchoring point, some names will necessarily come to mind such as Max Weber, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Antonio Gramsci, Steven Lukes, Talcott Parsons, Pierre Bourdieu or Michel Foucault. Being all part of what Angus Stewart calls the "dominant discourse" (1) in the discussion of *power over*, their theories, though differing in some basic ways, seem to postulate the inescapable equation of power with domination. Indeed, all these theoreticians consider power as some kind of ineluctable constraint over individuals' behaviors, be it through the use of actual physical coercion or implementation of normative sets of rules. Individuals are necessarily determined, and very likely alienated, by the power dynamics stemming from social structure, leaving very little—if any—place for resistance. Consequently, in a discussion of power that intrinsically takes into account the dichotomy of possibilities of *power over* and *power to*, such conceptual models need to be if not sidestepped, at least revised.

Admittedly, these theoreticians brought to light elementary conceptual assumptions about power that need to be re-appropriated by later researchers. This is especially true of Lukes, Parsons and Foucault. This re-appropriation has been, need it be said, oftentimes effective in the history of sociology and has sometimes even led to elaborations of models of power allowing some possibility of resistance towards domination, or rather the dominant social power structure.[42] Anthony Giddens, departing from earlier deterministic models, has

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[42] Foucault does indeed already mention resistance in his theory of power as domination.

been one of the most prominent advocates of a social theory focused on power as enabling: he indeed offers alternative conceptualizations of the role and importance of power within the production and reproduction of social structures.

Indeed, Giddens's model postulates a possibility for future evolution through an actual implementation of differing and/or resisting interpretation of norms inherent to any existing social structure. My main focus in this part is Giddens's liberal late modern theory of structuration and his meaningful implementation of a dialectic of power. I concur, here, with Stewart's assumption that liberal late modernity stands as proper grounds for a "general context of explanation" (2) of contemporary social structures. Stewart actually directly follows Giddens in his assumption "that the present epoch is defined by an identifiably distinctive configuration which represents a universalizing of modernity" (2). Despite post-modernist skepticism and a consistent theoretical urge to revise our dominant mode of social organization, the contemporary state in Habermasian terms "is [still] considered as a globalization of societal rationalization, both spatially and temporally, implicating struggles of redistribution and recognition centering on processes of communicative democracy" (Stewart 2).

II.1.2.1 Anthony Giddens' Sociology of Power

Several critics consider Anthony Giddens as some kind of an exception in mainstream sociology when it comes to his approach of the notion of social power. Indeed, Giddens proposes a positive and rather optimistic view of power. Where his predecessors and/or successors see power as repressive and authoritative, Giddens argues that it possesses a productive, enabling aspect. Power is first and foremost a characteristic of the individual subject. As an attribute of the agent, who enters in interaction with other agents, power permits to act in concert in order to *make a difference* with regard to a previously existing situation. Stewart goes so far as to argue that Giddens's theory "might potentially emphasize the relational even concerted character of social 'power to'" (14). Yet, Stewart adds, Giddens still describes social power as instances of *power over*. Social relationships entail dynamics of power between actors who will possibly bring in different resources to the relationship.

Though Giddens moves away from his predecessor's view, his basic tenet relies on Talcott Parsons's "action frame of reference" (Giddens, *New* 16).[43] According to Giddens,

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[43] My approach of Parsons' sociology is based on Giddens' own descriptions in *New Rules of Sociological Method* and *The Constitution of Society*.

"[t]here is no action, in Parsons's 'action frame of reference'" (Giddens, *New* 16; emphasis in the original). In spite of Parsons's prime wish to include a voluntaristic aspect in his theory of human capacity to act—as opposed to the influential Marxist view—"[t]he stage is set but the actors only perform according to scripts which have already been written out for them" (Giddens, *New* 16). This is precisely the paradox Ralph Waldo Emerson described as the opposition between the "power of circumstances and the power of me," (qtd. in Jackson xiii) and to which anthropologist such as Nigel Rapport came to propose the notion of existential power as an answer.[44] Parsons endeavors to foreground voluntarism as the possibility for subjects to be creative or innovative agents. Since he considers norms as the basic properties of collectivities, he also tries to reconcile this feature with the exigencies of moral consensus. Value is the key term for understanding the action frame of reference "because it is the basic concept linking the need-dispositions of personality (introjected values) and (via normative role-expectations on the level of social systems) cultural consensus" (Giddens, *New* 95).

Giddens sees four major failures in Parsons's model, which he seeks to amend. First, human agency is reduced to the "internalization of values" (Giddens, *New* 21)—values which are universally agreed upon and consequently inescapably determining. Second, Giddens considers that Parsons fails to recognize that social life is *"actively constituted* through the doings of its members" (Giddens, *New* 21; emphasis in original)—that is, he fails to take actual *inter-actions* into account. Third, Giddens rejects Parsons's treatment of power as a secondary feature of social activity and social theory. Power should instead appear as a core feature for the management of resources and outcomes. Finally, Giddens emphatically emphasizes Parsons's "failure to make conceptually central the *negotiated* character of norms" (Giddens *New* 21). Indeed, since Giddens sees power as an intrinsic feature of human creative agency, it seems necessary to re-center the previously introduced action frame of reference from its structurally deterministic peripheral position on the individual.

Drawing on Parsons, Giddens sees action as the core of the (re)production of social structure. He considers that "[t]ransformation is both the condition of social existence and a driving force of cultural development" (Giddens, *New* 15) and accordingly proposes a conceptualization in which power and action are closely intertwined in a transformative endeavor. He explains:

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[44] Rapport's purpose is to delineate "the existential power of individuals to create personally meaningful and viable environments and to traverse these in the pursuit of their own life projects" (1).

> To be able to 'act otherwise' means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs. This presumes that to be an agent is to be able to display [...] a range of causal powers including that of influencing those deployed by others. Action depends upon the capability of the individual to 'make a difference' to a preexisting state of affairs or course of events. (*Constitution* 14)

Action necessarily involves power in the sense of a *transformative capacity* on the part of the subject. Subjects, through action, bring out a transformation (even a slight one) to their direct environment or to the direct course of events. As such, they set power(s) (whether their own or others') in motion.

Giddens, a disciple of interpretive sociologies, seeks to construe human conduct and actions, by granting primacy to meaning. Consequently, he considers actions as motivated, rationalized and reflexively monitored.[45] "If reasons refer to the grounds of action, motives refer to the wants which prompt it," (*Constitution* 6) he contends. Wants—the outcomes actors wish to achieve—are motivations and "refer to the potential for action rather than the mode in which action is chronically carried on by the agent" (*Constitution* 6). Motivations, intended actions, draw on power—"the capacity of the agent to mobilize resources to constitute means [for action]" (Giddens, *New* 110). Power is then the intent or will characterizing any kind of action: both the *expression of motivations* and the *actual capacity* to achieve desired or intended outcomes. For Giddens, power means motivation and capability: "[p]ower in the sense of the transformative capacity of human agency is the capability of the actor to intervene in a series of events so as to alter their course; as such it is the 'can' which mediates between intentions or wants and the actual realization of the outcomes sought after" (Giddens, *New* 111).

This *can*, Giddens mentions, may then seem as intrinsically positive and even (over)optimistic. Any human being is guided by this transformative capacity. It seems undeniable that such an approach to individual power is closer to empowerment than to domination and proves useful for this research's argument. Making a difference stands as the very motto of empowerment and is the avowed goal of testimonials. Interestingly, Giddens considers that when this capability to *make a difference* is denied or lost, the individual can no longer be considered an agent, that is they "can no longer exercise some sort of power" (*Constitution* 14). Mentioning denial obviously leads to a necessary shift from the individual

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[45] See Giddens *The Constitution of Society*, 'The Agent, Agency' (5 and ff.).

to the social or collective level, where the power dynamics of interactions are the central interest. Interactions have then to be understood as balances—most often asymmetries—of power, through which individual *cans* come in contact. Interactions, then, can amount to instances of cooperation, confrontation and sometimes complete silencing.

II.1.2.2 Power through Interactions

Giddens describes interactions as axiomatic—the founding element of social practices. They describe encounters between individuals, moments of co-presence which imply the gathering of two or more people in a same context—a physical environment displaying "social occasions" (*New* 104) more or less formalized and routinized. Interactions work, according to Giddens, according to three fundamental elements: they are constituted as meaningful, they are constituted as a moral order, and they are constituted as the operation of relations of power (*New* 104). Interactions, obviously, are direct products of the motivational model. Power as a constitutive feature of interactions is "the capability to secure outcomes where the realization of these outcomes depends upon the agency of others" (Giddens, *New* 111). Individuals pursuing the same goals or outcomes try to achieve them by joining their power through cooperation, collaboration, or in some cases domination.

Similarly, moral order—the normative feature of interactions—constitutes similar possibilities for collaboration. As opposed to Parsons, Giddens does not present norms as necessarily consensual. Norms are negotiated; they are open to various, divergent, sometimes conflicting interpretations. Collaboration—what interactions should actually stand for according to Giddens—thus, may not always be considered as some balanced or equal process. Divergent interpretations, just as the dependence upon others' agency, may lead to asymmetries in interactions. Power in its relational sense may be considered to some extent and in *specific situations* as domination, as strategically depending upon the agency of others and consequently exerting power over others.

This leads Giddens to make four assumptions about power as a feature of social structures. First, power is about capabilities. It exists not only when being exercised (though it is the only possibility to detect its presence), but it can be stored up for future uses. This markedly optimistic view allows creativity in human actions. Second, there is no logical link between power and conflict. "Power is not necessarily linked with conflict in the sense of either division of interest or active struggle, and power is not inherently oppressive [though it may display constraining properties]" (Giddens, *Constitution* 257). Third, interest and not power is directly linked to the implementation of conflict and/or solidarity. Power means

pursuing interests, but in some situations interests may fail to coincide. Yet, if power is part of every human (inter)action, division of interest is not. If it were the case, any possibility of collaboration or cooperation would be precluded altogether. Finally, interests are not "hypothetical 'states of nature,'" they cannot be considered as transcendent (*New* 111-112).

Consequently, "[t]he use of power in interaction can be understood in terms of *resources* or *facilities* which participants bring to and mobilize as elements of its production, thereby directing its course" (Giddens, *New* 112). Indeed, Giddens considers that power is not a resource in itself but rather that "[r]esources are media through which power is exercised, as a routine element of the instantiation of conduct in social reproduction" (Giddens, *Constitution* 16). More importantly because interactions—"conduct in social reproduction"— are constituted as meaningful, "what passes for social reality stands in immediate relation to the distribution of power; not only on the mundane levels of everyday interaction; but also on the level of global cultures and ideologies whose influence indeed may be felt in every corner of everyday social life itself" (*New* 113).

Giddens's view implies that in social systems, there are degrees of interdependence and negotiation which are always and everywhere relations of power. He argues:

> The use of power in interaction involves the application of facilities whereby participants are able to generate outcomes through affecting the conduct of others; the facilities are both drawn from an order of domination and at the same time, as they are applied, reproduce that order of domination. (*New* 122)

This process is what Giddens calls "the duality of structure in social interaction" (*New* 122). The reproduction of structures of domination is obtained through the implementation of two types of resources. Allocative resources, on the one hand, which he defines as "material resources involved in the generation of power, including the natural environment and physical artifacts; [...] derive[d] from human dominion over nature" (*Constitution* 373); and authoritative resources, on the other, to be understood as "non-material resources involved in the generation of power, deriving from the capability of harnessing the activities of human beings; result[ing] from the domination of some actors over others" (*Constitution* 373). These authoritative resources involve time-space organization, the organization of the relations of individuals in mutual association and finally the organization of what Giddens calls "life-chances" (*Constitution* 258) that is possibilities for self-development and self-expression.

Though Giddens presents modes of organization as authoritative resources, his conceptualization of social power is neither pessimistic nor characterized by confinement or determinism. Intriguingly, Giddens's structuration leaves a space, even a remote one, to the

possibility for masses or collectivities in situations of powerlessness to react actively and secure new life-chances. As he summarizes his own view on power, Giddens talks about the notion of control:

> Power is the means of getting things done and, as such, directly implied in human action. It is a mistake to treat power as inherently divisive, but there is no doubt that some of the most bitter conflicts in social life are accurately seen as 'power struggles'. Such struggles can be regarded as to do with efforts to subdivide resources which yield modalities of control in social systems. By 'control' I mean the capability that some actors, groups or types of actors have of influencing the circumstances of action of others. (*Constitution* 283)

Control is then the ability to mobilize the action of others when trying to achieve outcomes through the use of specific resources.

Yet, through his definitions of power and control, Giddens opens a wide space of possibilities for empowerment: "[p]ower is the capacity to achieve outcomes; whether or not these are connected to purely sectional interests[…]. (*Constitution* 257). It is not, as such, "an obstacle to freedom or emancipation but is their very medium" (*Constitution* 257). He explains that "actors in subordinate position are never wholly dependent and are often very adept at converting whatever resources they possess into some degree of control over the conditions of reproduction of the system" (Giddens qtd. in Stewart 17). Giddens adds that "there are normally continually shifting balances of resources altering the overall distribution of power" (qtd. in Stewart 17).

Because systems are produced through interactions as the negotiation of moral order which entails power asymmetries, they can also be transformed according to the same process. This specific process is what Giddens calls the dialectic of control:

> Power within social systems which enjoy some continuity over time and space presumes regularized relations of autonomy and dependence between actors or collectivities in contexts of social interaction. But all forms of dependence offer some resources whereby those who are subordinate can influence the activities of their superiors. This is what I call the dialectic of control in social systems. (*Constitution* 16)

Confinement or real determinism is then to banish from such a conceptualization, since, the dialectic of control is to be understood as "[t]he two-way character of the distributive aspect of power (power as control): how the less powerful manage resources in such a way as to exert control over the more powerful in established power relationships" (Giddens,

Constitution 374). Giddens adds that if this dialectic of control exists everywhere, the way in which it might be actually implemented—that is its actual outcomes—will be socially and historically determined.

The implementations of the dialectic of control, even in a restricted context such as that of contemporary American culture are manifold and difficult to describe comprehensively. I will venture to propose testimonials specific rhetoric and textual format as a possible answer. I, nevertheless, wish to make a quick reference to Michael Mann's social theory dealing with the sources of social power as it includes an interesting primary reconciliation between social structure and linguistic communication—the gap Habermas's theory finishes to bridge. Mann's understanding of "original" and "organizational sources of power" (I:4) as the structuring feature of society offers a convenient parallel with Giddens's view. It also concurs wit its optimist emancipatory implications, as Mann considers that all applications of his Ideological, Economic, Military and Political model intrinsically comprise a step "towards the emergence of rival, challenging power networks" (I:29). More significantly, Mann's model offers the convenient approach of society as inherently based on cooperation. If "organizationally outflanked" (I:7) social groups may question and eventually debunk asymmetries in social structure it is through cooperative endeavors. He contends that "[f]rom Aristotle to Marx, the claim has been made that 'man' (unfortunately, rarely woman as well) is a social animal, able to achieve goals, including mastery over nature, only by cooperation" (Mann I:5). Power is acquired or rather achieved through cooperation and allows larger transformations to take place, wider needs to be satisfied, bigger goals to be achieved—in short our human dynamic need to pursue a good life (Mann I:4). Social power is then to be understood as a complex system: authoritative, admittedly, but not inescapably alienating. Areas of resistance and possibilities for actual change exist and may be found and managed on the part of the powerless themselves.

II.1.3 Power and Norms: An Approach to The Notion(s) of (In)Justice

Power relationships, as we saw, are a constitutive feature of our interactions and of social structure. The transformative capacity of power that expresses in our individual drives can, as shown by Giddens's dialectic of control, help overpowered communities reverse a situation in which their lack of control becomes unendurable. The suffering induced by socially ill-balanced power relationships seems to have been a privileged theoretical issue in the

contemporary era.[46] Social suffering, the unendurable experience of overwhelming control has been the ground for spectacular social struggles throughout history. The demands that emanated from what Mann termed "organizationally outflanked" (I:7) communities ran anywhere from political representation to ideological or indeed physical recognition of their "life chances" (Giddens, *Constitution* 258). Twentieth century social movements led scholars to question issues of fairness and equality so as to oppose new theoretical constructions of justice with contemporary ill-balanced power relations inherent to the norms of social structure.

Justice—for it is indeed what has always been at stake—represents a social hyperonym encompassing reflections and decisions about fundamental notions such as liberty, right, equality and possibly universal human nature. Philosophers proposed the sub-category of social justice with the hope of approaching critically the question of the best possible society striving for equality of treatment and opportunity. John Rawls, with his *Theory of Social Justice,* was a pioneering figure in the development of the field. His theory of egalitarian liberalism proposed what has nowadays become a standard for the development of objective social justice based on egalitarian principles for the establishing of social institutions.

II.1.3.1 Justice as Egalitarian Liberalism: Equality and Liberties in Social Justice

Justice has been an all-time concern for philosophers, whether they were trying to determine the structure of the best possible world displaying an ideal of universal fairness or to critically assess the institutional righteousness of existing societies. This ubiquitous concern gave birth to several conceptualizations of the notion of justice. This predictably led to an increasing diversity in terminology. Hobbes in his *Leviathan* already differentiates commutative from distributive justice:

> Justice of actions is by writers divided into commutative and distributive: and the former they say consisteth in proportion arithmetical; the latter in proportion geometrical. Commutative, therefore, they place in the equality of value of the things contracted for; and distributive, in the distribution of equal benefit to men of equal merit. (92)

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[46] Some examples of this theoretical tendency would be found in the works of Bourdieu, Kleinman or Renault. More importantly, this area of social science is among the ones that have increasingly been relying on oral history and testimonies as raw sociological data.

Psychological theories, similarly, propose differentiated concerns about procedural and interactional justices. Hegtvedt, notably, defines procedural justice "in the terms of the fairness in the means by which distribution decisions are made" (46) and interactional justice as the fairness in the treatment of others. Whether scholars call it equality or fairness, justice pertains to individuals' right to be treated identically in all forms of interactions.

In *La Justice sociale: le liberalisme égalitaire de John Rawls* [Social Justice: John Rawls' Egalitarian Liberalism], Véronique Munoz-Dardé contends that justice is not necessary that aim to strive for an ideal of perfection. It should rather seek "to protect everyone from the imperfections of all, using what in each of us approaches cooperation" (9).[47] Munoz-Dardé, indeed, mainly draws on the philosophical school that gave birth to human rights. She considers that the idea of justice—that is, notions of liberty and equality—can be based on an abstract universality pertaining to common human characteristics. These common human characteristics need to be respected equally for each person. Striving for justice is then an attempt to restore "a sort of preexisting state of equality" (Munoz-Dardé 32). This is what Rawls calls the "initial position of equality," (10) the position from which the original agreement over the social contract can be rationally attained. In this hypothetical "initial status quo" (Rawls 11), since no social or natural advantage or disadvantage is involved, individuals may reach basic agreements that are fair and serve as a basis for further cooperation in their community life.

This instinctive and natural assumption makes possible the detection of injustices—i.e. instances of inequality. Quoting Dworkin, Munoz-Dardé argues that each contemporary theory of social justice presents a tendency towards equality—an "egalitarian plateau" (33) which ensures members of a society to be treated equally at least regarding specific issues. Echoing the question voiced by Amartya Sen in *Equality of what?* one might here consider liberties as the primary issue to be addressed when considering equality. Indeed, when describing Rawls's approach to justice, Munoz-Dardé insists on the fact that the main principles to be taken into account in this conceptualization should be the fundamental liberties which Rawls considers as "pertaining to the equality of citizens," (Munoz-Dardé 24) what he calls "justice as fairness" (10). As Rawls devises from his founding original position thought-experiment, the notion of liberty is then intrinsically entwined with that of justice, operating as the egalitarian plateau on which judicial institutions can base their equal

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[47] All quotes from Munoz-Dardé are in my translation.

treatment of citizens. Justice is then, following Ralwsian theory, an actual implementation of equality of treatment based on the respect of fundamental liberties.

Equality of treatment corresponds to Ralws's first principle of justice, which he devises as an "equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties" (13). This first principle is then coupled with a fair equality of opportunities, as Ralws explains that we all intuitively agree on the fact that any social structure implies a plurality of positions among which institutions favor some starting places over others. Indeed, Munoz-Dardé explains Rawls's distinction between liberty and the worth of liberty. Liberty represents the complete system of fundamental liberties and its worth "the capacity [for groups or individuals] to favor their outcomes in the structure defined by the system" (25). Structural or institutional *power over*, then, appears to be the limit to the worth of liberty. Rawls, indeed, contends that value varies according to structural criteria:

> It is the community as a whole which stands surety for society's […] structural effects. Society safeguards the fact that liberties present an actual worth in peoples' lives, and not only formal guarantee in legal acts. (qtd. in Munoz-Dardé 26)

Accordingly, Rawlsian theory bases the definition of social justice—the fair structuring of society—not only on the principle of egalitarianism but also on a libertarian distribution of costs and outcomes. Rawls argues, indeed, that "social and economic equalities, for example inequalities of wealth and authority are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone" (13). He explains:

> The intuitive idea is that since everyone's well-being depends upon a scheme of cooperation without which no one could have a satisfactory life, the division of advantages should be such as to draw forth the willing cooperation of everyone taking part in it, including those less well situated. (13)

This second consideration opened way for the main criticism suffered by Rawlsian theory. As Rawls explains, in his theoretical conception, "the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions *distribute* fundamental rights and duties and *determine the division* of advantages from social cooperation" (6; emphasis mine). Institutions such as the legal protection of freedom of though and liberty of conscience, competitive markets, private property in the means of production and the monogamous family (6) solely define individuals' rights and duties and influence their life prospect. Even though these institutions are hypothetically based on cooperatively agreed upon fair principles of justice, his conception remains significantly

material and individualized because centered on the agent's relative position in the structure. Indeed, Rawls tackles social justice from the sole point of view of Hobbes' distributive justice overstepping possible—in fact necessary— fundamental interactional implications.

II.1.3.2 Redistribution, Recognition and Representation

The Rawlsian distributive model of social justice, as groundbreaking as it might had been was, thus, rapidly confronted with harsh criticism. Fair social structure cannot not be solely characterized by legitimate authoritative decisions and a just distribution of resources and outcomes. History and political evolution showed how issues beyond distribution have always been at the heart of social struggle. Similarly, the normative environment of testimonials of social empowerment may not be subsumed under a just separation of outcomes and resources. All too often, these features reveal irrelevant in a consistent struggle over individuals' life chances. Faced with texts which cry out the hope of their authors to be finally heard as full-fledged social actors, the notions of recognition and representation appear inescapable.

Recognition is a necessary landmark because the witnesses through their writing are first and foremost constructing a citizen identity which, they hope, will become recognized by society as a whole. Representation is then the second requirement because, through their texts, the witnesses strenuously try to exert their deserved right to participate in democratic discourses, such as the negotiation of norms. I rely on Axel Honneth's model for recognition, as he is recognized as the philosopher who coined the contemporary re-appropriation of Hegel's 'struggles for recognition' in social justice. Honneth proposes a three-level typology specifying how relations of recognition are in fact constitutive of individuals' identities through their socialization. Individuals, thus, come to construct their identity through self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect. Unfortunately, Honneth remains rather vague on the political implications of justice for individuals, even if his model does include self-esteem as a hint to the individual's worth as a political being.

My belief is that testimonials of social empowerment can be paralleled to social movements. As such, I need to propose a definition of justice which includes the political in greater depth. Nancy Fraser, who had in her earlier work proposed to consider recognition as a second constitutive element of justice, indeed as important as distributive issues, later proposed to add a third level. She, herself, contends that she had failed, as Honneth did, to properly consider the political in her approach to recognition.[48] She then came to propose the

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[48] See Nash and Bell and Dahl, Stoltz and Willig

notion of representation as the proper equivalent of the political in social justice. Justice is then to be understood as a three-cornered system including issues pertaining to distribution, recognition *and* representation. Accordingly, injustices can arise from any of those three dimensions and one can thus imagine in the lifeworld struggles for redistribution, recognition and representation; which according to Fraser, correspond to questions about the 'what', 'who' and 'how' of justice. The who and how of justice, Fraser so adamantly seeks to emphasize, can be addressed in the case of testimonials, I contend, through a meaningful reconstruction of their status as cultural equivalents to social movements. Philosopher Emmanuel Renault, indeed, developed a negative definition of social justice in this same sense. It is in analyzing the struggle of disempowered communities faced with the experience of injustice that the social critic will be able to properly address contemporary issues of recognition and representation.

II.1.3.2.1 Axel Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition*

In his two seminal works *The Struggle for Recognition* and *The I in We*, Honneth addresses the question of social justice through a prism of insightful theoretical resources from which he constructs a new framework for social recognition. Drawing on Hegel's notion of the struggle for recognition as a motor for social evolution, Honneth proposes G. H. Mead's theory of intersubjectivity as the basis for an improved approach to relations of recognition, which he considers constitutive not only of society as a whole but of individual subjectivity as well.

Honneth appears very conscious of his debt to Hegel's theory and consequently begins both volumes by chapters acknowledging his master's views. To cut a very long story short, Hegel's approach to the struggle for recognition could be summarized as follows:

> [It represents] a struggle among subjects for the mutual recognition of their identity generated inner-societal pressure toward the practical, political establishment of institutions that would guarantee freedom. It is individuals' claim to the intersubjective recognition of their identity that is built into social life from the very beginning as a moral tension, transcends the level of social progress institutionalized thus far, and so gradually leads—via the negative path of recurring stages of conflict—to a state of communicatively lived freedom. (Honneth, *Fragmented World* 5)

Both Hegel and Honneth are thus interested in the freedom of individuals. Freedom in organized communities necessarily concords with the "practical [and] political establishment of institutions" (Honneth, *Fragmented World* 17) which is meant to guarantee freedom, *i.e.* norms of justice.

Hegel contends that such an establishment is based on "the movement of recognition that forms the basis of an ethical relationship between subjects [which] consists in a process of alternating stages of both reconciliation and conflict" (Honneth *Fragmented World* 17). Recognition is a reciprocal communicative relationship between subjects: whenever the subject is recognized valuable because of their specific abilities or qualities by others, the subject simultaneously recognizes others as valuable in their judgmental ability. Such a relation moves through stages of conflict and reconciliation: recognizing a subject's abilities or qualities cannot go without 'discussing' those abilities or qualities and acknowledging them to be particular ones. By wishing to establish my own identity, I need the other to recognize me as particular, whenever the other recognizes one of the aspects of my identity I feel reconciled with them. Yet so as to make the other recognize the remaining aspects of my particular identity, I need to reenter a conflicting situation in which I persuade the other that those qualities can be deemed particular and as such worthy of recognition. Hegel believes that this dialectic movement leads individuals to finally accomplish the "situation of communicatively lived freedom" (Honneth, *Fragmented World* 5) in which every subject is recognized as a particular individual.

Once the theoretical bases for his recognitional model have been outlined, Honneth addresses contemporary approaches of social justice so as to pin down their flaws. In *The I in We*, Honneth describes "the fabric of justice" (35), *i.e.* the liberal-democratic model, which he considers to be currently limited by proceduralism. Honneth observes a misguided consensus presiding over what he calls the material component and the formal principle of justice. Indeed, both elements are derived "from the idea that principles of justice are the expression of a common desire to grant each other equal freedom of action" (37). It is not so much the idea of deriving justice from freedom of action he rejects, but rather the fact that contemporary approaches to the material component and formal principle draw on two very different definitions of liberty.

As regards the delineation of the material component, freedom embodies "a striving for the liberation of the individual from external impositions and personal dependencies" (37). That is, freedom is equated with autonomy, the modern ideal of which could be paraphrased as the unhindered pursuit of individually chosen aims. Honneth sees in this praise for autonomy the appearance of a new task for justice: "whereas it once primarily consisted in assigning each person his or her place in the social hierarchy and ensuring a corresponding livelihood, it now consists in granting all subjects equal space to pursue their individual preferences" (37). This new task for justice is at the core of what has been termed the

distribution paradigm: freedom can be achieved through autonomy only, and autonomy in turn can only be secured by offering individuals sufficient means (material resources) to achieve their purposes in life.

If the material component heavily relies on liberal autonomy, its constructive counterpart is based on an intersubjective approach to liberty. According to the formal principle of the distributive paradigm, principles of justice are the result of shared processes of will formation depending on intersubjective cooperation. Such a cooperative approach of the formation of principles of justice is expressed in the distribution paradigm by specific procedures: "the [...] authors construct an 'original position,' a social contract or similar situation of deliberation, in which hypothetical conditions of impartiality allow us to arrive at justified conclusions about distributional preferences" (38).[49] However, Honneth argues that these procedures must remain thought experiments.[50] Indeed, such a proceduralist approach would necessarily need to "unintentionally anticipate the normative results of the procedure by positing specific conditions of autonomy" (38). The paradigm's use of irreconcilable views of freedom thus reveals invalid as it fails to reconcile the position of, in this case, the we in I.

Honneth, then, turns to the necessity of replacing distribution by recognition in a proper framework for social justice. He advances that, as far as the distributional model is concerned, the material of justice must axiomatically consist in generally valued goods which will be distributed according to principles determined by a specific procedure. This presupposes a common interest in those goods which become means for the autonomous achievement of freely chosen life plans (40). But, for the possession of goods to be seen as a chance for liberty, one must have a conception of what is deemed worthy of pursuing. Subjects must have an idea of their dispositions or talents that are worthy of realization. None of these conditions are goods, they rather have to be acquired through interpersonal relationships. They have, in other words, to be recognized by others.

Subjects will indeed need specific goods to achieve their freely envisioned life career, but the question is to know whether those goods themselves can determine the subjects'

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[49] Though Honneth does not mention it overtly, he is here referring to the views of John Rawls for the original position, and notably John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau for the social contract.

[50] Ralws, indeed, heavily insists on the importance of considering his original position under the veil of ignorance to be fully imagined: "it is understood as a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a certain conception of justice" (11).

choice of a life career. Such a view is akin to asking whether goods can define how to ensure conditions of personal autonomy. Autonomy, Honneth contends, is defined as "as a certain type of individual relation-to-self that allows us to be confident of our needs and beliefs, and to value our own capacities" (41). Autonomy encompasses forms of self-respect. These may be articulated or represented with the help of goods "but they cannot be acquired and maintained through them" (41). Autonomy is necessarily intersubjectively achieved because our needs, beliefs and capacities have to be recognized by others. To this condition only, they are worth being realized. Honneth further argues that this autonomy is only possible if "we recognize those who recognize us" (41). We assess our value as an individual in the behavior of others. "Therefore, if individual autonomy is to emerge and flourish, reciprocal interpersonal recognition is required" (41), Honneth concludes. Subjects living in a community, by essence, need to fall into patterns of interaction which will influence and limit their possibility for autonomy. Consequently, the only possible way for a subject to be autonomous is to be recognized as such by the other members of society.[51]

In a wish to further emphasize the importance of recognition, Honneth foregrounds an agentive argument about the spheres of authority that have to be taken into account when defining social justice. Honneth, when he criticizes proceduralism, suggests that such a paradigm may end up in extreme patterns of government which, he thinks, fail to properly address the interweaving spheres in which the individual needs to manoeuvre so as to fully develop her individuality and autonomy. Indeed, Honneth argues that for the distribution paradigm to be implemented, the only acceptable authority to be entrusted with principles of distribution is the democratic state itself (*I in We* 39). Even though this idea stems from the commendable desire to avoid dictatorship, "[t]he obvious danger of focusing so strongly on the state is that everything outside the latter's legal jurisdiction would remain immune to demands of justice" (*I in We* 39).

Honneth is here hinting at the enquiries bearing on the separation of public and private matters in the public sphere. Indeed, if justice is now to be conceived of as pertaining to relations of recognition, it can no longer bear upon issues of citizenship only, which is unavoidable when granting unique authority to the state. "Alongside democratic legal community, in which we are obligated to respect each other as free and equal citizens, we are involved in multiple forms of familial and work relations [...] in which we apparently acquire

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[51] Honneth finds further support of this interaction-based procedure for achieving autonomy in G.H Mead's intersubjective theory for the formation of the subject's identity.

other facets of our self-respect," (*I in We* 43) he explains. Family offers the emotional groundwork for our self-confidence to be formed, and our working environment ensures (or should ensure) our capacity to view our skills as socially valuable. Both, Honneth contends, "make up core components of our capacity to live [...] autonomously" (44). Honneth, thus, devises a three cornered model which is meant to embrace the entire spectrum of reciprocal relations of recognition. In order to implement such a complex model, Honneth delineates three primary forms of disrespect or misrecognition which pertain to the alteration of a subject's practical relation to its identity. Those practical relations are neither beliefs, nor feelings. They rather "involve a dynamic process in which individuals come to experience themselves as having a certain status" (Anderson xii). Status can be threefold: the subject may be recognized as a focus of concern, a responsible agent, or a valued contributor to shared projects. This three-cornered concept corresponds to the three principles of justice to be foregrounded when founding social justice on relations of recognition.

The first, fundamental, form of disrespect pertains to the person's physical integrity. Those physically violent acts cause the degree of humiliation most likely to have the most destructive effect on the subject's identity. Honneth mentions the example of rape and torture which impact not only on the subject's confidence in its self, but also its trust in the world. In this view, the most fundamental type of practical relation to identity is termed *self-confidence*. Joel Anderson, Honneth's translator, argues: "[o]n Honneth's account, basic self-confidence has less to do with a high estimation of one's abilities than with the underlying capacity to express needs and desires without fear of being abandoned as a result" (xiii). Self-confidence, which is primarily acquired through relationships in infancy, allows the subject to trust in family bonds and later in its larger environment as capable of listening to and providing for its needs and desires.

Moving to a larger sphere, Honneth, then, mentions disrespect affecting the subject's normative understanding of its self. Being excluded from the possession of rights, the subject lacks the full-fledged status of partner in interaction and appears incapable of reaching moral judgments. Such a type of disrespect ends up in a loss of *self-respect*. In Honneth's view, self-respect corresponds to the subject's sense of possessing the universal dignity of a person: "[t]o have self-respect, then, is to have a sense of oneself as a person, that is, as a 'morally responsible' agent or, more precisely, as someone capable of participating in the sort of public deliberation that Habermas terms 'discursive will-formation'" (Anderson xv). Self-respect does not mean that the subject has a good or bad opinion of itself. It rather ensures identification with the large body of the generalized responsible citizen. The object of respect

covers the subject's capacity to raise and defend claims and his status as a responsible agent. This type of practical relation to identity corresponds to the one which was addressed through the paradigm of distribution. Rights are here to be considered as the 'disposable goods' to be equally distributed so as for the subject to be able to enact the capacities which are at the core of respect.

Finally, disrespect may take the form of attacking social values, denigrating lifestyles or downgrading patterns of self-realization. In this specific case, the subject is no longer able to associate positive values with its personal way of life. Such a negatively connoted practical relation to one's identity ends up in a loss of *self-esteem*. "Whereas self-respect is a matter of viewing oneself as entitled to the same status and treatment as every other person, self-esteem involves as sense of what it is that makes one special, unique, and [...] particular," (xvi) Anderson explains. [52] Honneth, following Mead here again, directly correlates those qualities with what allows the individuals to find their functional roles within a society (he directly correlates self-esteem and labour). Interestingly, those functional roles, in which individuals excel when they correspond to a high self-esteem, are meant to operate "not at the expense of others but precisely to the benefit of the whole" (Anderson xvi). Honneth thus locates esteem in the values of a particular culture.

All three forms of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem correspond to principles of justice to be implemented according to the sphere of justice at hand in a specific struggle for recognition. Honneth then appoints "justice of needs" to be implemented when dealing with the sphere of the family and the notion of self-confidence, "deliberative equality" to be administered when dealing with situations of normative injustices in which self-respect is denied, and finally "justice of achievements" to be reinforced when subjects feel harmed in their self-esteem (*I in We* 49). Honneth's tripartite conceptualization of recognition as a basis for social justice already hints at testimonials' textual formatting of content. It does not appear surprising that their aesthetic remains primarily based on their loss and later recovery of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect. Conversely, their ethics based on the delineation of a responsible model citizen encompasses the justice of needs and achievements while directly implementing deliberative equality.

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[52] This duality is directly echoed in Benhabib's concept of the "concrete" as opposed to the "generalized other". See II.3.1.2.

II.1.3.2.2 Nancy Fraser's Tri-Dimensional Frame

Honneth's model seems to leave distribution out of the map, though he agrees that a just distribution of goods has an undeniable impact on individuals' possibility to live 'without shame or anxiety'. Recognition is here postulated as the necessary overarching principle to be taken into account first and foremost whenever discussing principles of justice in societies. Though an ardent supporter of the recognition model of social justice, Nancy Fraser rapidly came to nuance in her own theoretical account the apparently necessary separation between distribution and recognition. Indeed, Honneth's model, as efficient and as remedial as it may appear, seems to suggest an essential disjunction between a view of social justice based on distribution and one based on recognition. As the recognition reworking of autonomy situates individual needs in a totally different sphere of existence, moving away from a just distribution of goods to the fairness of intersubjective relations, it suggests that questions of justice have to deal exclusively with dilemmas pertaining to disrespect, leaving the unjust repartition of resources inadequately answered. That is, by answering the overarching issue of recognition, resources should be redistributed accordingly.

Fraser then proposes to rework this apparently irreconcilable dissociation, which she considers to be the "dilemma" (*Dilemmas* 68) of justice in our current society. Her purpose is to develop a new critical theory of recognition, "one which identifies and defends only those versions of the cultural politics of difference that can be coherently combined with the social politics of equality" (*Dilemmas* 69). Though in her article, she proposes an analytical table separating the two theoretical trends of distribution and recognition, she insists that her purpose is to emphasize their necessary interdependence in lifeworld situations. She explains:

> Even the most material economic institutions have a constitutive, irreducible cultural dimension; they are shot through with significations and norms. Conversely, even the most discursive cultural practices have a constitutive, irreducible political-economic dimension; they are underpinned by material supports. (72)

She indeed contends that socioeconomic egalitarianism is based on the recognition of people's equal moral worth, and conversely, that multiculturalism (which she regards as an example of the recognition model) is grounded on an egalitarian distribution of primary goods.

According to Fraser, this somehow complex love-hate relationship between redistribution and recognition leads to important dilemmas in lifeworld situations. She argues that in the case of patterns of redistribution, the "remedies" (82) to injustices correspond to the abolition of socioeconomic differences underpinning group specificities, giving the

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example of Marx's exploited class. As opposed to this "group de-differentiation" (74), patterns of recognition enhance the putative specificity of one group (or individual) and consequently foreground group differentiation. This opposition ends up in an apparently irreconcilable dilemma for groups needing to address issues of both unfair distribution and disrespect, as they would "need both to claim and to deny their specificity" (74). Such groups, which she terms "bivalent communities", "may suffer both socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition in forms where neither of these injustices is an indirect effect of the other, but where both are primary and co-original" (78). Consequently, they need abolish their group difference while at the same time accord to it a positive cultural recognition. Now, Fraser's delineation of this dilemma appears highly elaborate and indeed totally appropriate to current situations, even more so as she mentions gender and race as examples of those "dilemmatic modes of collectivity" (81). Communities presented in testimonials correspond to paradigmatic forms of these collectivities.

Unfortunately, the answer she wishes to bring to this intricate question appears far less convincing. She opposes transformative and affirmative modes of remedy. The affirmative modes are the ones society proposed up to now as regards the different struggles for redistribution and recognition. They are respectively the liberal welfare state and multiculturalism. And the transformative ones, on the other hand, would correspond to deconstruction in the case of recognition and socialism for redistribution. Fraser quickly concludes with the current impossibility to implement the transformative model she encouraged at first. As she herself argues, it seems that those transformative views are too avant-gardist and far-fetched to fit our current societies, even if this may irritate supporters of postmodernism and post-structuralism.

Indeed, as the recognition model appears to be the one which is nowadays primarily used to address social injustice (whether on the national or international scene), proposing solutions pertaining to the complete restructuring of notions of communities would be considered an even greater type of injustice, and would probably be paralleled to examples of misrecognition such as cultural domination which renders another community alien and invisible in the worst form of disrespect.[53] Those complications notwithstanding, Fraser's view offers the advantage of insisting on the necessity for theories of justice to realize that both recognition and redistribution need to be pursued simultaneously in lifeworld situations.

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[53] Honneth considers that Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* represents invisibility as the possibly worst form of social disrespect in contemporary societies. See Honneth, *Recognition*.
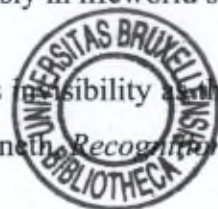
Similarly, Fraser's *Scales of Justice* introduces a third dimension in her framework for justice. She remains convinced that dilemmas overarching the separation of the redistribution and recognition models kept addressing the same question; namely, that of the "what of justice" (15). The distribution and recognition models kept addressing the material component of justice, to revert to Honneth's terminology. Consequently, by adding a third dimension to her previously two-dimensional framework, Fraser hopes to address the questions of the 'who' and 'how' of justice.

According to her, justice in its most general meaning is equivalent to the notion of *parity of participation:* "overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction" (16). Accordingly, in the first two paradigms, maldistribution means impeding participation by granting unequal access to resources and misrecognition means impeding participation because of an unequal cultural status. To those flaws in the economic structure and the cultural hierarchy, Fraser adds a political dimension dealing with the "scope of the state's jurisdiction and the decision rules by which it structures contestation" (17). The political dimension, in short, represents the "stage" (17) on which struggles for redistribution and recognition are performed. As such, "it tells us who is included in, and who excluded from, the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition" (17). Fraser calls this political dimension "representation" (17) and considers that it encompasses the two different issues of membership (who?) and procedure (how?). For, to be able to perform a struggle on that stage, one must be part of the "community of those entitled to make justice claims" (17) *and* be aware of and experienced with "the procedures that structure public processes of contestation" (17). In the case of representation, then, two types of injustices may appear, which Fraser both gathers under the term misrepresentation.

Misrepresentation in its broadest sense assembles situations in which "political boundaries and/or decision rules function wrongly to deny some people the possibility of participating on a par with others in social interaction—including, but not only in political arenas" (18).[54] Misrepresentation thus can express in "ordinary-political misrepresentation" (19) situations which wrongly deny some members of society the chance to participate and in 'misframing': "[h]ere the injustice arises when the community's boundaries are drawn in such

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[54] Indeed, and interestingly enough, the stage of justice can be understood at different levels of an individual's socialization. In an echo to Honneth's three levels of the family, labour and citizenry, the stage of justice can easily be applied to the smaller and larger spheres of life.

a way as to strongly exclude some people from the chance to participate at all in its unauthorized contests over justice" (19).[55] Misframing can thus be understood as a meta-injustice, in which people undergo a political death and become non-persons with respect to justice.

Fraser's theoretical view of justice thus entails a tri-dimensional approach. She understands justice as encompassing multiple dimensions and rejects any ontological monism for matters of justice. Depending on the situation, struggle against injustice will try to counter maldistribution or what can be termed class inequities, misrecognition or status hierarchy, and/or misrepresentation or political voicelessness. Interestingly, Fraser argues that as dimensions of justice are disclosed through social struggles, her framework should remain an open-ended one as future claims might uncover new dimensions. Such an encompassing framework can easily be applied to testimonials. As the texts address a wide number of unfair situations pertaining to social justice, offering a multidimensional open-ended conceptualization can easily assemble situationally separated circumstances. It seems necessary to insist, beyond this multiplicity of issues to be addressed, on the importance of recognition for the witnesses. The very concept of being voiceless lies at the core of testimonies in their political aspect but also very much in their recognition implications, as Fraser acknowledges. What the witnesses are experiencing firsthand in their unjust predicament is social, that is interpersonal, misrecognition undercutting their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect.

In the cases of testimonials of social empowerment, it seems therefore essential to propose a dialogical framework for social justice which not only foregrounds the multidimensional aspect of the social implications of injustice but also its psychological and personal dimensions. Again, a dialectic movement between the social and the individual acts as a direct echo to the notion of empowerment itself. As misrecognition most often entails misrepresentation, injustice, in the case of testimonials, affects the witnesses' personal relationship to their selves in a highly distressful loss of self-consideration and their larger social status as agents of the political which underlies their crippled ability to enact their rightful transformative agentive power.

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[55] Fraser considers the "politics of framing" (19) to concern the notion of setting the boundaries for the political. If the XXth century relied solely on the Westphalian state grammar of frame setting, Fraser now contends that an abreast theory of justice must reshuffle this grammar so as to evolve into a post-westphalian globalizing frame.

II.1.3.2.3 Emmanuel Renault's Clinique de l'Injustice

In his seminal work, *L'Expérience de l'injustice* [The Experience of Injustice], French philosopher Emmanuel Renault directly questions the social and individual implications of injustice implied in the dialogical approach of empowerment. Renault is a disciple of Honneth's and as such a follower of the Frankfurt School. Following his predecessors, Renault wishes to devise a critical theory focusing on the practical consequences of institutions and social arrangements. In focusing on the concept of experience, Renault hopes to address injustice more directly. His theory, in fact, circumvents usual abstract definitions of the best possible just world. Renault identifies as a follower of both Fraser and Honneth in their delineation of what Honneth has termed social "pathologies" (*Fragmented World* xxii).

Renault's purpose is to analyze social situations in which norms do not satisfy the normative expectations of members of a society (34), which consequently puts them in situations of both misrecognition and misrepresentation (to which maldistribution may be coupled). Those types of dissatisfaction serving as symptoms for the physicians of social justice to detect, the purpose is, metaphorically speaking, to devise a clinic of injustice. Pushing the metaphor to its limit, the idea is for critical theory to describe injustices guided by the behavior of the individuals who experience it on a daily basis. Critical theory, in such a view, is consequently based on the assessment the dominated and the voiceless make of their societal environment.

As human perception depends on status and position, it seems to go without saying that people experiencing injustice are the ablest to delineate the whys and wherefores of their predicament (as opposed to the standpoint of the external observer). Testimonials of social empowerment are then a goldmine for such a critical social project. By voicing in their personal narratives their experience of specific instances of social injustice, the narrators seek to express the suffering induced by their frustrated life expectations so as to turn them into transformative claims and actions. First, their texts aim to re-evaluate their negative feelings in a struggle for their personal recognition—the individual aspect of empowerment. Likewise, they subsequently voice and implement the transformative potential of their experience on a collective basis—the social aspect of empowerment. This collective effort corresponds to (re)appropriating the mastery of representation. In this case, representation is to be understood in both its symbolic and political senses. Narrators seek to faithfully represent their personality and experience through their narratives, which demands the mastery of specific literary and cultural skills. But they also seek to demonstrate the necessary competences for political representation in bringing their issues public on the political stage. Moreover,

Renault adds that only "a multiplication of private languages can attest to all the aspects of our moral experiences," (101) asserting himself the necessary balance between private and public matters.[56]

Ressenti, Vécu, Expérience: Justice, Politics and Action

The situations in which the normative expectations of citizens are not satisfied represent *experiences of injustice* in the sense that they both encompass a feeling of injustice which expresses the dissatisfaction of normative expectations *and* practical claims and behavioral tendencies.[57] Renault defines the experience of injustice as "a concept [...] [which] designates injustice undergone as *a practical and normative transformative action guided by a feeling*" (35; emphasis mine). The experience of injustice is thus one of the many expressions of individual *power to*, in Giddens's terms. Renault insists, however, on the emotional implications of his own concept. In his view, there cannot be any action without the grounding feeling of normative dissatisfaction. This grounding feeling is presented as a particularly negative experience, sometimes entailing what Renault terms social suffering, which *can lead* to a possible action against the conditions of this experience.

The hint here is to foreground the difficult path which leads from the "*vécu*" *of* injustice to the *actual struggle against* injustice. Renault, indeed, insists on the important difference, which his French terminology conveniently articulates, between the *vécu* and the *expérience* of injustice. The *expérience* covers both *vécu* and *sentiment*, and it is *expérience* only that can be turned into the necessary transformative action a struggle against injustice will induce.[58] It is only when the feeling at the core of the experience of injustice is turned

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[56] All quotes from Renault's volumes are in my translation.

[57] Renault makes an interesting distinction between injustice and misfortune: whereas misfortunes comprise hardships naturally or ecologically induced, injustice proceeds from hardships for which others or society are to be held responsible. Renault also insists that such a distinction might be blurred because of the feelings induced by the very experience of injustice itself and must as such be necessarily kept in mind when dealing with the claims of victims. Interestingly enough, in the case of *Voices from the Storm*, such a distinction is re-evaluated in a new light, as it is the very happening of an ecological misfortune, hurricane Katrina, which uncovered institutional injustices.

[58] The struggle against injustice calls for a reworking of the principles of justice, which according to Renault would correspond to either an *extension* or a complete *transformation* of

into action that the struggle may be engaged "so as for the voice of the dominated to be fully heard" (42). My endorsement of Renault's theory is primarily based on this meaningful interweaving. Testimonials, because of their emotional and factual nature, stand as the best possible communicative format for *vécu* and *sentiment* to be fully conveyed to the narrators' audience. *Sentiment* is obviously expressed through the aesthetic weaving of the texts, while *vécu*—and its meaningful evolution into a transformative *expérience*—corresponds to the narratives' ethical message.

Renault establishes a meaningful distinction between matters of political and moral interest. If both of them are based on practical or agentive premises, moral concepts influence direct action and judgments while political concepts, such as justice, liberty or equality concern transformations in the lifeworld. The concept of justice is meaningful *because* its purpose is to eradicate unjust situations. Such a standpoint demands that justice be contextualized not only in the sense of the normative expectations which principles of justice expose *but also* in regard to the normative and practical dynamics appearing when those expectations remain unsatisfied. Political matters differ from morality in the sense that they represent a form of *agency* (encompassing speech and physical acts) *specifically directed at transforming the lifeworld*—Giddens's action frame of social power in which the individual can make a difference. Political action rests on three important premises. First, it is based on the rejection of situations of social disparities. Second, it develops a struggle against social groups interested in maintaining those situations. Third, it aims at a more egalitarian situation. Renault is convinced that to politically tackle matters of justice, the experience of injustice is the only answer. So as to defend this standpoint, he devises three main characteristics for the experience of injustice.

First, the experience of injustice is a matter of quality or evaluation (*qualitative*). As it entails a feeling of dissatisfaction, the experience of injustice appears indeed as an evaluative experience of the quality of principles of justice and as such remains a qualitative demand. Yet, as I previously demonstrated with Honneth's and Fraser's critique, contemporary conceptions of justice dwell on a quantitative level, as theoreticians consider questions of injustice to pertain to questions of fair redistribution. To answer to such an apparent dilemma,

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those principles. Renault's reflections on a twofold framework of remedies to injustice echo Fraser's own dichotomy between affirmative and transformative remedies, yet Renault's analysis of those remedies, like Fraser's, remains rather embryonic and would need further development to be fully endorsed.

Renault proposes two possible approaches to the feeling of injustice. The latter can first be appraised as comparative behavior.[59] In such a case, opposing the evaluative and distributive aspects is no longer necessary: both aspects coincide. But injustices may as well be understood as situations which are morally unacceptable, in which case the qualitative aspect will undeniably dominate. Such morally evaluative situations, whether they are endured by external witnesses in the form of indignation or by the victims themselves, are the ones on which depend political practical dynamics, and are thus the focus of Renault's theory.

Second, the experience of injustice is environmentally determined (*referential*). The experience of injustice is a specific experience correlated to a specific situation. For victims of injustice to issue the demand of a transformation, the relation existing between the injustice and its social situation has to be properly underlined, even if general principles of justice do come into play. This is a concern that some scholars of *testimonio*, mainly Kimberly Nance and John Beverley, have expressed as well. Referencing adopts an even more meaningful aspect in the case of testimonies. Mistakes in the description of the physical and/or historical environment may lead to exposing frauds and discrediting altogether the claim for justice.

Third, the experience of injustice is *affective*. As Renault mentions in his definition, the experience is based on a sentiment and the practical dynamic initiating the struggle against an unjust situation. However, he insists that his interest in emotions does not mean that politics should be reduced to the momentum of individual feelings. Individual feelings, alone, can neither define injustices nor delineate struggles against them. Though a rational definition of justice remains unavoidable, the analysis of the experience of injustice allows the evaluative assessment of struggles against injustice.[60] The very function of such a critical

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[59] This is a widely shared point of view in research on the psychological appraisal of the notion of justice. Karen Hegdvedt, in her seminal article "Justice Frameworks," argues that the perception of injustice is always a subjective evaluation based on the assessment of personal and situational features. These situational features correspond to Renault's concern with referencing. She adds that that evaluation is "the result of what individuals believe about the situation, the *comparisons* that they make, and their perception of situational information" (48; my emphasis). For further insight in this concept of comparison, see also Kellerhals.

[60] In voicing these assumptions, Renault's theory shows significant similarities with Iris Marion Young's inclusive understanding of the different forms of language that should constitute acceptable political discourse. Though she observes that contemporary deliberative

stance based on experience is to question the criteria of struggles "in the light of a specifically political normativity instead of looking for them in moral or legal principles" (48). Renault is convinced that Honneth's theory of recognition appears as the proper theoretical scaffolding for the correlation between those three criteria of the experience of injustice and political action to be fully exposed. Even though, experience is based on sentiments, it does not mean that those sentiments are deprived of normative implications. Recognition can stand as a proper representation of the motivations for political action.

Injustice and Misrecognition: Social Movements

Renault seeks to *complete* his mentor's denunciation of the imperfections pertaining to the current consensus on social justice. Honneth's model was in fact based on three points, though I focused on only two of them. Indeed, Honneth notices in current models of justice, in addition to their wrongful approach to the material component and the formal principle, a complete silencing of matters concerning social movements and their actual political representativeness. Still drawing on Hegel's views, Honneth considers social movements to be akin to "corporations" (*I in We* 45) which in his predecessor's terms are groups whose function is to establish and practically reinforce the moral principles of specific spheres of the social landscape. Honneth thus insists that "social justice is fought for and secured by many agents connected through network-like structures [...] on the terrain of civil society" (*I in We* 45).

Those social agents, Honneth calls pre-state organizations, among which one can find social movements and community caring organizations, are to be taken into account by whoever wishes to devise an exhaustive theory of social justice. Unfortunately, Honneth leaves it at that; settling for a general delineation of what those pre-state organizations represent, he seems to leave for others the task to further investigate their actual way of action. This is obviously where Renault complements his analysis by pointing out the connection between Honneth's theory of recognition and his own theory of the experience of injustice.

As he considers that the modern public space for institutionalized politics came to become fenced in [*clôturé*], Renault contends that victims suffering from injustice are facing a double impediment: the boxing in of their expressive possibilities and the silencing of the

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democracy relies on an ideal of reasonableness, Young contends that affectivity would deserve a better place in the political sphere. See II.4.1.

social disrespect characterizing their predicament. In a nutshell, the experience of social injustice is reinforced by the feeling that those subjected to it do not deserve to be politically considered (70). Victims are abandoned twice, by society and by the state. Renault thus suggests that contemporary theories of justice might, by privileging an interest in the state, themselves implement the same symbolic violence. In its practical implications, a theory of justice willing to reverse such a politics of invisibility must take social movements into account. As might have appeared obvious by now, my intent in following Renault's theory is to emphasize the procedural and organizational similarities between testimonials of social empowerment and social movements. If the testimonial format appears as a most convenient vehicle for the experience of injustice, Renault's description of social movements can help explain these editorial projects' political niche in contemporary culture.

Renault, indeed, considers social movements to be double instances of a "space of appeal" (71) in both the general and legal sense of the term. Social movements act as claims for answering social issues (call for help) and as pleas when classic institutions fail to consider previously made requests (legal appeal). Social movements thus have a sizeable role in the public sphere, as "[they] show the ability to impose on the public sphere issues that would have been kept silenced. Social movements rank among the only liable forces able to distort the logic of institutionalized politics by shattering the sphere's closure" (71). Consequently, such organizations act as effective conveyors of criticism against politics and injustice, as symbolic hyphens between issues of representation and recognition.

Renault defines social movements in opposition to mass or crowd movements [*mouvements de foule*] and political movements. As opposed to riots, and other chaotic mass movements, social movements are organized. The difference between political and social movements is located in their actions (which do not boil down to interventions in the political public space), their goals (institutional reforms and not political power) and their discourse, which justify particular goals and not an overall political project. Social movements can thus be defined as "a type of collective action characterized by a protesting demeanor, that is a contentious behavior targeting the overall organization of society or particular institutions" (90).[61]

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[61] Here, one discerns the link with the various levels of Honneth's model. Social movements can be targeted at specific institutions on levels other than politics or citizenry. One might think in this respect of the feminist movement targeting the position of women in the family, thus fusing public and private matters; or trade unions struggling for justice in the work place.

By focusing on the social community involved in the movement and the definition of justice implied in their demands, Renault proposes different types of social movements. Renault distinguishes among three ideal types of social movements based on specific social groups: social struggles [*les luttes sociales*], struggles for identity [*les luttes identitaires*], and struggles of the deprived [*les luttes des 'sans*]. Social struggles pertain to communities akin to social classes and often aim at the redistribution of resources. Struggles for identity, on the other hand, issue from communities organized around a common status. Such communities most often hope to promote recognition for their own identity or fight against negative identities.[62] Finally the struggles of the deprived are struggles that do not show specific social bases but seek their community's reintegration in stable and valorizing political and social relationships. Renault gives as examples the community of the homeless or jobless, as well as illegal immigrants.[63] Renault insists that they all share recognition as the normative component for their struggles which makes them different sides of one same social project: to restore intersubjective relations characterizing successful socialization (93)— Fraser's parity of participation.

Institutions of Injustice: types of misrecognition

If the very purpose of the struggle against injustice, whether undertaken by social movements or other organizations, is to restore the intersubjective relations of recognition which allow the individual to become successfully socialized, one must be able to identify types of possible misrecognition so as to respond to them accordingly. Renault places those types of misrecognition in what he terms "institutions" (183). The concept of institution in Renault's terminology comes to cover two different types of social apparatuses. On the one hand,

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[62] It is interesting to note that Renault creates a meaningful parallel between notions Fraser depicted as paradoxical. Where Renault proposes an apparent equality between identity and status, Fraser considers them to be complete opposites. Indeed, Fraser, when reformulating the paradigm of recognition, came to oppose the identity model to her own status framework. She contends that the identity paradigm pertains to group identities and might as such obscure internal struggles for recognition, which, in her view, the status paradigm would avoid. See Fraser's "Rethinking Recognition".

[63] French, in this case, offers more convenient use of the word '*sans*' [less] as a proper label for those struggles as those movements are *sans* [without a] social basis and pertain to the *sans-abris* [homeless], the *sans-emploi* [jobless] and the *sans-papiers* [undocumented].

institutions are the apparatus governing the coordination of social actions (Renault mentions the economic market as an example); and, on the other, they correspond to local apparatuses in which the coordination of action takes place in specific social spaces such as schools, families, companies or prisons. In the case of local institutions, the apparatus covers both techniques according to which actions are organized and principles justifying norms thus created. Institutions also vouch for a fair society, granting individuals' freedom of action and an equal pursuit of their life chances—our normative expectations.

Renault's institutions thus cover both public and private levels of social life and offer a broad framework in order to address the manifold issues of injustice which are at the heart of testimonials of social empowerment. Whether the narratives deal with domestic violence, imprisonment, unjust treatment of citizens based on racist prejudices, or gang affiliation, larger or more local apparatuses governing action necessarily come into the understanding of what is experienced as an instance of injustice. As I mentioned previously, it is the misrecognition of their agentive identity and their being deprived of proper representation that the narrators understand as unjust. Institutions at some point obscure the narrators' possibility to act meaningfully in relations of recognition or situations of representation.

According to Renault, the experience of injustice in institutions can spring from three different levels of misrecognition: a breach in principles which have been explicitly formulated, a breach in implicit principles of justice, situations in which both types of principles of justice are compatible with the situation of injustice (187). The two first levels seem to imply that injustices can be subsumed under the sole notion of contentious situations, yet, and this is where the third level turns out to be of the highest importance, the experience of injustice is more often than not conceived as an actual *prejudice*. In the case of the prejudice, the available normative discourses appear inadequate because both the justificatory principles and the rules of interaction they produce remain congruent with unbearable living conditions. Those third-level injustices are the ones Renault envisages as the most significant ones, the ones liable to lead to possible institutional transformation (189).

As institutions regulate situations of interaction, their evaluation adopts a three-cornered reasoning, in which the agent, the action and its context are assessed. This triadic logic allows for a separate assessment and qualification of both partners in interaction. Consequently, the first broad type of institutional misrecognition encompasses cases pertaining to the qualification of the agent and its partners, Renault terms this type "depreciating recognition" [*reconnaissance depreciative*] (201). This depreciating interaction can take several forms: a slighting relation of recognition, in which the agent is subordinated

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in a hierarchical interaction; a complete disqualification, in which the agent is considered as unable to meet the criteria of a full-fledged interaction partner; and a stigmatizing recognition, in which the agent is associated with damaging and condemnable actions (201). Interestingly, though Renault analytically separates those three forms, I would argue that they often appear as entangled in lifeworld situations. For example, as developed in Carolyn Ann Adams's testimony in *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*, convicts suffering from slight mental disorders come to be shoved to a lower status in the prison's internal hierarchy. But these convicts are also disqualified and stigmatized because of their retardation.

Examples of depreciating recognition abound in *The Freedom Writers' Diary*. The narrator of Diary 99 provides a beautiful account of the emotional wound it may induce:

> My neighborhood has a way of demolishing any hope I have for a brighter future. 'I was born poor and I will probably die poor'. No one from my neighborhood has ever made a difference and I probably won't make one either. That was my mind-set. For so long, society has told me that because of my neighborhood and the color of my skin, I would never amount to anything. (199)

Such a deterministic understanding of the individual's environment alongside with racist stereotypes are indeed significantly correlated with forms of depreciating recognition. Moreover, the students' recurring reliance on the motif of social labels testifies to their acute awareness of their institutional disqualification as social agents.

The second type of institutional misrecognition is situated at the levels of the agent's actions and identifying practices. The normative principle at stake here corresponds to the fact that individuals seek to conform to norms and to reproduce those norms as faithfully as possible in their behavioral patterns. Renault calls this type of misrecognition, "staggered recognition" [*reconnaissance décalée*] (202): cases in which the agent can be recognized only through her straining to stick to the social role determined by the institution. Again, staggered instances of recognition take different forms: misrecognition, where the agent is pressured into a role to which she cannot identify (in extreme cases it may lead to a traumatic abandoning of previous identity); invisibility or social death, where the agent does not exist in the institution either because they do not act within it or because they do not perform any socially identifiable function (202-203). An obvious example of misrecognition is the predicament of immigrants, who are often pressured in assimilating the culture of the incoming country. Similarly, undocumented immigrants are literally rendered invisible to institutions. The best examples are testimonies in which the protagonist abandons her real identity so as to fully impersonate her role of illegal immigrant (see El Mojado's story). A

parallel kind of system can easily be found in classroom or school quad hierarchies, in which some pupils are deprived of any social visibility if not bullied, and in gang affiliating practices according to which non-members are somehow non-beings excluded from the chosen community.

Diary 1 in *The Freedom Writers' Diary* proposes a heavily connoted entrance in the students' world. The student's assessment of her classroom environment tells of her understanding of identifications imposed by the institution. She overtly expresses the fact that some people do not belong to this group of "'sure to drop out' kids from the 'hood":

> I don't even think everyone in this class is supposed to be in here, because there's a white boy in the corner looking down at his schedule, hoping that he is in the wrong room. For his entire life, he's always been part of the majority, but as soon as he stepped into this room he became the minority. Being white in this class is not going to give him the same status that he gets in society. In here he gets stared down by most of us, and the other people just think that he's either stupid or must have ditched the day he was supposed to take the assessment test. (7)

Interestingly, staggered misrecognition here expresses through a significant shifting gesture between who or what should majority and minority be. In imposing on the white boy a minority position within the classroom, the students inflict on him a rough form of misrecognition that might indeed lead to his social (or at least classroom) complete invisibility—a situation that, being part of the minority outside the classroom, the students are all familiar with.

The third and last type of institutionalized misrecognition can be located at the level of the context of action in the sense that it pertains to the intersubjective characteristic of recognition. During processes of socialization, institutional spaces, by virtue of intersubjective relations, make possible the arrangement of the agent's identity components. Institutions have a founding function in identity formation because of the agent's internalization of normative principles and roles through identification to significant others. Renault calls the third type of institutional misrecognition, "unsatisfactory recognition" [*reconnaissance insatisfaisante*] (204). Misrecognition, in this case, stems from the discordant roles institutions may impose on individuals, which preclude identification and consequently intersubjective recognition. The agent is able to interpret the different roles but their superimposition prevents "the personal unification that would end up in a successful recognition" (204).

The forms of unsatisfactory recognition are an unstable recognition, in which the individual is floating between roles without any possible coherent unification (the agent cannot find any satisfying meaning to his life); dividing or tearing recognition, in which social context makes several strong identifications possible but in an incompatible way. One of the most blatant examples of unstable recognition in testimonials is that of wrongful conviction in which the narrators, because of their predicament, are forced into the roles of criminals and convicts, which obviously do not correspond to their real identity. Moments when the floating between identities is exposed correspond to the trial(s) and other judicial procedures through which the witness is either condemned or exonerated. As for tearing recognition, immigrants often testify to this distressful situation of being in-between two identities: that first acquired in their motherland and that to be constructed in the incoming country. This is even truer of second-generation migrants who often come to be rejected by both communities. Examples of this suffering abound most notably in *Patriot Acts*, in which institutional injustice directly targets first and second-generation migrants' tearing self-identification.

The Freedom Writers' Diary, here again, proposes interesting examples. The narrator of Diary 12 tells of his first entrance in Juvenile Hall as a telling instance of tearing recognition. The boy got involved in a brawl, after a visit to the principal's office, police officers want to bring him back home. His parents are abroad, consequently Juvenile Hall appears "the best thing to do" (24). The boy feels deeply distressed at being "treated […] like a criminal" (25): "I was unlike any of the people surrounding me. Caged like beasts were murderers, rapists gangsters and robbers" (25). In spite of his violent encounter with a group of bullies, the boy obviously considers that he cannot accept to be qualified as a delinquent. Narrator of Diary 133 proposes an example of unstable recognition. Interestingly, she shows that in spite of individual achievements such forms of discrimination die hard. The girl runs into a former teacher upon the day she received her acceptance letter to UCLA:

> With a blank face she said, "That's amazing, because you know there's no more Affirmative Action". I though to myself, "If I were white I would have been congratulated, because getting into college is what I'm supposed to do. If I were Asian her reaction would have been 'Well, of course you got in. You're super smart.' Yet because I'm black or even if I were Latino 'it's amazing' for me to have gotten into a school like UCLA." (254-255)

Because institutions impose on the girl a negative identification regarding her educational potential, she is faced with considerable difficulties in having her identification as a future

college student accepted. Such a form of unstable recognition might indeed correspond to a possible temporary status for agents who become empowered.

Renault considers that such a constitutive conception of recognition and its negative counterparts necessarily needs to be added to Honneth three individual types of recognition. Indeed, only thus can recognition be used to address both the individual and social components of social justice and the conflicts it may induce. Constitutive or institutional recognition, as it makes it possible to address issues pertaining to cultural, social and professional identities, enables a faithful depiction of current struggles for recognition. Moreover by dealing with some of the irreconcilable couplings of those aspects of individual identity, constitutive recognition opens an important debate on social suffering which Renault considers to be another important component of social justice.

Frame of Injustice, Normative and Practical Dynamics

A purely descriptive approach to social movements and their project is not sufficient to show their inner workings and potential effectiveness against different types of misrecognition. In order to explain how those movements manage to engage public opinion and lifeworld transformation, Renault resorts to theories of collective behavior to outline the affective and cognitive components at stake. Renault quotes Ted Gurr to describe the motivating factors triggering action. Gurr considers intensity of frustration to be persuading, yet not necessarily decisive. In order to reach actual collective mobilization, the course of action needs to be legitimized and responsibilities must be defined. This whole process, according to Renault, confirms the *normative content* of the struggles of social movements.

Renault insists that research on these normative contents has been notably produced in the field of framing processes.[64] The basic principles of this theory develop the tenet that political opportunities and mobilizing structures do not suffice in arousing collective action. Other factors are necessary, "[m]ediating between opportunity, organization, and action are the shared meanings and definitions that people bring to their situation" (McAdam 5). Mc Adam adds that "at a minimum people need to feel both aggrieved about some aspect of their lives and optimistic that, acting collectively, they can redress the problem" (McAdam 5). The necessity for optimism as the decisive spark is common to all volumes of testimonials. As

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[64] The term was coined by David Snow and his colleagues in 1986 to refer to the psychological dynamics governing collective attributions and social constructions in social movements. See McAdam, McCarthy and Zald.

unexpected as it may appear, these texts are examples of a literature of hope for social progress.

Not all situations of injustice, the negative feelings they may induce notwithstanding, will lead to the same potential for action. Only a very complex correlation of psychological factors—both affective (the very sentiment itself) and cognitive (the ability to project the sentiment and name the situation an 'injustice')—and environmental aspects can efficiently draw up the frame for social mobilization and organized action. Renault, fully endorsing the framing process, delineates the necessary frame for the experience of injustice to lead to actual mobilized action:

> [the frame of injustice] includes a combination of *shared representations* in a mobilized group making first possible to *identify the injustice* of a situation, then to *allocate its causes to an injustice* and *assigning responsibilities* to other social groups, and *finally* to *plan a transformation* of the situation. (95; emphasis mine)

Through such a frame, it appears that the experience of injustice makes it possible to follow a somehow linear procedure.

Renault's frame obviously corresponds to Fraser's in delineating the who and how of justice, the way in which individuals can come to understand their position as meaningful members of a community deserving representation and the way in which this representation is to be performed. Indeed, for the experience of injustice to evolve into structurally transformative action, it needs to encompass, in addition to the qualitative, referential and affective characteristics Renault previously devised, causal, responsibilizing and organizational characteristics. Moreover, if the first three correspond to individual assessment, the ones subsumed under the frame of injustice necessarily imply *shared representations*. This means that upon the moment when the frame should be implemented, the injustice has been conjectured as being shared by an entire community. Once again, the correlation with the notion of empowerment seems transparent. The dialogical relation between the individual and the collective spheres notwithstanding, both the experience of injustice and empowerment correspond to processes (as opposed to punctual achievements) aiming at the emancipation of overburdened subjects through evaluative (cognitive) and transformative (behavioral) steps.

Renault considers social movements to be permeated by two important dynamics which make it possible to transform the experience into a struggle against injustice. Social movements are deeply rooted in disruptions of social life. But for a *social* movement to appear, a large number of subjects need to consider those disruptions unbearable enough for

them to engage in protest. Renault calls this first step *"prise de parole"* – [speaking]; which must be contrasted with other possible reactions of accepting the unbearable situation or fleeing.[65] For speaking to evolve into, action, the following conditions must be met: subjects need to perceive their converging interests; the directory of available social actions must offer collective responses appropriate to the situation, and the frame of injustice has to be established covering identification, the allocation of responsibility and the legitimation of action.

Social movements' resistant actions are neither a simple reaction nor a calculation but an *evolving understanding* and thus a *dynamic* process.[66] They are, not punctual acts "but [a series of] motivations inducing action and opening possibilities" (109). This evolving understanding according to Renault is located in the frame of injustice, which corresponds to the movements' normative dynamic. To this normative aspect is coupled the practical dynamic of perceiving a perturbation, voicing a protest and acting. Both dynamics seem to advance in a closely intertwined fashion. The sentiment of injustice results from the feeling of a perturbation which is coupled to the identification of its social implications. For protest to be voiced, subjects must allocate responsibilities to other subjects or to institutions. Finally action can be implemented through the legitimized planning of a transformation. The different steps of both dynamics appear then to logically entail one another.

Intriguingly, for those two dynamics to be implemented, Renault reiterates the importance of organization for social movements. As was previously mentioned, it is their organizing skills that differentiate social movements from riots and crowd reactions. Those skills, according to Renault, must correspond to a somehow situational position, an "internal public sphere," (110) in Habermas's sense, a privileged place for normative discussions to take place. Renault mentions as examples the auditorium, the general assembly or the union *"brasier"*—the fires lit up by French picket lines in front of companies on strike. In the case

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[65] These low-posture reactions correspond to what Melvin Lerner defined as the defense strategies individuals develop when their instinctive belief in a just world is threatened. See II.2.1.3.1.

[66] The term evolving understanding is my own reworking of what Renault defines by means of a quote by Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel: "les pratiques de révolte ne sont à interpréter ni comme une simple réaction, ni comme le résultat d'un calcul mais 'comme la recherche obstinée, tâtonnante, d'un sens qui n'est pas donné au départ mais qui peu à peu se découvre'" (108).

of testimonials, the witnesses' narratives, and by extension the volumes in which those are collected, represent the internal public sphere in which the normative and practical dynamic of struggles against injustices are devised. This reworking of Habermas' first characterization of the public sphere is discussed in section II.3, and further correlated to what Seyla Benhabib terms 'unofficial public spheres.'

Furthermore, Renault insists on the creative characteristic of social movements. He, indeed, considers that social movements may be characterized by the critical and creative aspect of adverse experiences. "On the one hand social movements product demystifying and truth effects which would, for example, explain the deep marks left on their members," he explains, "and, on the other, they serve as the stage on which socially instituted values are rectified in the process of renewing their sense" (111). The pertinence of these remarks for testimonials of social empowerment almost goes without saying. Testimonies in their admonitory function demystify social issues unfamiliar to the general public. They oppose the witnesses' truth, that of lived experience, to the one institutions have been spreading in the form of the social myths of the imagined community—these mythologies Barthes so wittingly developed. Renault's use of demystifying truth effects might actually also refer to Barthes's view. As such, the deep marks the witnesses will bear eternally are not only those inflicted by the indignation they managed to turn into a renewed social power: they will also flaunt the signs of their demystifying gesture. Likewise, in their discussion of crucial normative issues within the internal public sphere of the texts—both in the sense of the narrators' heart of hearts and the dialogical sphere of the volumes—testimonials of social empowerment work at the renewal of sociological values.

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In urging subjects to become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, the first step of McWhirter's model for the process of empowerment already implies an impressive degree of social sensibility. Through concepts such as the experience of injustice, one might apparently easily come to understand the psychological and social implications of being part of the voiceless—a socially disempowered community. Such a theoretical understanding of the witnesses' predicament remains a mental exercise on the part of a member of the mainstream and quite probably the privileged. This is obviously sustained by the very fact that philosophy often appears as the proper scaffolding underlying the conclusions which are produced, as philosophers often stress their privileged sensitivity as social observers.

I am nonetheless convinced that it is no overstatement to consider that a type of investigation conducted 'in the field' must be envisaged. Of course, eyewitness testimonies (or testimonies from experience) as well as research methods based on life narratives [*récits de vie*] have become customary in the social and psychological disciplines at stake when researching the notions of social power and justice. But, in all cases, those narrations remain raw material, data which is 'actively produced' by researchers themselves. Actively produced in the present context implies some skepticism with regard to classic sociological methodology: sociologists and psychologists indeed base their studies on individuals' direct experiences, yet this information is gleaned through questionnaires and interviews, that is, on texts or talks obtained in situations the scholars themselves have created. Produced in those constrained situations, the subjects' contribution necessarily tries and complies with the rules and expectations of the research staff—though it may not always be a conscious process on the part of the informants.

On the contrary, I believe that literary testimonies offer a relative sense of spontaneity, which might offer greater possibilities for a more accurate appraisal of the real involvements at stake. Of course, I mean to insist on the relativity of this spontaneity. I am definitely not denying the underlying projects from which testimonials of social empowerment arise. Those projects are governed by the rules of publishing, and editors will of course at some point come to propose modifications. I am not implying either that those texts do not seek to use rhetorical means in order to influence their readers' standpoint—quite the contrary. But editors all stress the authenticity of the witnesses' voice—sometimes up to the point of proposing disclaimers over the possibly aggressive tone the narrators adopt. I therefore remain convinced of the fact that the purely theoretical discussion of the dynamics by which powerless become aware of their possibilities offered by their environment need to be correlated with their narrative of how this all takes place on an individual basis.

The niche of testimonials of social empowerment in contemporary American culture corresponds then to a form of frame of injustice. The texts primarily permit the dominated to voice their negative feelings induced by the hindrance of their normative expectations in the current social context. The narrators, in this primary aspect, adopt the stance of the public prosecutor, Dulong so readily attributes to the witness. They tell of their first-hand experience of situations of injustice that remain generally invisible to the eyes of society. Their stories stand as a form of social criticism coupled with transformative motives. As these narrators tell of their personal cognitive appraisal of the power relations their social environment impose on

them, they voice their anger and suffering and actually engage the transformative process of empowerment.

II.2. Developing Skills and Capacity in order to Gain Reasonable Control over Life

"It would be easy to become a victim of our circumstances and continue to feel sad, scared or angry; or instead we could choose to deal with injustice humanely and break the chains of negative thoughts and energies, and not let ourselves sink into it."

—Zlata Filipovic, *The Freedom Writers' Diary*

"We've decided to bind all our diary entries, and call it *An American Diary... Victims of an Undeclared War*. Someone said he refused to be called a 'victim,' and we all agreed, so we came up with Voices instead. Since we titled it *An American Diary...Voices from an Undeclared War*, we felt that someone should hear our voices."

—Diary 76, *The Freedom Writers' Diary*

II.2.1 Trauma: Capitalizing on a Contemporary Signifier

My previous concern over the individual cognitive perspective required when approaching notions of empowerment—a compelling concept of our current individualist culture—is expressed in the pervasive affectivity testimonials of social empowerment display. Affectivity, as controversial as it may appear, is indeed one of the most obvious characteristics of testimonials, as it is for other forms of self-writing. Affectivity correlated with a boom in life writing and in the interest for real life experience appears to be a contemporary production of Western culture. Scholars seem to agree on the fact that confession is not the sole cultural signifier of our age. Trauma appears to be an even more important one as is widely sustained by academic and scholarly productions such as Leigh Gilmore's, Patricia Yaeger's, Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw's, Kimberly Nance's, Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman's, Stef Craps's and other previous seminal works such as Judith Herman's, Cathy Caruth's, and Kali Tàl's. Likewise, Emmanuel Renault's second influential volume may be considered an important contribution, though it might appear to come from a peripheral perspective.

Miller and Tougaw in the introduction to their collection of essays on trauma testimonies and community formation insist on this pervasive presence of traumatic allusions in our contemporary environment:

If every age has its symptoms, ours appears to be the age of trauma. Naming a wide spectrum of responses to psychic and physical events often with little in common beyond the label, trauma has become a portmanteau that covers a multitude of disparate injuries [...] The term trauma describes the experience of both victims—

> those who have suffered directly—and those who suffer with them, or through them, or for them, if only by reading about trauma. (1-2)

Miller's and Tougaw's remark means that, more than a mere answer to a human urge to confess (as Gilmore had hypothesized), it is rather a need for sharing pains and misfortunes that is constitutive of our cultural moment.

As a major overarching signifier, trauma refers to a plurality of signifieds and has come to "create a new language of the event" (6), as Fassin and Rechtman put it. Boris Cyrulnik explains, if "our culture puts emphasis on unhappiness" (114) it is only symptomatic of how civilized we have become. If suffering were (still) the norm, they would go unnoticed: "we have come to inhabit a world of verbal representations that consists essentially of the things we are fighting" (Cyrulnik, *Resilience* 115). Indeed, Fassin and Rechtman insist that the very concept of trauma, since its appearance in Freud's psychoanalysis, has been shaping a new category of truth. As such, our contemporary culture has become a culture of trauma in which cultural productions serve as records for personal exertions which have been produced by extreme instances of suffering (Miller and Tougaw 2). Ours is indeed a culture in which the publishing market is governed by accounts of extreme situations: "We've become accustomed in American culture to stories of pain, even addicted to them; and as readers (or viewers) we follow fascinated (though as many profess disgust), the vogue of violent emotion and shocking events" (Miller and Tougaw 2).

As products of their social and cultural momentum, testimonials do not escape this necessary voicing of suffering. As Miller and Tougaw contend "narratives of illness, sexual abuse and torture of the death of loved ones have come to rival the classic, heroic adventures as a test of limits that offers the reader the suspicious thrill of borrowed emotion" (2). Nonetheless, it is rather in their use of this affective relation to language and events that testimonials of social empowerment differ from the general tendency. But before focusing on such an important deviance from a general cultural mode of expression, I would wish to shortly define trauma in its general/usual sense. Fassin and Rechtman, in their definition of trauma as a new category of truth, manifest their misgivings with regard to the all-ubiquitous references to trauma. I must admit I came to share this cautious stance through my readings of theoretical views on trauma on the one hand, but more importantly through my readings and further understanding of the workings of testimonials on the other. Yet I feel that the notion of trauma cannot simply be avoided altogether. Trauma is undeniably part of the cultural moment which gave birth to testimonials of social empowerment and as such must be addressed. In the first place, reflections on trauma, as Miller and Tougaw contend, make it

possible to move the limits of what is socially tellable and 'hearable', which is of utmost importance for testimonials of social empowerment to meet their goal.

Trauma must also be addressed because it somehow breathes a new life in humanistic views of the subject and its empathetic capacities:

> [T]he remarkable renewal of autobiographical writing in the late twentieth century is not solely a feature of wide-scale narcissism or the idioms of identity politics. The culture of first-person writing needs to be understood in relation to a desire for common grounds—if not an identity—bound shared experience, the one that is shareable through identification, though this too will vary in degrees of proximity. The memoir and all forms of personal testimony not only expand the boundaries of identity construction and the contours of the self but also lay claim to potential territories of community. (Miller and Tougaw 2-3)

Indeed, testimonials in their literary process aim to construct through the frame of injustice new territories of community achieved thanks to the evolving understanding of society expressed in the normative and the practical dynamics of social movements.

II.2.1.1 A Classical Understanding of Trauma

Before I can come to bring trauma as an ideological signifier into the questioning room, it seems important to propose some of the conventional considerations that were primarily voiced about this relatively new concept. Freud first came to mention trauma in his volume *Moses and Monotheism* in 1937—thus, relatively late in Freud's production. In this work, Freud, through a rewriting of the first stages of the religious tradition, proposes a theory of traumatic history and latency. Cathy Caruth, who is now widely considered as one of the major scholars working on trauma narratives, investigates Freud's text in her seminal work *Unclaimed Experience*. She wishes to articulate, on the basis of the theoretical points which are nowadays widely accepted as conventional features of trauma, its relation to language and narrative.

As Caruth explains, Freud somehow displaced trauma from its etymological sense. Trauma comes from the Greek word for wound and originally referred to bodily injuries, yet in Freud's terms, the wound is no longer one affecting the body but rather one which leaves traces in the mind. Such a wound, just as a bodily injury may leave a scar, is expressed through a "breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (4). It thus remains unavailable to consciousness, at least initially. Caruth argues that "[i]n its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in

which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). Trauma thus involves first a strong negative physical perception which will after a period of time (the length of which is impossible to estimate) entail psychological reactions in the form of unbearable mental images. Trauma, in short, corresponds both to the situational conditions of a specific event which may have involved physical violence and bodily injuries and to the psychological suffering induced by the inability to understand such an event which leads to its recurrence in the mind. Caruth remarks "[t]he story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality [...] rather attests to its endless impact on a life" (7).

For Caruth, trauma is deeply correlated with the notion of history and the human tendency to historicize events or reality in a meaningful sequence. Trauma as a violent unexpected breach in the factual sequence of reality needs to be repaired. And repairing (which up to some point can correspond to reparation) can only be achieved by the insight history provides: "[t]hrough the notion of trauma, [...] we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not" (11). History then, the ability to achieve a complete understanding of the traumatic event, as opposed to immediate understanding needs to be correlated to forms of language mediating immediacy. Among the available forms of language, narrative appears as a satisfying alternative because of its sequencing principle.

It is because of the constitutive bewilderment of the human relation to trauma that the telling of traumatic events seems to pervade literature through and through. Trauma literature scholar Kali Tàl clearly expresses the correlation between literary representations of traumas and their now available understanding: the "[l]iterature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it 'real' both to the victim and to the community" (21). Though trauma is often considered an instance of the 'unsayable,' thus as the occurrence of events and experiences which elude the possibility of words, it is only when codified through language that trauma can become available both to the victim and to society at large. This again stresses the constitutive link between trauma and narratives, or trauma and testimony. For, indeed, among narrative patterns available to trauma victims, it is most often that of testimony which is foregrounded. Testimony along with its legal and religious background seems the most appropriate way for victims to speak, as in the act of bearing witness they not only disclose traumatic events to society but also manage to construct a coherent and seemingly reliable narrative setting around unspeakable events.

II.2.1.2 A Floating Signifier: The Moral Reworking of Truth

In their groundbreaking analytical volume, Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman propose a critical revision of the apparently consensual process through which trauma came to be imposed as an overarching signifier in our contemporary culture. Trauma appears today as "our *normal* means of relating present suffering to past violence" (2). They indeed contend that the term 'trauma' is nowadays to be understood along two very different theoretical lines, one related to the history of science and medicine and the other to an "anthropology of sensibilities and values" (6). This is true "both in the restricted sense in which [trauma] is used in the mental health field (the traces in the psyche) and in its more widespread popular usage (an open wound in the collective memory), for the trauma affects [...] both individuals and a nation" (2).[67] Whether as "cultural trauma"(15), a wound part of the collective memory that contributes to creating a group's identity, or as "historical trauma"(16), according to which a specific group may be recognized the victim of a shared experience of violence, trauma in its larger sense implies an irrefutable reality linked to human empathy which is nowadays spreading through the moral space of our societies (2). It is of course this sudden 'normalcy' of trauma which becomes dubious. From a term which in its conventional sense was supposed to mean an extreme type of psychological injury whose understanding was normally unavailable through direct experience or language, it became a general signifier. Such a view, of course, is not meant to undermine the pain of sufferers, it is rather the promptness of assigning the term to their suffering that appears equivocal.

Fassin and Rechtman argue that this universalization (18) of trauma is in fact due to two main theoretical trends born from its conventional approaches: Caruth's on the one hand and Zizek's on the other. Caruth, in her introduction to the volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, proposes to approach trauma from a dialogical point of view according to which the experience of trauma, or rather its deferral of experience, forms a dialogical space from which one can speak of or listen to both impossibility and the departure from this opening impossibility. In such a situation, the history of trauma takes place in a communicative situation which demands a speaker and a hearer. In a empathetic and humanistic view of speaking and listening "from the site of trauma" (11), our sensitivity to the misfortunes of the

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[67] Fassin and Rechtman propose a large number of examples such as 9/11, slavery or obviously the Holocaust showing that trauma is no longer the wound of a series of individuals but that of the nation as a whole.

world would be derived from a hidden wound we all have experienced, which allows us to understand the others not on the basis of their experience but of our own. Zizek quite similarly suggests that beneath the varied occurrences of trauma, "it is always the same gulf that is expressed" (Fassin and Rechtman 39). As useful as those universalizing theoretical views may be when taking, for example, interdisciplinary dialogues into account, they nonetheless led to a trivializing of the notion of trauma, creating would-be equations between, say, rape victims, widows or widowers, and genocide survivors.

As a universalized overarching concept, trauma has become "the product of a new relationship to time and memory, to mourning and obligations, to misfortune and the misfortunate" (Fassin and Rechtman 276). As a "floating signifier" (277), trauma has come to express concerns, values and expectations of our era, Fassin and Rechtman contend, in providing for the emergence of a new moral framework in which "suffering establishes *grounds for a cause* [and] the event demands a reinterpretation of history" (16; emphasis mine).[68] Suffering, because it corresponds to so many different and irreconcilable situations leads to a new appraisal of the tragic. Trauma is no longer addressed in clinical terms but in anthropological terms according to which individuals are thought of in one similar designation.[69] Trauma triggered an ideological evolution "[which] changed the status of the wounded soldier, the accident survivor and, more broadly, the individual hit by misfortune, from that of suspect [...] to that of entirely legitimate victim" (Fassin and Rechtman 278). Fassin and Rechtman argue:

> We have described this spectacular reversal [...] as marking the end of suspicion. This development both establishes and reinforces a new figure, one that is central to an understanding of contemporary society—the figure of the victim. (278)

More than a simple reversal of perspectives regarding the status of people's suffering, this ideological evolution makes possible a reevaluation of society's relationship and responsibilities towards misfortunes and the misfortunate. Trauma becomes, then, an important weapon in political struggles. Fassin and Rechtman contend that politics of

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[68] A floating signifier, in Lévi-Strauss's terminology is a signifier without any precise referent, "a symbolic value of zero" (qtd. in Fassin and Rechtman 277) which a speaker can fill with his or her own value.

[69] Fassin and Rechtman here refer to Michael Herzveld's definition of social and cultural anthropology as being "'the study of common sense', that is, of 'the everyday understanding of the way the world works'"(277).

reparation, testimonies and proof are now three practical ways to apply trauma in political action. "In each of these cases, the focus is less on exciting empathy (although this intention may be present) or of representing oneself as a patient (although the expectation of treatment is not excluded) than on simply claiming one's rights," (279) they explain. Trauma appears in what Fassin and Rechtman call "the context of an ethos of compassion" (279) and is then transformed in a demand for justice.

The recuperation of *trauma* and *victim* as floating signifiers expanded the use of those terms in political arguments about specific events and issues. Apparently, then, the fact that in our contemporary culture trauma became a somehow void vehicle has enabled a wide range of subjects who can be considered as *victims* to voice their misfortune and ask for reparation. Trauma thus participates in a new moral arrangement according to which our society should come to emphasize its empathetic responses towards victims in a responsibilizing gesture of reparation. Now, it would be hypocritical and senseless to mention that testimonials of social empowerment totally disregard such an understanding and use of trauma. As literary texts, and consequently rhetorical productions, their purpose is first and foremost to convince their audiences of the profound significance of their message. Trauma, or rather the use of trauma as a floating signifier and a powerful tool for questioning social justice, as *a ground for a cause*, is of course part of their rhetorical system. These views are subsumed in the workings of what I came to term their aesthetic of impact and their ethics of responsibility. However, thanks to those two subtle narrative threads, testimonials manage to twist the actual negative implications of Fassin and Rechtman's "*schème victimaire*" [victim schema] (Renault, *Souffrances* 24).

For, indeed, Fassin and Rechtman after offering *prima facie* neutral evaluations of the articulation of the victim's status and of the universalization of trauma nonetheless come to qualify their initial judgment in two different ways. First, they point out that this new use of the term trauma "obliterates experience" (281). As soon as the event comes to be named 'a trauma,' both the relations between the event and situational context, and the relations between the victim and the meaning the victim gives to the event are completely screened from public and political understanding.[70] "[Trauma] obscures the diversity and complexity of

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[70] Fassin and Rechtman when describing the universalizing theoretical phenomena of trauma add up a mitigating remark by quoting Dominic LaCapra's work who insists on the importance of contextualizing the specific event on historical, social and cultural grounds. This reminds of Renault's referential feature for the experience of injustice.

experiences. It conceals the way in which experiences take on multiple meanings in a collective history, in a personal life story, in a lived moment" (281). And, surprisingly, scholars seem to agree on the fact that for a reliable account of trauma to be produced one should turn to the victim's direct testimony (Miller and Tougaw 6), not to mention the fact that trauma was 'discovered' by the analysis of clinical accounts.

The universalizing of trauma then and its obliteration of experience carries on an undeniably alienating potential:

> while the subjective experience of victims remains inaccessible to us, the public recognition they are accorded in the name of trauma provides the key to an anthropology of the subject—an anthropology definitively freed from the illusion of the unfathomable depths of the individual and fully attentive to the political processes of subjectification. (279)

Trauma in its universalized usage opens a paradox. One the one hand, it is essential for survivors to share the 'unsayable' very often in an act of a warning. On the other, they become homogenized under the blurred label of 'victim,' thereby obliterating the specificity of their experience and alienating them into the position of a somehow clichéd secondary subject in need. Consequently, as I had anticipated, testimonials debunk this danger of obliterating experience by working according to Renault's approach to the experience of injustice—as if to oppose reason and responsibilities to pure emotions. It goes without saying that the witnesses' narratives serve as a wealth of information on situational, cognitive and evaluative implications. The witnesses can of course come to label their experience as traumatic, but this qualitative assessment (a significant aspect of the experience of injustice) will directly be derived from the insight witnesses gained thanks to their own narration.

Moreover, the label of victim seems too quick and too easy a solution. Indeed, calling someone a victim of a specific traumatic event carries dangerously reductive implications. Do victims consider themselves as victims? The answer to this question would probably be that some of them do but others do not. Moreover, whenever one is called a victim of rape, war, violence, or abuse, one will remain a *victim of*. Some survivors might not want to be reduced to a specific event (which is even more understandable when dealing with traumatic events and the very notion of coping) and see their whole life circumscribed to that episode. The status of the witness already creates a strong bond between the individual and the events. Yet, if the witness may adopt the tone of the admonition and act as a public prosecutor, the victim seems doomed to a disempowered fate.

However, Fassin and Rechtman insist that, for them, totally rejecting the victim label might appear to be a dangerous strategic move as well. Indeed, if being a victim engages society's responsibility towards us and allows for reparation and more importantly for recognition, it seems that other options might be more than limited. In such a view, "survivors of disasters, oppression, and persecution adopt the only persona that allows them to be heard" (279). They add that "[i]n doing so, [survivors] tell us less of what they are than of the moral economies of our era in which they find their place" (279). Worse still, understanding the label 'victim' as a potential strategic—or, as mentioned above rhetorical—move is basically offering ammunition to the opposite camp. It is not unusual nowadays to hear arguments of *victimization* to dismiss claims from specific groups in political or legal debates (Fassin and Rechtman 278), and thus to denounce a seemingly strategic move on the part of the disempowered group.

Fassin and Rechtman are convinced that victims are somehow organized into a hierarchy in the minds of members of societies, separating in a Manichean and simplistic gestures *good* from *bad* victims. Fassin and Rechtman themselves insist that this hierarchy is simplistic: they do not endorse that dubious opposition. Nevertheless, this hierarchy remains a matter of ideological common sense for societies:

> [r]ecognition of trauma, and hence the differentiation between victims, is largely determined by two elements: the extent to which politicians, aid workers, and mental health specialists are able to identify with the victims, in counterpoint to the distance engendered by the otherness of the victims. Cultural, social and perhaps even ontological proximity matter; as does the a priori valuation of the validity of the cause, misfortune or suffering, a valuation that obviously implies a political and often an ethical judgment. (282)

Accepting a victim as a victim, then, implies being able to identify with her predicament and consequently to endorse her cause. Obviously, identification needs to bridge the gap of otherness and the greater the gap, the harder the possibility for identification. Once again, politics will be involved along with the lines of the ethical frame of the specific society which is expected to display empathy.

Are testimonials of social empowerment a branch of the literature of trauma? Since they are more or less legitimate heirs to the genre of *testimonio*, one might feel compelled to give a positive answer to this question. Scholars have freely used the term trauma when dealing with testimonies themselves. Since these texts focus on events such as rape, violence whether domestic, in gangs, racial, ethical, judicial, or prison-related, they seem anchored in

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traumatic experience. When I first came to deal with the volumes of my corpus, I was convinced that this was indeed their main thematic tenor. And yet, reading the witnesses' texts and coming to be permeated by their humanist philosophy of the subject as effective agent, I rapidly realized that I would have to change my mind on this issue. Of course, I would not dare say, nor even imagine, that the psychological distress the witnesses disclose in their personal narratives is unrelated to trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. But to the question whether those texts belong to the literature of trauma in its universalized meaning, I believe a more nuanced answer is in order. The notion of trauma, in its conventional and universalized understanding, implies an unsettling atmosphere of paralysis surrounding the victims. The latter should be listened to, should be cared for and receive reparation. Renault in his description of the current numerous political references to social suffering proposes a concurring standpoint. The term suffering "reduces individuals to powerless victims where they should be reminded of their responsibilities and capabilities in striving for their own social success" (*Suffering* 5). Such a view, Renault argues, locks *victims* in the position of assisted persons rather than encourage integration efforts in the population of mainstream individuals.[71] Nowhere are victims considered as potential actors capable of reacting in a meaningful way.

Even the act of testifying will never be fully effective for victims of trauma. Since trauma corresponds to what cannot be expressed through words, testimonies necessarily remain incomplete—a fact Elie Wiesel himself duly acknowledges. Such a disengaged, defeatist, or nihilistic conduct is at odds with the one identified in testimonials of social empowerment. After all, engaging into an active response towards the predicament of powerlessness is at the very heart of the process of empowerment, and narrators often insist on the fact that they do not wish to be considered as victims—or, at least, do not wish to be confined to this status. Yet, narrators paradoxically describe their predicament in detail, and seek to be as sincere as possible in the delineation of their suffering. I then came to realize that I was facing an apparently irreconcilable paradox when trying to describe a situation in which narrators do not consider themselves as victims of trauma proper, but still come to

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[71] This understanding is actually supported by the psychological theory of learned helplessness. First developed by psychologist Martin Seligman, this theory stands as the reverse process of the one empowerment seeks to implement. Its basic tenet is that when subjected to recurrent negative stimuli, individuals *learn* that their predicament is beyond their control and thus, somehow willingly, accept their helpless position.

describe extreme sufferings and to use the powerful values involved in our cultural discourse on trauma.

This is where the rhetorical framework of testimonials of social empowerment comes into action. As I will further develop in section II.3, testimonials rely on a modernized version of Jürgen Habermas's discourse ethics as their overarching rhetorical logic. The point in the witnesses' narratives is to engage dialogue so as to question tacit assumptions of the lifeworld. As such, testimonials of social empowerment as unofficial public spheres, in Seyla Benhabib's terms, address the very notion of trauma and the apparently necessary position of victims in transforming social justice. Because of their individual journey through the process of empowerment, the witnesses indeed manage to move away from the status of victim to that of the newly empowered agent who responsibly speaks for the empowerment of all. And it is to this specific position that readers should seek to identify so as to engage their actions.

II.2.2 The Narrative Format: Social Fairy Tales?

Among the reasons which led me to realize that testimonials of social empowerment could not adequately be fitted in the genre of trauma literature was the fact that they often feature sort of *happy endings*. Of course, witnesses offer a faithful depiction of the suffering implied by their unjust predicament, but their emotional disclosure, aiming to serve their social purpose, always seems to end up well. This ostensible predilection for positive closure can be correlated both with testimonials' specificities and with the genre of testimony itself—in particular legal and religious testimonies. Both those subgenres have specific yet somehow parallel purposes: the intent is in either case to disclose a personal episode so as to uncover the truth, whether that of God or that of the Law. This truth is expected, in the first sub-genre, to lead to a better, more enlightened life and, in the second, to settle unjust or illegal matters—whether for harms committed or suffered. Consequently, in both cases, testimonies are meant to help witnesses achieve the *good life*, to transform a generally very negative experience into a happy ending. Of course, if in the case of religious testimonies the happy ending is for the witnesses to decide, in the tribunal the intervention of an impartial judge is required. Those substantial differences notwithstanding, a true and—dare I say—*moral* happy ending remains highly important.

It is in their research for a higher truth, a form of moral to their predicament, that testimonies expose their intimate relation with the tradition of storytelling and folk tales. French psychologist, Boris Cyrulnik coined the phrase of "social fairy tales" (7) in his English volume on his theory of resilience. According to Cyrulnik's view human beings are able to

"bounce back" (50) after the blow of a trauma so as to go on leading a meaningful and successful life. It is on his concept of happy endings that I wish to focus in my efforts to define the psychological mechanics that makes possible for individuals to extract empowering capacity from their negative experience and environment. Cyrulnik openly expresses his conviction that narrative stands a one of the most effective communicative format for the exposure of resilience. Similarly, the works of psychologist James Pennebaker on the writing cure confirm this primary assumption. Narratives because of their specific treatment of a linear time sequence permit to derive meaning from the sequence of events they disclose. Finding meaning is the first step of coping and resilience.

II.2.2.1 Resilience and The Autobiographical Chimera

A few years ago, French psychologist Boris Cyrulnik introduced a novel approach to the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorders and coping. He coined the term *résilience* to describe human beings' ability to construct meaningful lives after having suffered a specific trauma. Based on his own experience as a deported Jewish boy, narrated in his volume *Autobiographie d'un épouvantail* [A Bogeyman's Autobiography], Cyrulnik describes resilience as "the story of the struggle of an individual who was driven to death and invented a strategy to come back to life" (133).[72] In this beautiful formula, Cyrulnik already depicts resilience as a dynamic *and* creative process on the part of the survivor. In his English volume, he claims that "anyone who has been hurt has to undergo a metamorphosis" (3). According to Cyrulnik's view, all people who suffered a significant ordeal come to be defined as a kind of oxymoron. This oxymoron creates the process of resilience—"the ability to succeed to live and develop in a positive and socially acceptable way despite the stress or adversity that would normally involve the real possibility of a negative outcome" (4). Cyrulnik argues that resilience is a universal characteristic of human beings, a form of natural procedure based on our assessment of our situational and emotional environment.[73]

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[72] Quotes from *Autobiographie d'un épouvantail* are in my translation.

[73] Cyrulnik insists that trauma is to be environmentally and culturally defined, rejecting as such its universalized definition. This obviously echoes the previous views of trauma scholars. Still, Cyrulnik argues that all life stories are tampered closely or remotely by trauma, for "if we did not suffer grazes, our routinized existences would not leave anything in our memories" (*Autobiography* 24).

This procedure resembles knitting: "[w]e might feel that if one stitch is dropped, everything will unravel, but in fact, if just one stitch holds, we can start all over again" (13). Building upon his metaphor, Cyrulnik considers that trauma "denotes the pathological breaking of a bond that must be formed anew" (23). The broken bond rests upon a split in the subject's personality—the oxymoron—"the part of personality that has been hurt suffers and bears a scar, but another part which is better protected, still unhurt but more hidden, uses the energy of despair to bring together anything that can still produce some happiness and give some meaning to life" (21-22). It is this very mechanism of piecing together what is left of the subject's previous self-definition that leads Cyrulnik to propose the image of an "autobiographical chimera" (33). Indeed, he argues that trauma corresponds to chaos for the human mind, tearing apart what had been previously constructed whether physically or psychologically. Hence, resilience means the reshuffling of a whole system (*Autobiography* 38).

The autobiographical chimera stems from the resilient procedure. The role of the chimera is to structure phenomena in order to momentarily give a stable form to the world (*Autobiography* 31). A chimera, according to the OED, refers to "any mythical animal formed from parts of various animals." Accordingly, the subject constructs from the parts of its shattered self a renewed mythical animal, the different parts of which are recognizable even though its whole configuration seems improbable, unreal and probably fearful. This is why survivors, subjects who underwent a sizeable trauma, come to be unsettling to their direct environment, and become bogeymen. Nonetheless, it is thanks to the construction of such unsettling mythical animals that subjects who had to go through traumatic wrenches can create the most important feature of resilience— *meaning*.

Human beings' lives are conducted by meaningful events and notions. Human beings are meaningful animals; they need to seek meaning in their actions, understanding, experiences, relationships,…—in short in both their lives and selves. Indeed, Cyrulnik explains that "human memory is so constructed that an event that is devoid of meaning leaves no trace" (*Resilience* 32). Now, of course, meaning is fabricated differently according to quite an important number of features, both personal and social (Cyrulnik argues that for adults, meaning is almost only sociologically constructed). Still it is always meaning that will lead to the outbreak of resilience, in the sense that it lies at the basis of the two necessary opening steps: that of intellectualization, and that of dream or hope.

In the intellectualizing phase, the subject faces questions such as 'why did this happen to me?' Meaning must therefore be derived from the event itself. This search for meaning is

directly correlated with coping. Coping lies in the event as well, and corresponds to a number of resisting (or defense) mechanisms which will approach meaning in different ways—whether in the sense of a complete denial, a turn to faith in a superior design, humorous reactions, a social support in understanding, or action. However, coping itself is not enough when facing resilience, which necessarily needs to take into account "afterwardsness" (*Autobiography* 128): what is going to become of me now, will I ever be happy again? Those questions pertain to the meaning of the afterwardsness of trauma, the very one resilience seeks to disclose. For, indeed, if coping may be repeated and answers only to specific situations, it does not involve "a life project beyond the event" (Manciaux *et al.* 16).[74] In this sense, resilience is a universal phenomenon, which varies according to circumstances and culture and requires a dynamic and evolving process (Manciaux *et al.* 17). Cyrulnik's theory thus presents meaningful parallels with Renault's sociological analysis of the dynamics of social movements, which are at first triggered by negative feelings or social suffering.

The birth of the autobiographical chimera, in Cyrulnik's terms, corresponds to the construction of a meaningful self: "the ability to knit together a feeling of selfhood appears to be a major factor in the aptitude of resilience" (*Resilience* 19). Selfhood, he nonetheless contends, is physical experience which finds its origins in social representations. Meaning—at least for adults—is sociologically constructed, which means that social representations deeply influence the way in which a person reacts to the ordeal on the one hand, and the way in which the person relates to it or recounts it on the other. It is through social representations that one can recount a specific event or experience; those specific representations in our culture are the ones expressed through relations of causality. Psychologist James Pennebaker, realized that it is indeed the wish to find and build meaning in constitutive causal relationships that underlies our compulsive disclosing acts.

Pennebaker believes that human beings have a sequential, almost linear understanding of their lives: our lives represent a series of tasks in need of resolving or completion (*Opening* 90); each of those tasks are correlated to the other by bonds of causality. To rephrase this in Cyrulnik's term: the image of the animal appearing on our identifying knitting pattern is constructed from bottom to top in a linear sequencing of rows of stitches, the whole pattern causing one row to differ from the other so as to comply with the overarching design.

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[74] Quotes from Manciaux's volume are in my translation. Manciaux's mention of a necessary life project so as to regain psychological and physical control on one's environment concurs with theoretical views close to Rapport's existential power.

Cyrulnik, along with Pennebaker, Freud and Caruth, consider that traumas or ordeals appear as disruptions in these linear series. Ordeals are troublesome events which represent interruptions of life-projects and life tasks: "if one row of stitches is well knitted, the next is easier, but any event can change the whole garment" (*Resilience* 144). This idea of an instinct for linear sequencing implies that whenever the sequence appears to have been disordered, subjects will inevitably seek to reorganize order and sequencing through causality: what caused this to happen? How is it that I ended up in such a predicament? Looking for answers to those questions, the subjects seek to establish causes, whether internal (personal) ones, or external (social, institutional or environmental) ones.

What is more unsettling is the fact that, even when faced with apparently totally meaningless events, the process remains identical. Even if the events have no meaning and could not be resolved in any straightforward way, the subject will try to understand the whys and wherefores of its predicament. This apparently instinctive human thought procedure can be easily correlated to psychologist Melvin Lerner's justice motive, according to which one necessarily assumes that one lives in a just world in which one will experience and live what one deserves. Human beings, faced with ordeals that are meaningless and totally unforeseeable, will necessarily seek, very often in negative coping strategies, a way of explaining the causes of the event. This is why negative reactions such as complete denial, total withdrawal from reality or blaming the victim often occur in extreme cases of suffering and injustices. Human beings, when faced with improbable events disrupting their linear appraisal of reality and their belief in a just world, often prefer to deny the event altogether.

How, then, can such negative mechanisms be avoided? Cyrulnik and Pennebaker, just as other important scholars in psychology and anthropology, seem to propose one and the same answer: weaving a story, proposing a narrative of events.[75] Narratives, as instances of oral or written language, are communicative forms representing sequencing, causal order, forms in which the events evolve from a beginning, through a middle, towards an end. Language in narratives serves as a "simplifying tool for experiences" (Pennebaker, *Opening* 96). Simplification is, however, not to be boiled down to minimizing. Rather, simplification permits an easier appraisal of the transformation implied by the traumatic events. As Cyrulnik explains in a meaningful metaphor: "speech is to the body what the butterfly is to the caterpillar" (*Resilience* 223). Narratives, as Jerome Bruner contends, are a way to open up the

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[75] Most notably Jerome Bruner, Nigel Rapport, Seyla Benhabib, Iris Marion Young, and Emmanuel Renault but of course the list could be largely extended.

possibilities offered by reality. Of course, narratives will change according to time, environment, and addressee but the purpose is always the same: reconstructing a meaningful *product* out of meaningless events.

And this, according to Cyrulnik, is the very point of the autobiographical chimera: "every element in it is true, and yet its sole function is to create an animal that exists only in the story being constructed" (*Resilience* 33). The narrative, as a product, will always remain crafted, constructed, in the very simple way that persons seek to extract their own meaning from the events that happened to them. The chimera for the subject will never seem really estranging or mythical: it is rather understood as representing the subject's identity with all its scars and wounds still-to-be-tended-to. Such a narrative process is of course underlain by our human capacity for creativity. Cyrulnik puts an immense emphasis on creativity in resilient processes. Creativity gives structure and transforms the events in such a way that meaning can be extracted from them. Just as daydream and its correlation to hope are the elements which trigger the second essential step of resilience, Cyrulnik contends that it is easier to transform trauma into a play or story. "We can easily turn [trauma] into images, stories or wonderful tragic epics that celebrate the exploits of heroes" (*Resilience* 88). Creativity appears as a positive defensive action: "the act of creation closes a gap, heals wounds and allows us to become ourselves once more, to become our *complete* selves" (*Resilience* 264; emphasis mine). Ordeals can, through narratives, be transformed into life-shaping tales.

Cyrulnik's positive understanding of the importance of creativity in the process of resilience opens the significant question of narrative truth status. Cyrulnik seems to see fiction as the privileged format for the narrative construction of resilience. This, obviously, appears to be his theory's stumbling block. While he acknowledges the danger of psychological defense mechanisms—among which fictionalization has a privileged status, Cyrulnik paradoxically proposes daydream as the opening step for resilience to apply. He thus makes fictionalization somehow inescapable. I propose to understand Cyrulnik's construction of the autobiographical chimera not as a fictionalization of the victim's life story but rather as the construction of their rhetorical persona. The narrators' *ethos* constitutes the creative painting of their position as an orator in the public sphere.

Because they have been instituted as witnesses—most significantly by their editors, narrators of testimonials of social empowerment rely significantly on factual accuracy and truth status. The assembling of their autobiographical chimera, therefore, cannot be conceptualized as fictionalization, at the risk of being called a fraud. However, each witness's narrative bears the traces of their *ethos*, the rhetorical character they construct for themselves

through their words. Testimonials' four paradigmatic *ethe* could then correspond to the frames—based on social shared representations—their autobiographical chimera can adopt: the bosom friend, the judge, the priest and the activist. These shared representations, as is explained further down, correspond to applications of rhetorical and semiotic models for narratives. As if to literally impersonate these models, the witnesses' creativity in fact lies in their ability to cast themselves as the characters of, indeed, social fairy tales.

II.2.2.2 The Writing Cure or The Applicability of the Narrative Format

James Pennebaker, as a psychologist, came to be interested in the processes at stake behind the apparently positive endings of narratives that help form autobiographical chimeras, therefore in what transforms narratives of traumatic events into 'fairy tales'. Though his works are first and foremost aimed at defining the physical healing outcomes of disclosure, they remain of interest in the fact that he insists on the *actual* power of words. The contribution of Pennebaker's works lies, indeed, in the important correlation between the psychoanalytical talking cure with a possible writing cure. Pennebaker, as he questions the possibility of a human innate urge to confess, first comes to explain the importance of disclosure as the opposite of inhibition (or secrecy).[76] In Pennebaker's 1997 volume, Eugenia Georges' contribution investigates this urge to confess. Foucault defined us as 'confessing animals,' she remarks. Georges insists on the cultural importance of confessing rituals in both Western and non-Western cultures. She points out that uses of words and symbols have been ritualized through the years, in a process in which "historically determined cultural values and social processes give meaning to a symbolic therapy and, in doing so, facilitate the latter's ability to heal in a given context" (12).[77]

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[76] Boris Cyrulnik explains that secrecy can in fact be used as a defense mechanism. As society is never really ready to listen to and accept testimonies of traumatic events without frowning upon the witnesses, secrecy may appear as a possible solution. Cyrulnik explains that when victims decide to speak, they expose themselves to other people whose reactions may not be beneficial; "[w]hilst all we have to do to protect ourselves is keep the secret, revealing it is all it takes to make us vulnerable" (248).

[77] Georges in her article proposes a short historical presentation of our Western history of confession: beginning with Stoics' contemplative self-disclosure, the sacrament of confession in Christianity, and reaching its climax in Freud and Breuer's talking cure.

As extensions of the *holding back* versus *letting go* paradox, inhibition and disclosure will necessarily "influence our basic values, our daily thinking patterns, and feelings about ourselves " (Pennebaker, *Emotion* 2). Inhibition, as Pennebaker demonstrated can in its most active form impose a strenuous control over the body and mind. The talking cure, in its primary form, when devised by Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud, was meant to serve a cathartic and communicative function: the subject was to disclose pent up feelings in hopes of avoiding the neuroses and isolation induced by defense mechanisms. Nowadays, Pennebaker contends, the talking cure has also come to serve the powerful function of gaining insight. In this modernized approach to the talking cure, talking appears valuable to understand the causes and consequences of the subject's course of action or of specific events. Writing, Pennebaker adds, can be associated with the same positive effects and offers the precious advantage of *self-medication*—that is, the possibility to dispense with a professional therapist.[78] By the same token, Cyrulnik considers that writing constitutes the most successful mechanism to engage both step one and two of resilience. Writing somehow condenses all defense mechanisms—intellectualization, daydreaming, rationalization and sublimation (269).[79]

Pennebaker carried out an important number of experiments so as to test in the lab the actual outcomes of therapy through writing, which led to most decisive results. The most interesting one makes it possible to correlate psychological implications with literature and the actual crafting skills necessary for narratives to really be effective. Indeed, Pennebaker contends that writing about misfortunes and discomfort must necessarily take the form of a *well-wrought story* so as to effectively lead to psychological and physical healing processes. He contends that "just as we are drawn to good stories in literature or movies, we need to construct coherent and meaningful stories for ourselves" (103). The point of the writing cure would then not only be about disclosing one's life experience of traumatic misfortunes as well as the emotional responses they triggered but more importantly to turn them into inspiring and

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[78] Pennebaker conceives of his own book as a kind of self-help volume and he proposes advice to persons willing to engage with this writing procedure when faced with suffering. He nevertheless warns against the fact that writing must be carefully handled, for it could easily transform into an isolating mechanism.

[79] Renault's three steps of the normative and practical dynamics show significant similarities with these mechanisms.

elaborate stories. For testimonials to really be effective, then, narrators must not only learn the competence for political representation, but that of symbolic representation as well.

According to Jerome Bruner, it is no wonder that philosopher Kenneth Burke should have decided to designate the initiating factor of narratives as Trouble with a capital T. Burke considers that narratives are necessarily based on the *dramatistic pentad*, that of "an Agent who performs an Action to achieve a Goal in a recognizable Setting by the use of certain Means" (Bruner 34).[80] Burke's five rhetorical elements common to all narratives can be mirrored in the works of later narratologists such as A. J. Greimas.[81] For Burke, narratives are triggered by Trouble happening between at least two of those five elements: at least two elements of the pentad will be afflicted with inadequacy. Bruner contends that literature is in fact gorged with imbalances in the dramatistic pentad, which correspond to human plights. Literature offers narrative templates for those plights to be expressed, which is why despite being so local, unique and particular literary narratives can achieve such a large reach (35). "It is the conversion of private Trouble [...] into human plights that makes well-wrought narrative so powerful, so comforting, so dangerous, so culturally essential" (35).

Testimonials of social empowerment, indeed, seem to be paradigmatic applications of Bruner's theory. Through the resilient process of narrative construction, witnesses understand their predicament and give meaning to their disrupted life-projects but also extend their predicament into a larger human plight, which—they realize—necessarily needs to be recognized by society at large. Rather than referring to Burke's pentad as a metalinguistic model for narration, I propose to explain the apparition of the four paradigmatic testimonial *ethe* as a differentiated appropriation of Greimas's actantial model. According to the paradigm, the narrator will cast their subject, object, sender, receiver, helpers and opponents on the axes of quest, communication and power. This creative capacity to craft powerful narratives is what I term the texts' aesthetic of impact. The power of the narratives and as such their literary and cultural significance lies in the impact they manage to communicate to the readers by creating a communicative bond. In the sense that they transform personal plights into universal human crises which, though they have already been partly overcome by

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[80] Burke, actually, calls means *agency*. Each element of the pentad is aimed as the answer to—one or a combination of—questions from the scholastic hexameter. Agency in this model answers to the question how or by what means.

[81] Burke's dramatistic pentad dates from 1945, whereas Greimas's actantial model was devised in 1966.

individual subjects, need to be eradicated from society altogether, testimonials knit a collective action akin to what the texts express in their ethics of responsibility.

II.2.2.3 Publicity

Little wonder then that witnesses should decide to *go public* with their narratives. If the truths they are disclosing appear of general interest, if their happy ending deserves to be extended to society as a whole, they need to publicize their stories. However, it appears that other reasons, both psychological and social or political need to be taken into account when dealing with published testimonies. Cyrulnik, in quite an unexpected argument, affirms that it is not rare for survivors to decide and disclose their testimonies for the first time on television—that is to directly transform disclosure into a public gesture. The motives for such a gesture appear unsettling, the more so as the witness generally considers this to be an act of intimacy: "Because [I] want[…] intimacy, [I] talk[…] to an audience of eight millions, [...] on television at least, I can be sure I'm talking to people who can understand me" (*Resilience* 255).

Cyrulnik emphasizes the fact that disclosure can be highly influential on the following possibility for resilience:

> When the speaker tells the story of his sufferings, he is much more disturbed by the reaction of the person he is confiding in than by the evocation of his own wounds. [...] Sharing our misfortunes means changing those who are close to us. We are even unsure we have the right to talk about the events of our lives (247).

In order to neutralize the angst of assessing the addressee's reaction, it seems easier for witnesses to address their disclosure to the largest audience possible, because among this large number of people, they can be sure that at least some will understand them, either because they share their predicament or because they have higher skills for empathy. For the narrators, in the case of testimonials, changing their relatives is of utmost importance, but the stakes match the risks. "It is only when I confide in someone that I appear before the court of other people," (*Resilience* 258) Cyrulnik remarks. The purpose is to organize testimonials along the lines of an aesthetic of impact. But if this impact is too frontal and substantial, it might miss its target altogether: "the hope is that the intimacy thus created will change other people's world of representations" (Cyrulnik, *Resilience* 258).

Cyrulnik contends that the ideal reader can serve as a perfect third party when the purpose is to share ordeals: "Because we idealize him, he will understand us perfectly, and, among the army of readers who read this book, there will be at least ten people who can understand and accept me, even though I have been hurt" (*Resilience* 156). Moreover,

assuming the role of the autobiographer can be just as curative: "[t]aking on the identity of an autobiographer suddenly gives one a feeling of coherence and acceptance" (156). For, indeed, Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact is often signed between readers and autobiographers, as shown by bookshops display windows these last ten or twenty years. Cyrulnik insists that resilience is to reinterpret the past in the light of the present, so as to propose a real social fairy tale: "[t]he reader can experience a feeling of wonder while reading a horror story, because the horrific events have a happy ending" (160). This might indeed explain the high number of readers for Misery Memoirs, or what has been derogatively termed Mislit, and what has often been understood as unhealthy voyeuristic drives for dreadful life stories. "[Autobiographies] are edifying: they teach us a lesson, and encourage us to be virtuous and constructive,"(161) Cyrulnik claims.

Of course, the intimate bond which is forged by the exchange of personal experience will not necessarily end up in a successful relationship. As mentioned earlier, if the impact is unsustainable, the point is simply missed. Cyrulnik remarks that as soon as people confide in each other they "create a shared history and a future memory" (177), even if they were not part of the same events. Confession creates immediate intimacy. The demand of such a relationship can be met by two paradoxical relational strategies. Either the addressee is moved by the story and accepts the budding bond. Or the addressee feels embarrassed and accepts only a formally sanctioned relationship expressed through social conventions and stereotypes, most often ending in a repressive reaction towards the witness and their story.[82] If Cyrulnik is right in saying that the "powerful tranquilizing effect of speech depends on the listener," (*Resilience* 260) then in the case of testimonies of social empowerment, publicity seems the best possible solution for disclosure. Cyrulnik remarks:

> Speaking to a large number of people in contrast, and divulging one's secrets to them is not a way of sharing them. It is a way of exposing oneself, in the way that we expose ourselves to blows, or in the sense of giving an *exposé*. Divulging one's secret in public means choosing one's clan, assuming we have one. When we open up to ourselves, we are at our most vulnerable. Sharing a secret is an intimate act that

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[82] Kali Tàl sees in this repressive reaction "strategies of cultural coping" which stand as social equivalents of personal defense mechanisms. Tàl lists mythologization (standardization), medicalization and disappearance (invisibilization) as the possible application of these equally negative appraisals of the witnesses' experience.

creates a bond: a secret that is made public represents a social commitment. (*Resilience* 259)[83]

The impact of sharing is then at its highest: disclosing secrets—that is, the most intimate suffering and questioning I have gone through because of this unjust turn of events that came to disrupt the course of my life—is a way to create the impact of intimacy on one's addressees, the impact needed for them to fight at one's sides for a fairer society.

This, of course, is no easy battle. Bearing witness, even when motivated with the best of intentions, remains a difficult task as liberating and empowering as it may be. Kali Tàl eloquently observes:

> Bearing witness is an aggressive act. It is born out of a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or to repress experience, a decision to embrace conflict rather than conformity, to endure a lifetime of anger and pain rather than to submit to the seductive pull of revision and repression. Its goal is change. The battle over the meaning of a traumatic experience is fought in the arena of political discourse, popular culture, and scholarly debate. The outcome of this battle shapes the rhetoric of the dominant culture and influences future political action. (7)

Aggressiveness is a delicate notion to put forward when dealing with literary testimonies, though it is relevant to the matter at hand. Those texts are undeniably unsettling and moving; readers are no longer the same when having shared those events even from a secondary staggered position.

And this is the reason why an approach to testimonials must not underestimate the importance of the "burden of listening" (*Opening* 117) to use Pennebaker's terms. Testimonies are always dialogical acts, communicative actions in Habermasian terminology: a form of language-based relationship which is proposed and comes to be either accepted or rejected. Pennebaker insists that listening to narratives of traumatic ordeals can be emotionally and nervously exhausting, and even sometimes lead to "burn-out" (*Opening* 106). Most demanding on the part of addressees, whether they are listening to or reading the witnesses' words, is the feeling of a lack of control. Pennebaker argues that "the more control I have, the healthier listener I will be" (*Opening* 107). The possible trick, then, in order to

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[83] Interestingly enough, in previous stages of my research I had considered to label testimonials of social empowerment, testimonials of social commitment, enhancing the committed/committing aspects of the texts both on the part of the witnesses regarding the truth they disclosed and on the part of the readers in their signing a socially empowering pact.

exert a significant impact, would be to transmit the unsettling imbalance of the experience of injustice but at the same time to voice the possibility of reconstructing a sense of control over the situation and environment. This reconstruction of control lies at the heart of the individual characteristics of empowerment; it is the very competences the subject will then try to inspire to its community.

II.2.2.4 Publication: Editors as Political Entrepreneurs

Community remains a key term for testimonials of social empowerment. However for them to achieve exposure in the community they must be introduced in the public sphere. This introduction is epitomized in the publication of the volumes. The publishing world, the *champ littéraire* Bourdieu so knowledgeably described, remains a closed world governed by strict rules and demands a form of acculturation that is not reflected in all subjects' *habitus*. It is in their position as trained agents in the *champ littéraire* that editors have a crucial importance in the development of testimonials. Their meaningful position resembles that of what Renault calls political entrepreneurs in the organization of social movements. The witnesses presented in collections of testimonials of social empowerment, as single agents disclosing their experience of injustice, would achieve little on their own. In spite of the fact that Renault argues that it is only through the multiplication of private languages that social issues can properly be addressed, the simple association of the witnesses' voices through the polyphonic format of the volumes remains insufficient. The volumes as the internal public sphere of the movement demands a specific organization of motives and ideas. This organizational aspect demands a larger encompassing point of view best embodied in the figure of the external (informed) observer.

Renault, in his characterization of the struggle against injustice, comes to address the issue of those persons capable of filliping the witnesses' claims and transforming them into a first stage of restorative action. Those persons, whom he calls "political entrepreneurs" (330) fulfill a very important role most notably in the struggles of the deprived; that is, struggles against those injustices which remain invisible because of the lack of normative means to directly address them. Renault, in such cases, considers that subjects undergoing those injustices are unable to voice their claims alone. Those specific injustices *crucially need* the standpoint of the social critic in order to be uncovered. Indeed, in numerous introductions to the witnesses' texts, editors voice their role as social critics as they articulate their *duty* to publicize situations which have, up to that point, remained silenced by society either through its institutional organization or through the myth of its imagined community. As invisible

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injustices remain concealed through long periods of time by the very history of socialization, putting an end to this conspiracy of silence demands efforts which are more often than not out of reach for the disempowered subjects themselves. Renault explains the situations through two characteristics which he considers common to the apparent inconsistency of the social movements he regards as struggles of the deprived.

First, those movements are characterized by their lack of a defined social basis. As opposed to social struggles and struggles for identity, individuals undergoing invisible injustices gather in a group because of their common goal of overcoming this distressful situation. This first remark is echoed in my own findings developed from my efforts to categorize the volumes of this research's corpus. The volumes cannot be organized according to pre-existing communities, they lack this previously defined social basis. As opposed to social class or status groups, the community of witnesses does not show a preliminary homogeneity. It is their struggle against a shared type of injustice which allows group identification for witnesses. In spite of their overall different positions in society at the time the unjust situation appears, the latter gather into a community. This implies, as Renault mentions, that those struggles include both people already integrated in society and castaways (329).

The second characteristic which makes it possible to homogenize apparently irreconcilable types of struggle is their shared goal of integrating the disempowered subjects into valued social and legal relationships. By this, Renault means that "their struggles are, above all, directed at injustices correlated to rights abuses and fit in unstable or degrading social relationships" (329). Renault considers that rights and social relationships are deeply correlated, as people suffering from rights abuses are often stigmatized by comparison with 'normal' full-fledged citizens. Having ambitious goals is often not sufficient: Renault contends that collectivities whose potential strength lies in superior aspirations to freedom and capacities for radicalism, can, for lack of a social basis, nevertheless often be condemned to practical powerlessness.

Consequently, victims of socially invisible injustices appear *prima facie* disinclined to successfully struggle against injustice, notably because of the heterogeneity of the individuals involved. Nevertheless, 'struggles of the deprived' *are* actively engaged and this is where, according to Renault, the auspicious position of political entrepreneurs is at stake. Renault defines political entrepreneurs as "subjects who do not share the experience on which the struggle is based, but who command the *social and cultural capital*, as well as the political career-path which allows them to stir up the struggle" (330; emphasis mine). In an obvious

echo of Bourdieu, Renault states the necessary presence of an actor correctly positioned in the political and cultural field who will intercede in the public sphere. The political entrepreneurs will indeed intercede but their role needs to toned down:

> For a group of individuals to adhere to views of protest, they need to recognize in those views the stakes of their own experiences in such a way that views of protest need to be considered as a collective formulation and the 'leaders' of the struggle considered as spokespersons rather than simple political entrepreneurs (330).

The relevance of these remarks for editors of testimonials of social empowerment is undeniable. Indeed, editors do not act as leaders of the struggle against injustice but rather as public informants making audible the voice of the oppressed.

In publishing the personal narratives of the witnesses, the editors enact the collective effort necessary to formulate views of protest issuing from the heterogeneous members of the distressed community. As true mediators between the witnesses' discourse and that of the public sphere, the editors act as the spokespersons of the struggle of the deprived: "spokespersons of the deprived proceed in formatting and organizing views of protest, the function of which is to politically express claims articulated by specific experiences of injustice and open up an access to the political public sphere" (331). Again, the resemblance with editors is blatant: in formatting and organizing the witnesses' narratives they open up the way for those texts to reach first the audience and in a secondary effort the political sphere. As such, editors are of the necessary mechanisms triggering the whole mechanics of social empowerment, if the latter is viewed as the struggle against invisible injustices. Editors are the first to recognize witnesses as full-fledged individuals who deserve parity of participation. But they also give witnesses the necessary impetus for their recognition to spread up. Playing once again on the two senses of representation, editors work with the witnesses on their skills for symbolic representation and open up the path for their political representation.

II.2.3 Political Representation: Empowerment Indicators and Testimonial Rhetoric

Empowerment and resilience scholars have questioned the learned competences and behavioral characteristics that form the basis for an effective regained control over one's environment. The process of resilience itself testifies to a number of individual qualities and skills that need to be emphasized and developed so as to regain one's position as a member of mainstream society. The patching up of the autobiographical chimera demands more than

narrative skills and creativity, it involves social capacities. These capacities are obviously enlarged if social empowerment is at stake. As members of mainstream society, witnesses have acquired parity of participation. They need to learn communicative skills for participation, even if these skills may be supported by behavioral qualities. Resilience, thus, develops the basic competences of intellectualization, hope and a sizeable amount of creativity. Several scholars came to extend the list of the skills likely to trigger a favorable substratum for resilience. Julius Segal proposes five main lines along which to assess a subject's propensity to resilience: communication, control, conviction, clear conscience and compassion. Serge Tisseron further characterizes those basic notions. If communication obviously encourages the development of communicative skills, control would encourage initiatives in relationships. Conviction gives meaning to ordeals and clear conscience precludes instinctive drives to guilt. Compassion, finally, forges bonds with people who suffered from the same difficulties (19).

Besides these skills undeniable link with my previous concerns with the tri-partite general frame for social justice, they also lay the foundation of a description of testimonials' rhetorical format. I already referred to Kimberly Nance's approach to *testimonio* as being a persuasive literary format. I concur with her on this primary assumption. The communicative and control skills Segal and Tisseron assign to resilience offer a basic understanding of this persuasive nature. Testimonials are instances of representation in the frame of social justice, the witnesses thus display communicative skills that comply with the communicative situation in the public sphere—a situation I hereafter primarily define as a wider appropriation of Habermasian argumentation. However and more importantly, it is a situation they must be able to control. In this sense, narrators' take initiatives in the relationship they seek to create with their interlocutors. This control, I contend, expresses through the narrative threads testimonials develop. The aesthetic of impact based on the sincere disclosure of authentic experiences initiates a specific bond with their audience. On the other hand, the narrators' conviction, clear conscience and compassion instantiate an ethical environment for the discussion of social justice based on responsibility.

II.2.3.1 Persuasion and Skills for Symbolic Representation

In uncovering empowerment indicators when dealing with literary texts aimed at recognition and representation, it is necessary to address the writers' skill for narrative crafting. Narrative crafting can be a very large and unspecified notion. Kimberly Nance, basing her work on *testimonios*, sought to investigate a text's capacity of triggering social evolution. She insists

that "[i]n speaker's terms, the justification for writing and reading *testimonio* can only be found in the genre's outcome in the world, in the changes in readers' attitudes, and the actions that the texts promote" (13). She considers *testimonios* to be the cultural match of social movements—which I obviously echo in my own approach based on Renault. Despite an exterior enthusiasm, Nance questions the actual efficiency of this literary format as is expressed by her choice to formulate the titles to her chapters in the interrogative form. She nevertheless contends that social activism appears to be enacted through those literary works which display the capacity to conduct the audience in their trail towards ethical social evolution.

As a psychological basis for her rhetorical approach to those socio-cultural literary projects, Nance outlines psychologist Melvin Lerner's theory of the "justice motive" (Lerner 388). According to Nance, it coherently motivates the texts' "rhetorical project of persuasion" (16). Lerner's research on the notion of justice has led to a wide range of academic productions in the last four decades, ranging from the position of the justice motive as a motivational means promoting the pursuit of self or shared interests to its impact on negative responses to victimization. Such a fruitful, varied and sometimes contradictory range of productions led Lerner himself to contend in 2003 that social psychologists had eventually "lost" (388) the justice motive altogether. However, his first reflections on what he named the "belief in a just world" (388) undeniably remain a meaningful contribution to the understanding of human perception of justice in the social sphere. His first research was meant to call attention upon people's "desire to believe that [they] get what they deserve" (388). To put it in less simplistic and less individualistic terms, the belief in a just world corresponds to peoples' innate belief in the fair-mindedness of their world: people assume they live in a world in which situations of injustice *do not exist*. In such a conceptualization, whenever people's belief in a just world is challenged, reactions range from total denial to actual striving toward the restoration of justice. Accordingly, Nance considers this approach to the human perception of injustice as a coherent and effective means to decipher testimonials' pugnacious social discourses.

Lerner considers that the belief in a just world "influenc[es] both restorative actions and social judgments [...] as a distinct source of motivation and influence in people's lives" (388). Nance, building upon Lerner's findings, adds that "[b]elieving in a just world, it appears, is an important goal of people's everyday actions: people do justice because they desire to believe in it" (68). As she further develops this point of view, Nance contends that since "[b]elief in justice is widespread and powerfully motivating, readers are willing to act

upon it, and [...] can [therefore] *be motivated by textual depictions of injustice*" (67; emphasis mine). This implies that, whenever their just world belief comes to be challenged through direct or indirect experience, people, if motivated in the appropriate way, may be impelled to act so as to restore justice. Indeed, according to Lerner, "if it is true that a central concern in people's lives is maintaining the belief that they live in a just world, [...] it is also true that this commitment remains a powerful untapped source for generating constructive social change" (qtd. in Nance, 72).

Nance rapidly nuances these seemingly optimistic conclusions. Faced with the discomfort of being placed in direct contact with injustice, subjects may decide to take action against that injustice. But, she explains "they act on that preferred choice only if the action at hand appears to offer a reasonable hope of success and an acceptable ratio of risk-to-benefit" (69). Should these conditions not be met, subjects will have recourse to defense mechanisms by reinterpreting events "so as to believe that the victim is not actually suffering," (69) or placing their faith in alternative compensations. Consequently, despite the fact that the justice motive appears as a powerful means of textual motivation for lifeworld agency, "the sobering news is that the qualifications for socially effective texts are remarkably exigent" (17). The question is then to decide whether witnesses' narration of their experiences will lead readers into fighting to adjust the world rather than easily altering their perception of the events and persons at stake.

Nance's answer to this question is in rhetoric: it focuses on the specific narrative frame adopted by testimonials. She proposes as a solution the texts' potency for efficient depictions of both actors and events, which involve a degree of literary persuasion. As such, along with Kimberly Nance, I came to understand the rhetoric of testimonials of social empowerments as a hodgepodge of Aristotle's three rhetorical formats. The texts 'do justice' through forensic speech, which judges past actions as just or unjust; they 'do fine' through epideictic speech, which makes possible the categorization of present actions as noble or shameful; and they 'do well' through deliberative speech, which decides whether or not to undertake future actions. Testimonials thus adopt a specific way of presenting the narratives so as to steer their readers' commitment. However, if Nance talks about "tropes of persuasion" (42) in her work, I remain convinced that the idea of tropes as somehow punctual achievements in the rhetorical weaving of the texts remains too weak for testimonials. I then consider testimonials to rely on two narrative threads of persuasion that I will further define in section II.4. Nonetheless, these textual features can be significantly paralleled with behavioral and cognitive skills induced by the process of empowerment. If the aesthetic of impact relies heavily on competences through

which the narrators learn to manage the different relations of intersubjective recognition, the ethics of responsibility is solidly anchored in civic competences for political representation.

II.2.3.2 Impact and Skills for Recognition

Mc Whirter, in her typology for counselors, insists on the fact that empowerment has to be understood as assisting people "in making changes that will lead to a greater life satisfaction and adjustment, and to establish, an increased sense of control onto their lives" (222). Control is about "the capacity to influence the forces which affect one's life space for one's own benefit" (222). But before even thinking about influencing the forces of our life space for our own benefit, we must define this benefit. This can be correlated to Giddens's life chances and to Honneth's understanding of an individual's three-layered relationship to identity. Even though Giddens proposes an appealing individualized view of transformative *power to*, I remain convinced that Honneth's relations of recognition necessarily need to be taken into account, and this for three reasons. First, individuals are never completely autonomous, as human beings we live in societies, a situation which necessarily leads us to come in contact with other beings from whom we expect a certain level of recognition. Second, Honneth's three notions of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem are of the highest importance in every individual's life and world-view. If it is through consciousness that I come to be individualized, it seems unavoidable that at some point I will need to devise, through my consciousness, a meaningful relation of confidence, respect and esteem towards both my experiences and understanding of those experiences and the life-project that will be derived from them. Similarly, I expect people to recognize my life-project in probably similar relations of confidence, respect and esteem. Finally, the distress deriving from social injustices, whether one calls it *suffering* or *trauma*, is undeniably correlated with recognition. As such, all the competences referring one way or another to the construction or acceptance of one's individual identity can be considered to be skills for managing one's recognition.

As Honneth proposed three separate levels for his theory of recognition, I would similarly separate skills for recognition according to the level to which they pertain. Marc Zimmerman, in his discussion of what he came to term psychological empowerment, proposes three levels on which empowerment may have an influence for individuals.[84]

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[84] Zimmerman insists on the importance of the term. Zimmerman's intention in mentioning psychological empowerment is to differentiate his own concept from more individualistic

Zimmerman's levels can be conveniently correlated to that of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, so as to understand the importance of perceptions as "the basic elements to engage in behavior" (*Issues and Illustrations* 589). According to Zimmerman, empowerment is based on intrapersonal, interactional and behavioral components (*Further Explorations* and *Issues and Illustrations*).

The intrapersonal component mainly deals with the way in which individuals think about themselves. In the confines of this first sphere, self-perception is of tremendous importance and can thus be correlated with the notion of self-confidence arising from the first relations the individual is involved in. Judi Chamberlin has offered what seems to be a most exhaustive list of individual empowerment indicators or "qualities" (44). Quite a number of them can indeed be subsumed under this first category of intrapersonal skills for self-confidence. Chamberlin insists that individuals need to speak in their own voice (quality 6a) whenever wishing to express their need for empowerment, and as such must learn to define or redefine who they are and what they can do (quality 6b and c). Similarly, assertiveness (quality 4), the ability to express anger (quality 7), 'coming out of the closet' (quality 13) and the maximization of one's positive self-image (quality 15), all belong to competences learned in the closest relationships of family and close relatives during childhood and adolescence. By the same token, qualities 5 and 14 correspond to enhancing one's self-confidence as they insist on hope and "the feeling that one can make a difference [...] [and that] growth and change [...] is never-ending and self initiated" (44). Echoes of Cyrulnik are obvious here: imagination and creativity as extensions of hope, whenever they can enhance the individual's positive self-perception, are efficient factors for empowerment, and resilience, particularly in extreme situations.

These first intrapersonal factors mainly refer to testimonials' significant reliance on the emotional impact narratives of empowerment can trigger on their audience. The texts stand as tales of quests for self-confidence, stories of people led astray and who compellingly learned to love and confide in their selves. It is in this primary sense that they stand as social fairy tales. Remarks about the witnesses' discovery of their positive self-image and newly gained assertiveness pervade testimonials. Some of the most telling examples of this motif are presented in the *Freedom Writers' Diary*. Erin Gruwell describes the Toast for Change she organized for her students as "an epiphany" thanks to which her "apathetic students seemed to

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ones. He contends that psychological empowerment "refers to the individual level of analysis, but does not ignore ecological and cultural influences" (*Aim* 173).

transform themselves into scholars with a conscience" (79). The narrator of Diary 31 explains:

> I was offered an opportunity that not many people have, I got a second chance to change my life for the better. [...] I was always known as the person that was going to be a druggie, or get pregnant before she turned fourteen and drop out. Now I have chance to prove them wrong. (62)

Similarly, the narrator of Diary 32 understands that he could "change [his] ways" (63). Because he sought to help his community rather than to hurt it, he became a role model for the young ones and "tr[ies] [his] hardest to give a straight image on how things should be" (63). It is through their newly gained positive self-image that these students could imagine to "have a purpose in [their] class and in life"—"that purpose is to make a difference and stand up for a cause" (Diary 75 154).

On a second and larger level, Zimmerman proposes an interactional component as part of the larger process of psychological empowerment. This interactional component can be correlated to Honneth's approach to self-respect in the sense that it represents the individual's recognition as a rightful member of the community of citizens and, as such, deserving recognition for their personal values and critical judgments. Indeed, Zimmerman considers that the interactional component requires the disempowered subject to display a deeper critical awareness and to develop a deeper understanding of norms and values.[85] Chamberlin's quality 6 voices the exact same concern for "learning to think critically" (44), to which she adds other correlated qualities such as the necessity to understand that people have rights (quality 9), and that people should have a range of options (of action) from which to choose (quality 3). This means that individuals need to understand that civil rights are part of their self-definition as individual subjects, and are as such inalienable.

When Chamberlin insists on the importance of range of options, she specifies that choices should be larger than either/or and yes/no structures. This is obviously in accordance with the view of people's own understanding of values and norms, which according to each individual will correspond to specific understandings based on perceptions. But the process is not limited to this individual understanding of environmental social norms and values. In this interactional space, the point is also "to change other's perception of [our] competency and capacity to act" (Chamberlin 44; quality 12). Once again, if this is to be transposed to a

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[85] Similarly Jo Rowlands and Julian Rapaport respectively propose "critical consciousness" (103), and "critical awareness" (*Narrative* 797) as determining factors.

rhetorical level, the notion of persuasion will necessarily come to mind. The very purpose of testimonials is to convince readers to act; whether by reassuring similarly disempowered people on their capability to make a difference, or by inspiring indignant reactions in the larger audience. By showing self-respect—a form of conviction about their values and judgments—witnesses again ensure the impact those values and judgments may achieve on readers. More often than not, witnesses express the fact that disclosing their experience is akin to uncovering the truth. It is thus the impact of truth they seek to secure, which is undeniably enhanced by the messengers' respect for the values they disclose.

It is again possible to find beautiful examples of this respect for positive values in the Freedom Writers' Diary. The narrator of Diary 75 realizes that his position as a member of the majority further enhances his power to convey his classroom message:

> [The White Freedom Riders] wanted to fight for others who didn't have the same privileges or rights as [they] did, which made me realize that's been my role for the last two years. Since I'm white and my parents make a lot of money; I probably could have gotten out of Ms. G's class […]. By making the choice to stay […], I've forced myself to fit the cause. People gave those riders a chance to get off the bus, and they didn't, and I'm going to face intolerance head-on as well. (154)

It is, indeed, in emulating other figures of social movements for tolerance that the Freedom Writers could understand the actual potential "to truly be catalysts for change" (Diary 74 152). As student of Diary 74 cleverly remarks, "imagine if there were 150 Rosa Parks standing up for tolerance, what a difference we would make" (153).

Zimmerman's third level is that of the behavioral component actualized in the concrete course of action the subject will display when empowered. In the same way as Honneth associates self-esteem with one's position in the labor-market, with one's status in society, the behavioral component of empowerment governs individuals' motivation to act, as well as their capability to manage stress and to adapt to situations (Zimmerman, *Issues and Illustrations* 590). I contend that motivation, stress management, adaptation capability and self-esteem need to be extended to one's status in society in order to include cultural position as well. Chamberlin proposes two qualities which are relevant to this specific level: the necessity of feeling part of a group (quality 8) and effecting change in one's life and community (quality 10). Note that in the case of testimonials of social empowerment, the behavioral level in effect corresponds to the publishing of the collections. As testimonials of social empowerment are published in collective formats, the witnesses effectively enact the important step of feeling part of a group, thereby overcoming the loneliness of their suffering.

But by way of that same gesture, they also effect change in their lives accepting their position as witnesses—repositories of an admonition—and effect (or at least hope to effect) change in their communities. Needless to say, the notion of impact is here of utmost importance. The impact the texts achieve in the sense of the behavioral component is that of activism.

II.2.3.3 Responsibility and Skills for Political Representation

However, empowerment, as Zimmerman put it, is not limited to its individual (sometimes individualistic) level. Citizenship, active participation in the political, also appears to be part of the deeper concerns of all the actors engaged in the process of testimonials of social empowerment. For changing society through struggles for recognition will necessarily imply political argumentation and the implementation of different norms. By the same token, testimonials activate skills for political representation. On the level of symbolic representation, those competences mainly engage the narrative thread of the ethics of responsibility. Testifying demands a responsible relationship to the truth disclosed as well as towards other witnesses. In a secondary effort, the narrators seek to responsibilize their readers. On the part of the witnesses, political representation is expressed through their newly acquired access to decision-making processes. This also demands a significant level of responsibility.

Most empowerment scholars (Rowlands, Zimmerman, Rapaport, Walters *et al.*) insist that empowerment is in effect expressed by an awareness and participation in decision-making processes. For Rowlands, active participation goes hand in hand with a successfully constructed self-esteem: subjects need to understand that they are able and entitled to take part into the existing decision-making processes (103). Similarly, the remaining qualities of Chamberlin's paradigm correspond to this issue: having decision-making power (quality 1), having access to information and resources (quality 2); and learning skills that the individual defines as important (quality 11). Representation, in the paradigm of empowerment, effectively comprises participation in decision-making processes. However, it is not any sort of participation. It has to be a form of participation for which subjects have been meticulously prepared; their participation is well-informed (since they had a previous access to resources and information) *and* knowledgeable, in the sense that they are familiar with the system inherent to decision-making processes. These are indeed the conditions for a responsible participation.

Education and knowledge are recurring concepts in the vocabulary of testimonials of social empowerment. Most witnesses feel the urge to *educate* their audience on issues of

social injustice. Most citizens are ill-informed, if at all, about the matters developed in the volumes. It is this *educational mission* which lies at the heart of the second part of the ethics of responsibility and the expansion of empowerment. For Rowlands, expanding empowerment resides in the subjects' understanding that empowerment necessarily comprises a collective aspect: it is the instant "[when] individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact than each would have possessed alone" (103). This is the very idea that witnesses wish to pass on through their responsibilizing gesture. By the same token, Walters *et al.* clearly specify that participation is one of the most determining competences for empowered subjects to properly implement change. Participation is to be understood as a means to decrease alienation (8) and to enhance citizen and democratic participation (19).

Now, the question remains how such participation can be secured. Ann Ferguson addresses this question by creating a very interesting bridge between the notion of empowerment and the political potential of social movements. She considers that "[s]ocial movements' challenge to social injustice is not simply conceived of as a means to eliminate the injustice in the future, but as valuable for its own sake because it will also be a process of empowerment of individuals and groups who engage in the movement for social justice" (85). To Renault's two dynamics of the normative and the practical, Ferguson adds interesting reflections on rallying processes. According to Ferguson, the political process at stake is that of 'consciousness-raising' (93). The process of consciousness-raising, or awareness-raising, was popularized by Feminist movements in the United States in the 1960s. Ferguson defines it as follows:

> [It is] a participatory process of individuals sharing their life experiences with others in a regular group process. This in turn aims to create the emotional space for individuals to challenge low self-esteem, fear, misplaced hostility, and other issues dealing with internalized oppression. In this process, they can voice their own life experiences in a context where they learn to apply analytic tools and concepts to understand themselves as structured by oppressive structures and having a collective interest in challenging them (86).

Ferguson contends that the system of consciousness-raising engenders a sort of "power with," (93) the formation of a group based on the common interest to focus the attention of a wider community, or a whole society, on the cause or condition the witnesses believe require redress or remedy.

Judith Herman concurs with this view: "though the methods of consciousness raising were analogous to those of psychotherapy, their purpose was to effect social rather than

individual change" (29). Herman explains that a feminist understanding of sexual assault forced victims to breach the barrier of privacy so as to implement social change. Testimonials of social empowerment function according to the same structure, though they replace talking by writing. The polyphonic format makes it possible to create participation in a group dynamics which enhances the witnesses' feeling of responsibility, a responsibility on which they seek to raise awareness thanks to the publishing of their collections and their public disclosure.

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The choice of the narrative format and the significant reliance on the impact of emotional disclosure and the responsibilities it entails can thus be explained by complex psychological factors. Testimonials of social empowerment, as true products of their time, rely on the seemingly inexhaustible cultural source of trauma and suffering as floating signifiers. Far from considering them as completely void shells, the narrators skillfully appropriate the psychological implications of their reception by the audience. This tells of testimonials' fundamental relation with rhetoric as the art of persuasion. The art of the oratory appears to experience a potent return on the cultural scene in the testimonial niche. Yet, because of their primary social purpose, narrators also need to practice their art in the public sphere of political debates. At its best, this art expresses through instances of deliberative democracy, the paradigmatic mode of governance that enables citizens to exercise control over the polity without infringing the rights of their fellow citizens

II.3 Exercising Control without Infringing on the Rights of Other

> "This game is stupid: I'm not a peanut! And what the hell does world peace have to do with peanuts? All these thoughts rolled through my mind as I tried to piece together a puzzle consisting of people and Planters. [...] The more I though about this, the more the concept overwhelmed me. I began to analyze and reflect on my life, my many encounters with injustice and discrimination. It sounds strange, somewhat on the line between irony and absurdity, to think that people would rather label and judge something as significant as each other but completely bypass a peanut. [...] World peace is only a dream because people won't allow themselves and others around them to simply be peanuts. We won't allow the color of a man's heart to be the color of his skin, the premise of his beliefs, and his self-worth. We won't allow him to be a peanut, therefore we won't allow ourselves to come to live in harmony."
>
> — Diary 18, *The Freedom Writers' Diary*

Empowerment resides mainly in the subject's acquisition of a sense of control over its environment. Despite its numerous definitions, and probably because of its usual connotations, this notion of control, always retains positivistic and solidaristic overtones. Subjects, in gaining or re-gaining agency, do not foster an exclusively individualistic development. Empowerment in both its acquisition and its application is to be understood as an interactive and solidarity-minded process. In its first stages, the presence of a professional or expert-like figure is often required. This professional then engages in a dialogical exchange with the subject in order to help the subject reveal its inherent empowering features. Similarly, when subjects have become aware of their capacity to control their own environment, their new status as professionals enjoins them to exercise this renewed control in such a way as not to infringe on the agency of others. This third step in McWhirter's definition of empowerment serves as the actual framework in which testimonials' potential for social empowerment can be expressed. For indeed, when subjects become empowered, they (re)create a more meaningful and responsible relationship with their community. To be empowered, in all possible applications, means to be a *competent* social agent as well as to realize that this competence is consequential. Being empowered, in its social ramifications, means that the subject's newly gained competences are *meaningful:* they have an *impact* and entail *responsibility*.

It is because of the importance of this third step in testimonials' actual functioning that the critic's interest should be mainly centered on their social rather than their individual significance. The texts' essence lies in their social potential and in what the narrators and editors seek to achieve in publishing their collections. This interest for the social lies in the

first place in the form of the volumes themselves. Indeed, the fact that testimonials of social empowerment endorse a polyphonic format testifies to their plainly dialogical, indeed interactive, overtones. It is through the dialogue created by collecting narratives that the process of empowerment can take on its real significance for both the narrators and the editors. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that the texts' primary purpose is to trigger that same empowerment in their audience. Accordingly, the critical approach to testimonials takes the form of an analysis of the rhetorical strategies the texts display so as to *persuade* their readers to enter into the process of empowerment. This section aims to analyze how newly empowered subjects manage to exercise their agency in entering the national dialogue about justice without infringing on the agency of the other participants.

II.3.1 Pragmatics and Ethics: Two Textual Hypotheses

In the previous sections, the cultural, literary, sociological, psychological and even political background against which the renewed branch of testimonial literature came to gain success in contemporary American culture was approached. Though testimonials of social empowerment can be deemed part of the large genre of testimonies, a genre greatly favored by scholars over time, these works present a series of highly specific pragmatic and rhetorical characteristics. A critical approach is therefore required, according to a method sensitive to the cultural and political moment of the texts' production. The present research seeks to demonstrate how witnesses and editors manage to exert an actual influence on debates about the social injustices they seek to uncover. This section, thus, supports two particular hypotheses about the texts' functioning. These two hypotheses, whose specifics I delineate below, have a procedural value. In this matter, we need not investigate, nor even really question, the texts' actual effectiveness (this would demand a thorough sociological investigation of the texts' reception), but rather try and understand which pragmatic and rhetorical techniques are deployed by both narrators and editors so as to achieve the desired effects on the audience. Those techniques correspond to the texts' potential for social empowerment since, through their specific narrative weaving, witnesses manage to enter the national dialogue over issues of universal justice as empowered social agents.

Just as Emmanuel Renault's discussion of the practical and normative dynamics of social movements sketches out a comprehensive analysis of their functioning, my critical approach to testimonials uncovers the rhetorical procedures governing their empowering activity, indeed similar to that of social movements. Renault saw in practical and normative dynamics, which pervade the activities of social movements, the expression of both their

critical and creative aspects (Renault, *Injustice* 109). Similarly, I see in testimonials' aesthetic of impact and in their ethics of responsibility two rhetorical structures for the narrator's newly gained power to be fully voiced. This section is aimed at describing the theoretical core in which these narrative threads for social empowerment can be framed. I propose two hypotheses as the practical and normative foundation on which narrators can base the narrative weaving of their first-hand experience of injustice.

The two hypotheses on which the present discussion is based are supported by pragmatic considerations on the one hand and a theory of ethics on the other. In the previous sections, most notably in the discussion of power and empowerment, agency and the agent were introduced as key notions. Testimonials' power lies in their possible influence over public opinions and debates, and must consequently be appraised as actual social agency. Hence, pragmatics surfaces as a most relevant approach to reconcile agency with the use of linguistic, in fact literary, expression. Drawing on conventional pragmatic concerns, the first hypothesis concerns the possible representation of testimonials as specific speech acts.

The notion of speech act conveniently sums up Renault's practical dynamic. According to Renault's theory, the agent engaged in the practical dynamic of social movements perceives a perturbation, which leads them to voice a protest and to act. Similarly, speech acts can easily be vested with what, by reference to J. L. Austin's terminology, we might call the illocutionary force of protest, sparked off when the agent perceives a perturbation. Likewise, this "illocutionary force" (Austin 98) is more often coupled with a perlocutionary act—"what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something" (Austin 109; emphasis in the original)—meant at *persuading* the receiver to act.[86] I will here rely on Jürgen Habermas's theory so as to categorize testimonials of social empowerment as a specific branch of speech acts focusing on both their illocutionary and their perlocutionary levels. Habermas's theory of communicative action provides a cogent support for the approach to testimonials as communicative forms of social action. Indeed, Habermas understands communicative action as action oriented towards reaching understanding as well as creating and comforting the social bond. Communicative action is as such a fertile ground for empowerment. Yet, one could imagine communicative action to take several forms. We must therefore foreground the texts' use of an aesthetic of impact and an ethics of

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[86] Austin in his first description of perlocutionary acts lists persuasion as an example of its possible achievements.

responsibility as corresponding respectively to Habermas's bonding and binding effects of speech acts.

Both the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility have to be understood as narrative weaving threads through which communicative action is carried out; the first one roughly corresponds to the speech act's illocutionary force and the other to their perlocutionary force. Though Habermas's theory serves as a firm basis in this critical description of the texts, my understanding of perlocution moves away from his primary presentation of speech acts oriented towards reaching understanding. Despite the fact that Habermas rejects perlocution (and the implications it shares with the rhetorical use of language)—as it may be viewed as relying excessively on coincidence and contingence, I consider this level of speech acts as crucial as illocution for testimonials. Communicative action, as action oriented towards reaching understanding about a shared environment here takes the form of a complex rhetorical/pragmatic interweaving of impact and responsibilization in an effort of speakers to persuade of the soundness of their course of action.

The second hypothesis concerns the situation of persuasion proper. If testimonials of social empowerment can indeed be considered as instances of communicative action, that is speech acts oriented towards reaching understanding, the situation within which understanding needs to be reached remains to be defined. Habermas aims at proposing communicative action as a generalized model for agents to rationally coordinate their plan of action. He therefore only provides general definitions of the notion of a common situation. In the case of testimonials of social empowerment, this common situation corresponds to discussions about social justice.[87] Grounded on questions that originate in (sometimes boisterous) social debates, these discussions are at the very heart of the creation of social movements. If, as I intend to demonstrate, the mechanics of testimonials of social empowerment is akin to that of social movements, then the second hypothesis about testimonials would run as follows: how can testimonials as instances of communicative action *factually have* an influence in social debates over issues of justice? Social discussions that aim at reaching understanding and/or agreement about questions of justice and the good life correspond to the domain of ethics. The texts thus engage in a process akin to Renault's normative dynamics. Agents identify social implications, allocate responsibilities and plan

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[87] The plural of the term discussion is here aimed at referring to a plurality of content as well as a plurality of political and cultural stages for debate.

transformations. These questions, in the governing structures of our current societies correspond to ethical debates on the level of deliberative democracy. Once more, Habermas's theory allows for an approach to ethics in accordance with his understanding of speech acts and agency. Habermas's discourse ethics serves as a convincing basis to support this second hypothesis. This is even more obvious as, from his very first formulation of the basic principles of discourse ethics, Habermas insists on the procedural nature of his theory. On this ground, discourse ethics conveniently serves the purpose of explaining the process through which testimonials can indeed manage to influence social debates.

Though Habermas (in collaboration with Apel) was the first to advance the basic principles of discourse ethics, it is one of his disciples' reformulation of the theory I mean to develop. Indeed, Seyla Benhabib's re-appropriation of Habermas's primary conception and her effort to re-contextualize it in our modern multicultural society are more appropriate to the present argument. It is discourse ethics as a pool of bargaining processes and forms of argumentation that will serve the purpose of the second hypothesis. The description of Benhabib's reformulation of Habermas's (U) and (D) principles will provide an explanation for the way in which testimonials manage to create within the scope of their volumes the proper environment for social debates to unfold. Benhabib's concept of unofficial public spheres presents an undeniably commodious way of labeling this environment. Testimonials of social empowerment create within their volumes unofficial public spheres in which new public opinions can be formed by means of instances of discourse ethics.

II.3.1.1 Testimonials as Speech Acts: Habermas's Model of Communicative Action

The choice to approach literature and culture as specific instances of speech acts is symptomatic of the twentieth-century linguistic turn in academia and research. Habermas's theory of speech acts differs, however, from what has now become the mainstream approach to this matter. Most contemporary scholars have an interest in performativity: they favor the countercultural message speakers express thanks to the performance of speech acts *per se*, their actual reception notwithstanding. Habermas, on the contrary, suggests that speech acts' illocutionary force has a solidaristic interactive potential. As opposed to the recurrent understanding of cultural speech acts as socially subversive performativity, I wish to emulate Habermas in investigating their actual potential for creating the social bond.

In the discussion of testimonials of social empowerment as speech acts, any possible provocative performative intent (whether it is described as an admonition, a warning or otherwise) may be less significant than the effect speech acts produce in creating a specific

human and social bond and in securing the witnesses' sense of competence and responsibility as social agents. The point is not so much the performance of the action than its socializing or (re)uniting effect. In this sense, testimonial speech acts implement the core efforts of the practical dynamics of social movements. Though this dynamics is based on the agent's perception of a perturbation and their effort to voice a protest, its final goal is action. Without the social bond, which is both necessary for witnesses to realize their capacities as social agents and for citizens to act together, agents would be stranded on the barren level of protest only.

Habermas defines his concept of communicative action in opposition to other forms of action (strategic, normatively regulated and dramaturgical—*Communicative* 1:85-95): communicative action is characterized as action oriented towards reaching understanding. More specifically, "the actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement" (Habermas, *Communicative* 1:86). On this basis, communicative action can be described as a way of mastering situations that presents two different aspects: a teleological one, in the sense that actors seek to implement a specific plan, and a communicative one, in the sense that the implementation of the plan is possible only through the actors' agreement or consensus over a shared interpretation of the situation. Habermas then contends that:

> [one] shall speak of *communicative* action whenever the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding. In communicative action participants are not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions. (*Communicative* 1:286)

Witnesses in testimonials of social empowerment seek to enter such a mode of action by sharing (*i.e.* accepting to publish and circulate) their narratives. Before even thinking about harmonizing possible plans of actions, the witnesses, in disclosing their perspectives on undocumented forms of social injustices, purpose to reach an understanding, a common definition, of their living situation as being indeed instances of injustice.[88] Their first-person

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[88] One directly realizes the possibly damaging effects such a hankering after sincere understanding may produce. One can, obviously, never be sure that the understanding reached through communicative action will be sincere. Testimonials may not be considered immune to bad faith. However, it seems that these negative outcomes of pragmatics, as is explicit in

narratives are aimed at pursuing universal justice in harmonizing their societies' plan of action on the basis of a common definition of injustice. This common definition, they contend, can only be reached thanks to the act of narrating individual experiences. Their narrative speech acts are intended to share a situational knowledge they can only express through their personal perspectives.

This specific process relies on what Habermas considers to be the binding/bonding force of speech acts, which in turn is correlated to our communicative capacity to reach understanding. Habermas bases his depiction of action oriented towards reaching understanding on his theory of universal, or formal, pragmatics.[89] In articles preliminary to his development of the theory of communicative action, Habermas established the necessity to devise a universal pragmatics in an effort to identify or reconstruct the system of rules a competent agent must follow in order to communicate. As opposed to Chomsky with his deep grammar, Habermas considers that competent speakers do not display uniquely linguistic competences but pragmatic ones as well. Language does not serve the sole purpose of conveying information, it also allows for the establishing of social relationships; "[f]or then we are aiming at reconstructing the system of rules by means of which we generate contexts where we can reach a mutual understanding about objects (and states of affair)" (*Preliminary Studies* 68).

Pragmatic concerns are of profound significance since speakers produce utterances in social contexts, act with regard to particular listeners, and hope to achieve particular outcomes: "therefore, the concern of universal pragmatics is the ability, not just to formulate meaningful sentences, but rather to engage others in interaction, drawing on an awareness of the cultural and physical environment within which they act in order to begin communication and to repair [potential] breakdowns" (Edgar 163). Because Habermas sees communication as an *intrinsically interactive* process, grammar rules are no longer sufficient to provide a

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Austin's or Searle's felicity conditions and Grice's maxims for the cooperative principle, have been optimistically considered side effects the theoretical frame has to make do with. Of course, for a speech act to be felicitous and for cooperation to be achieved sincerity is essential, and yet we all know that people do lie.

[89] In what follows, I use 'communicative action' and 'action oriented towards reaching understanding' interchangeably. From Habermas's definition, one directly understands that the two expressions are synonyms.

complete characterization of communicative competence.[90] This idea of basing the framework of communicative action on the actual pragmatic *competences* of speakers already reveals chief concerns for the empowerment of agents. Significantly, and because they produce communicative speech acts, it is as *competent* speakers that witnesses engage in communication as soon as they start disclosing their personal experience through their narratives. Witnesses, when they start telling their story, already have mastered (or rediscovered their mastery of) the competence necessary to construct "universal conditions of possible mutual understanding" (Habermas, *Pragmatics* 21). Consequently, witnesses have the necessary competence to control (*i.e.* have an influence on) the situation of communication oriented towards mutual understanding; this is the same competence that permits a capable management of social interactions, the competence that characterizes social agents.

Thanks to this effort to devise some level of universal competence, Habermas's formal pragmatics permits to also *recognize reasonable* (and responsible) *agents*. Habermas is undoubtedly one of the last defenders of reason in its format inherited from the Enlightenment. He considers rationality to be at the very heart of sociological concerns. Habermas contends that sociology arose as the science of bourgeois society, a society whose basic conceptions were influenced by the growth of rationality in the modern lifeworld. In the same way, in their effort to explain the evolution from community to society, sociologists came to the conclusion that "understanding rational orientations of action became the reference point for understanding all action orientations" (Habermas, *Communicative* 1:5). It is thus in an effort to reconstruct rationality that Habermas devised his theory of communicative action as well as his formal pragmatics. Agents who act communicatively, who display the competence of universal pragmatics, act reasonably.

Habermas's primary definition of rationality lies in the susceptibility of linguistic utterances to being questioned and justified. For Habermas, rationality corresponds to an utterance's susceptibility to being criticized and grounded. It can therefore best be expressed through argumentation: "the theory of argumentation thereby takes on a special significance; to it falls the task of reconstructing the formal-pragmatic presuppositions and conditions of an

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[90]Andrew Edgar paraphrases Habermas's interactive view of communication as follows: "communication can be understood as a process in which two or more people come to share a view of the world, or at the very least to recognize aspects of a common world about which they disagree" (164).

explicitly rational behavior" (*Communicative* 1:2). His appeal to argumentation is based on the conviction that actors always act and speakers always communicate with reasons and that these reasons can be linguistically retrieved and formulated (*i.e.* through argumentation and arguments) if the agents' actions, or the speakers' utterances are vindicated. Indeed, Habermas argues that "in context of communicative action, we call someone rational [...] if he is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in the light of legitimate expectations" (*Communicative* 1:15).

Consequently, Habermas's formal pragmatics and his preliminary approach to communicative action rest on the conception of subjects grounding their actions in reasons that can be vindicated and redeemed when necessary.[91] Inasmuch as he is grounding his theory on reason and inasmuch as he is striving to devise a universal pragmatics, Habermas proposes only a specific number of "legitimate expectations" (*Communicative* 1:38) that a speaker can appeal to when their speech acts need justification. In a concept reminiscent of Austin's and Searle's felicity conditions, Habermas calls those legitimate expectations, validity claims, and explains that "a validity claim is equivalent to the assertion that the conditions for the validity of an utterance are fulfilled;" (*Communicative* 1:38) only thus is the speech act grounded in good or acceptable, indeed valid, reasons. Habermas then contends that "anyone acting communicatively must, in performing any speech act, raise universal validity claims and suppose that they can be vindicated" (*Pragmatics* 22). In the first stages of his theory, Habermas proposes four validity claims for any speech act that is produced:

- Meaning (or the well-formedness of the utterance): what is said must be meaningful and formulated in an idiomatic way.
- Truth: the utterance will be based on a shared understanding of the world (whether the objective, social or individual world).
- Rightness: the speaker has a right to utter the speech act.
- Truthfulness (or sincerity): the speaker utters the speech act in a sincere way.

Again, the interactive undertones of Habermas's theory are conspicuous; linguistic competence is not enough: for agents to act communicatively, they must also be able to

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[91] Habermas again proposes an inherently interactive conception of language and communication as vindicating or redeeming the reasons that ground speech or action can only be achieved in dialogical situations; thus, Habermas's theory necessarily supposes at least two speaking subjects.

meaningfully manage interpersonal relationships. The agents must necessarily be aware of their social position so as to question their right to producing specific speech acts and they must also display a responsible, reasonable, relation to both the objective world and their own convictions and course of action. Forasmuch as an agent seeks to act communicatively, they will produce a speech act that is meaningful, true (*i.e.* that displays a shared understanding of the world), for which they have a right as a specific social agent and that sincerely corresponds to their understanding and course of action. Reasonable agents are, then, agents who successfully raise all four validity claims whenever uttering a specific speech act and who can redeem them if asked to.

Similarly, Habermas uses these validity claims so as to propose a definition of the process of reaching understanding which is at the core of communicative action: "[r]eaching an understanding functions as a mechanism for coordinating actions only through the participants in interaction coming to an agreement concerning the claimed validity of their utterances, that is, through intersubjectively recognizing the validity claims they reciprocally raise" (*Communicative* 1:99). Agents entering communicative action will act reasonably whenever uttering a speech act in the hope to reach an understanding that will allow for the coordination of their actions. Communicative action is then characteristic of agents mobilizing their rationality potential: "[t]hus the speaker claims truth for statements or existential presuppositions, rightness for legitimately regulated actions and their normative context, and truthfulness or sincerity for the manifestation of subjective experiences" (*Communicative* 1:98-99).

Habermas's inclusion of rationality in the process of communicative action presents decisively meaningful implications when applied to testimonials of social empowerment. To the extent that empowerment means gaining (a renewed) control over one's environment, communicative action as rational action oriented towards reaching understanding and coordinating action plans stands for a promising procedure for reaching empowerment. Witnesses, if they understand their narratives to be instances of communicative action, can reassert their status as competent reasonable social agents. Indeed, they will display the communicative competence subsumed under the label of universal pragmatics *and* mobilize their rationality potential in proposing speech acts for which they will raise all necessary validity claims. Even more so, their use of instances of communicative action serves to recreate or secure a preexisting social bond, which is crucial to their capability to exert control without infringing the rights of others, as well as to the potentiality for empowerment to expand.

With this consideration in mind, one can again refer to Habermas's position on argumentation. Habermas considers that humans' rationality potential refers to the various existing kinds of argumentation as "possibilities of continuing communicative action with reflective means" (*Communicative* 1:10). Habermas hence devises a conception of communicative rationality:

> This concept [...] carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld. (*Communicative* 1:10)

Hence, communicative action based on communicative rationality allows for both the individual and social might of empowerment to unfold; it makes it possible to overcome subjective views and to assure the unity of the intersubjective lifeworld.

In the initial stages of his argument, Habermas has been elucidating the procedure of communicative action on the part of the speaker only, focusing on illocutionary forces rather than on results proper. However, since the main objective of his theory of action is to reinforce the intersubjectivity (*i.e.* unity) of the lifeworld, the point of view of the receiver needs to be addressed. Even so, it is through validity claims as well that the socializing potentiality of speech acts can be characterized: "[o]wing to the fact that the communication oriented towards reaching understanding has a validity basis, a speaker can persuade a hearer to accept a speech act offer by guaranteeing that he will redeem a criticizable validity claim" (*Discourse* 64). Habermas adds that "[i]n so doing [the speaker] creates a binding/bonding effect between speaker and hearer that makes the continuation of their interaction possible" (*Discourse* 64). Habermas insists that it is not the validity claim itself that is binding/bonding but the act of guaranteeing.

A speaker, when uttering a speech act, hopes for its illocutionary force to be accepted; especially in the case of communicative action as the point is to reach understanding. Habermas explains:

> Thus a speaker owes the binding (or bonding [...]) force of his illocutionary act not to the validity of what is said but to the *coordinating effect* of the warranty that he offers: namely to redeem, if necessary, the validity claim raised with his speech act. In all cases in which the illocutionary role expresses not a power claim but a validity claim, the place of the empirically motivating force of sanctions (contingently linked with

speech acts) is taken by the *rationally motivating force* of accepting a speaker's guarantee for securing claims to validity. (*Communicative* 1:302; emphasis mine)

It is the guarantee that the speaker offers which, through its coordinating effect, on the one hand secures the social bond and on the other effects the coordination of action plans. Because of this guarantee, which acts as it were a rationally motivating force, a speaker may, with reasons, persuade the receiver to accept the offer contained in her speech act.

On Habermas's account, speech acts when realized communicatively seem to display a binding/bonding potential, and seem as well to always appear in communicative situations in which speakers seek to reach understanding. He nevertheless mentions the possibility for strategic action to also be implemented through linguistic means. How, then, should receivers deal with situations in which understanding is not the actual goal, how can they identify and again react to situations in which the speaker might not be sincerely seeking social bonding but rather domination? To put it differently, when faced with a speech act offer, what are the receiver's conceivable options of answer? How can they be sure of the speaker's actual intentions? Can they simply decide to reject the offer? This question is of paramount importance for narrators of testimonials as they might not necessarily be able to directly behold the response to their speech acts. Habermas, here, proposes a somehow surprising answer:

> [t]he binding effect of illocutionary forces comes about, ironically through the fact that participants can say 'no' to speech-act offers. The critical character of this saying 'no' distinguishes taking a position in this way from a reaction solely based on caprice. A hearer can be bound by speech-act offers because he is not permitted arbitrarily to refuse them but only to say 'no' to them, that is, to reject them for reasons. (*Communicative* 2:74)

Consequently, speech acts display their binding/bonding force both towards the speaker, in the sense that they guarantee their capacity, if necessary, to redeem their validity claims, and towards the receiver, in the sense that their yes/no positioning has to be grounded in reasons as well. This last step in the procedure closes the loop of communicative action. In the framework of actions oriented towards reaching understanding, it is the guarantee of both speakers and receivers to agree to enter into a communicative exchange about their motivating reasons that ensures intersubjectivity and (ultimately) cooperation.

This yes/no positioning is, obviously, decisive in whether or not the offer of a communicative speech act has been successful. First because the possibility, for the receiver, to say no will allow for distinguishing communicative action from other forms of teleological

actions. Indeed, Habermas explains that not all illocutionary acts can constitute communicative action, the speaker has to connect criticizable validity claims with their act. However,

> [i]n other cases, when a speaker is pursuing undeclared ends with perlocutionary acts—ends on which the hearer can take no position at all—or when a speaker is pursuing illocutionary aims on which hearers cannot take a grounded position—as in relation to imperatives—the potential for the binding (or bonding) force of good reasons—a potential which is always contained in linguistic communication—remains unexploited. (*Communicative* 1:305)

In other words, Habermas argues that linguistic communication stands for an untapped source of cooperation but that it can only be successful when a speech act offer is based on criticizable validity claims and thus can be followed by a 'no'.

Though Habermas's rejection of imperatives appears fairly sensible, his outright dismissal of perlocution remains less consistent, and this for three reasons. First, the ends the speaker expresses with the perlocutionary force of their speech act are not necessarily strategic and domineering. One could easily imagine a speaker's perlocution to correspond to the intention of coordinating plans of action, though Habermas would probably refute this position as a case of a badly formulated communicative action. Second, Habermas's arbitrary separation between speech acts motivated by illocutions and speech acts motivated by perlocutions counters conventional pragmatics. Austin had, indeed, devised all three levels of locution (the linguistic form of the speech act), illocution (the force of the speech act), and perlocution (the effects of the speech act) as applicable to *all* performative speech acts. Searle later extended this scope to all possible speech acts, a theoretical move Habermas definitely endorses. This being said, perlocution remains a speech act's *intended* effect, on which the speaker does not actually have a say. Habermas as a rationalist distrusts contingence, and thus had to find a way out. Third, even if according to Habermas illocution only offers the possibility to say no, its eventual purpose is nonetheless to trigger a 'yes'. As Habermas, himself argues, "we can say of a speech act that it is successful if the *intended* relationship between a speaker and a hearer is brought about" (*Universal* 156; emphasis in the original). Thus, the actual possibility of totally separating speech acts moved by perlocution from speech acts moved by illocution appears highly dubious. Communicative action eventually pursues persuasion; that is the achievement of specific, indeed rational, ends on the part of the speaker.

Even if the possibility to say 'no' denotes the utterly non-coercive potential of communicative action, its essence remains to persuade the receiver to accept speech acts offers. Affirmative responses to speech act represent instances of communicatively achieved rational agreement, the very basis of socialization. Habermas contends that:

> [W]ith his 'yes' the speaker accepts a speech-act offer and grounds an agreement; this agreement concerns the *content of the utterance*, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, certain *guarantees immanent to speech acts* and certain *obligations relevant to the sequel of interaction*. [...] Illocutionary success is relevant to the interaction inasmuch as it establishes between speaker and hearer an interpersonal relation that is effective for coordination, that orders scopes of action and sequences of interaction, and that opens up to the hearer possible points of connection by way of general alternatives for action. (*Communicative* 1:296; emphasis in the original)

It is as such a process of communicatively achieved rational agreement that testimonials of social empowerment should be understood. They seek their readers' agreement on the content of their narratives, both in the sense of legitimizing their account (*i.e.* accepting the guarantees immanent to the speech act) and in the sense of recognizing injustice. But they also know that in agreeing with the content of their story, their readers accept the obligations that are relevant to the sequel of action: that is, endorsing the struggle against this injustice. Testimonials' position in the contemporary cultural and public sphere allows for the creation of fruitful environments for these specific speech acts to unfold. The action plans the witnesses seek to coordinate when disclosing their personal experience of injustice is that of a common fight against those injustices. Once they manage to reach such an agreement, it is as social agents united with their community by the might of communicative action that they can think of new courses of action to implement.

As mentioned above, my point is to propose a procedural approach to the format of testimonials of social empowerment. Though testimonials are literary works and could, as such, be analyzed from a number of textual points of view, I decided to privilege the communicative or pragmatic aspect of their functioning. Testimonials as literary speech acts seek to achieve a purpose of warning and admonition in a two-phase procedure based on persuasion and education. Witnesses in disclosing their personal experience intend to inform on a specific situation but this implies informing in an urgent way; that is, they purpose to persuade the audience into calling their predicament a situation of social injustice, and as such susceptible of amendment. This first phase corresponds to what I call the aesthetic of impact. The witnesses seek persuasion through their use of poignant images, terms, and first-hand

experiences, which are supported by a powerful reliance upon concepts of sincerity and authenticity. Once the audience has been persuaded, the witnesses; in a secondary phase, include in their texts educational undertones. It is those educational or pedagogical remarks that I call the testimonials' ethics of responsibility. In momentous dialogical asides, the witnesses on the one hand realize their own responsibilities in either perpetuating or defusing the situation of injustice, and on the other, set their sights on bestowing those same responsibilities to readers.

Intriguingly, it is thanks to a detour into translation that the combination potential of communicative action with testimonials can be unleashed. Thomas McCarthy, the translator of the 1984 edition of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, proposed as a translation for the *bindungseffekt* of speech act, their "binding/bonding" effect (278). The term *bindung* in German conveniently offers both meanings of binding and bonding, indeed. Yet, the necessity for the English translator to use both words makes it possible to insist on the twofold textual functioning of testimonials as communicative speech acts. The binding effect corresponds to the texts' ethics of responsibility, while their bonding power would be the equivalent of their impact-based aesthetic. The ethics of responsibility in its efforts to responsibilize, leads the audience to adopt a binding attitude, namely that of "involving an obligation that cannot be broken" (OED). While the aesthetic of impact in its efforts to persuade through disclosure, leads the audience to adopt a bonding attitude, namely that of "establish[ing] a link with someone based on shared feelings, interests or experiences" (OED).

Only speech acts that raise criticizable validity claims (of truth, right, and truthfulness), can serve as proper initiators of these two implications of communicative action, Habermas argues. Interestingly enough, testimonials, as all types of autobiographical writing, are probably among the most controversial forms of speech acts and can easily be attacked on grounds of truth, rightness, or sincerity. Indeed, those concepts are considered as constitutive characteristics of testimonies. Let me here refer back to Paul Ricoeur's categorization of testimonies, which he himself calls specific types of "speech acts" (206) necessarily produced in dialogical situations. Among his six characteristics, the most important ones were the ones connected to what he calls the moment of authentication and appropriation on the part of the interlocutor. The moment of authentication resides in the audience's acceptance of the testimony: in their agreement with the witnesses' words, the audience not only receives the testimony, but also accepts it. The process is similar to that of the interlocutor accepting the offer of a communicative speech act, saying 'yes' to the offer. But, Ricoeur insists, this agreement is not just any type of agreement. This agreement lies in a

shared understanding, an appropriation, based on a feeling of human resemblance. One can easily create the link between this notion of human resemblance and Habermas's conception of the bonding force of speech acts. Similarly, the appropriation of testimony is not without consequences. Fellman and Laub, among others, have insisted on the responsibilities the audience of testimonies must shoulder. As a repository to the other's words, the audience assumes the binding force of human trust, and becomes then committed to the other's words.

The richest correlation between Ricoeur's and Habermas's models is undeniably the idea that Ricoeur insists on the fact that for the phase of authentication to take place, the interlocutors will necessarily "open a space of controversy" (164). This controversial space, which he meaningfully calls "public space," (164) obviously corresponds to Habermas's public sphere, the most proper arena for argumentation to take place. Yet, what is most relevant in Ricoeur's discussion, is that this space of controversy, is openly expressed in the possibility of confrontation and in the fact that "the witness must be able of answering for what he says before whoever asks him to do so" (165). Testimonies are then privileged instances of communicative speech acts in which speakers not only raise criticizable validity claims, but more substantially, they overtly express the guarantee of redeeming these validity claims. Significantly, for Habermas, this guarantee stands as sole rational motivation for the audience to accept the speech act's binding/bonding force. Testimonies, then, are designed as most eligible speech acts for communicative action.

Both the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility, as narrative key features of testimonials of social empowerment, rely on Habermas's view of rationality and its implications in his model of communicative action. The aesthetic of impact is mainly based on Habermas's approach to rationality in correlation with validity claims, as well as Ricoeur's moment of authentication/appropriation. Habermas argues that:

> In contexts of communicative action, speech acts can always be rejected under each of the three aspects: the aspect of the rightness that the speaker claims for his action in relation to a normative context (or, indirectly, for these norms themselves); the truth that the speaker claims for the expression of subjective experiences to which he has privileged access; finally, the truth that the speaker, with his utterance, claims for a statement (or for the existential presuppositions of a nominalized proposition). (*Communicative* 1:307)

In such a framework, a rational, and thus reliable, speaker will be able to redeem reasons for all three validity claims of truth, rightness and truthfulness. All three of them can have a powerful correlation with the way in which the witnesses manage to use poignant images (and

words) in the hope to trigger a sense of human resemblance in developing the audience's empathy for their predicament. If the validity claim to truthfulness is realized in the witnesses' continual effort to secure their sincerity, Habermas's concerns with the speaker's rightness as well as truth claims correspond to a form of perlocutionary realism aimed at exposing authenticity.[92]

The aesthetic of impact, as well as the ethics of responsibility, as I theorize them, are to be understood as narrative weaving threads: they permeate the entire narratives in the way in which a watermark would label a sheet of paper. Yet, just as a watermark can represent a specific pattern, these two narrative threads can somehow be fashioned in different portraits according to the narrators' specific voice. These portraits correspond to rhetorical *ethos*: narrators through their texts construct a specific persona for themselves as witnesses. I came to devise four paradigmatic *ethe*, which each express a particularized narrator/audience relationship. These particularized relationships offer textual equivalents to the bonding force of speech acts embodied in the aesthetic of impact. According to the specific paradigm at hand, a distinctive bond is created between speaker and receiver; a bond, that, in each case, involves a far-reaching binding commitment. This commitment corresponds to a differentiated handling of the ethics of responsibility. Though I describe these four paradigms at length in the section on rhetoric, I briefly define them here so as to proceed with my depiction of the aesthetic of impact and ethics of responsibility.

The four *ethe* correspond to the roles that can be distributed to the witnesses depending on the different social contexts in which testimonies may be summoned. First, a religious paradigm can be observed. In that specific context, the narrators propose their testimony as the evidence of a higher realm of truth, which, as somehow privileged beings, they could once access. This accession is always presented as a painstaking educational journey; during which the aesthetic of impact more powerfully unfolds. Witness, as priest-like figures, then feel endowed with the duty of sharing with the audience what they discovered– hence the necessity for an ethics of responsibility. Second, the witness may be summoned in a legal type of situation. This paradigm unfolds in a more complex way. The witness is at first called to testify in the position of the defendant. It is during that first stage that narrators make

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[92] I borrow the term "perlocutionary realism" from Christophe Den Tandt's current research on contemporary realism. For Den Tandt's discussion of the relevance of performativity and communicative action to realism, see his "On Virtual Grounds" and "Graphic Evidence" (40-42).

use of the aesthetic of impact so as to present their case as an instance of social injustice. The witness then assumes the position of the judge. In that second stage, narrators develop the ethics of responsibility in an effort to uncover truth and to pronounce sentences (in this specific case, this amounts to devising possible plans of action against the situation of social injustice).

Moving to another lifeworld context, the narrator can also assume a third position, that of the activist. In this specific social movement-like context, the narrator uses the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility as techniques characteristic of the process of consciousness-raising. Narrators share their life experience in the hope to provoke a shock, which is necessary to trigger the consciousness that action against injustice is not only needed but also possible. The impact is thus that of a social epiphany, which is aimed at triggering responsibilities in the audience. Finally, the testimonial can assume a most intimate and private form. Within this last paradigm, narrators disclose personal feelings and sufferings to a bosom friend whose presence allows for resilience and awareness of the possible solutions to implement. This last paradigm could be compared to psychoanalytical contexts because of its seemingly monological format. However, the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility serve here to trigger an overtly dialogical process. Indeed, this paradigm presents a high number of 'you' pronouns that seek to actively involve the readers and as such impedes a psychoanalytical position, which enjoins readers to remain silent and uninvolved. Though in some cases the paradigms appear less singled out than in others, the texts necessarily develop more closely to one or the other paradigmatic *ethos* in such a way that they enter an individualized categorization. There is thus a more or less broad range of rhetorical possibilities for the narrators to express their need to impact the audience in their effort to trigger responsibilization.

Now that these four paradigmatic textual portraits have been sketched out, the aesthetic of impact's relation to validity claims appears even more conspicuous. For indeed, it is through sometimes bitter, even vindictive, validity claims that the witnesses manage to produce their communicative utterances. Truth, as the first validity claim, is undoubtedly paramount to all four paradigms in their endeavor to exert an impact on the audience. Habermas contends that the notion of truth, when it is understood in the traditional philosophical sense of the term, stands for an all-encompassing validity claim, grouping all claims he proposes separately. Truth is then understood as "a sense of rationality encompassing propositional truth, normative rightness, authenticity and sincerity" (*Communicative* 1:134). Testimonials can indeed be considered as examples of a plurality of

"manifestations" (*Discussion* 256) of truth, to borrow Michael Lynch's terminology. The texts enact different "properties" that play "the truth-role" (*Discussion* 256) all of which serving their performative realism for authenticity.

Lynch's effort to propose a functionalist definition of truth was rooted in his "intuitive belief that there could be more than one true account of some subject matter" (*Context* ix). He thus devised a metaphysical pluralism for truth. According to him, propositions can display differentiated aspects of a property of truth. Lynch considers that this property is functional and hence "defined by its role within a network of closely related properties described by some familiar truisms" (391). Objectivity, norm of belief and end of inquiry are among these truisms: "they include that truth is a property that objective judgments have; that it is what valid inferences preserve, it is what makes a proposition correct to believe and a judgment one that we aim at in inquiry" (*Expressivism* 391). This "job-description" opens a possibility for pluralism in the sense that "there is more than one substantive property that can play that role" (*Expressivism* 391). These properties do not offer a definition of truth *simpliciter* but are manifestations of truth, "under certain conditions and for certain kind of content, realize truth" (*Discussion* 256). Truth is thus open to "multiple manifestation" (*Discussion* 256). The different paradigms for testimonials conspicuously call to these differentiated manifestations. Truth in the religious, forensic, activist or intimate context call for different contents for which individuated truth properties hold valid.

In the case of the religious and the legal paradigms, it is on the narrators' validity claim to truth that the whole narrative's credibility rests. It is because the priest-like figure has seen truth that they can now disclose it. Likewise, it is because they stand as the official representative of legal truth, because they are experts of truth that judges can unveil it. Similarly, the activist and the bosom friend both in their symptomatic relation to life experience must necessarily raise a validity claim to truth in a way that is just as significant. For the story of their life experience to achieve its purpose, the recipient must not doubt its authentic value, its truth. If the story is not perceived as being authentic, its whole power is deflated. In all four paradigms, it is through their quintessential relation to truth, that the narrators assert their rationality, their reliability and thus the authenticity of their experience. This quintessential relation is chiefly expressed through textual impressions indulging rhetorical effects exhibiting authenticity, such as effects of voice, second person addresses, or over-realistic descriptions. For it is indeed on a subtle marriage between authenticity and sincerity that testimonials' aesthetic of impact is based. It is in being sincere and in disclosing authentic life experiences that the witnesses can manage to impact their audience.

As sincerity is significantly correlated with authenticity in the texts' impactful aesthetic, the validity claim to truthfulness is predominantly exhibited in the narrators' textual constructs. Sincerity, needless to say, is the most significant feature that witnesses seek to secure. Once a witness's sincerity is in doubt, their testimony can no longer remain receivable whichever the context in which it was summoned. All four paradigms essentially call for a sincere expression on the part of the speaker. The audience axiomatically imagines the witnesses' words to be 'full of truth' and if the contrary were to be proven, the communicative chain would be broken (most often) beyond repair. But most significant than this relation to truth, Habermas understands truthfulness in a much more decisive way for testimonials. Habermas's approach to sincerity carries on two ponderous implications for the perlocutionary realism the aesthetic of impact relies on.

First, the validity claim to truthfulness is what allows for expressive language to permeate speech acts oriented towards reaching understanding. Expressivity, in its different modes, corresponds to the actual impact that is aimed for.[93] The bonding power of speech acts is that of shared feelings, of feelings people develop in situations of empathy and solidarity. It is always through unanticipated appalling images that the impact of life-experience is most meaningfully achieved: the more distressing, revolting, even ghastly, the more powerful. This appeal to expressive language corresponds to the recourse to particular rhetorical tropes according to the specific paradigm: where the religious paradigm uses highly symbolic language, the legal format prefers expertise; and where the activist seeks powerful formulas, the bosom friend favors personal, highly sensitive vocabulary. Here, sincerity as an expressive mode of communication relies on a form of perlocutionary realism aimed at exhibiting authenticity. The expressiveness of sincerity needs to be coupled with the disclosure of an authentic experience lest the testimony would be exposed as a fraud.

Second, Habermas insists that claims to truthfulness are intrinsically relevant to actions: "[t]he sincerity of expressions cannot be *grounded* but only *shown*; insincerity can be *revealed* by the lack of consistency between an utterance and the past or future actions internally connected with it" (*Communicative* 1:41). Similarly, Ricoeur speaks of testimonial authentication in the form of the witness's positioning on a ladder of trustworthiness based on

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[93] Expressivity is a feature that Dulong already proposes as essential to the testimonial format: the mention of affects, Dulong considers, expresses through the disclosing of spontaneous reactions and stands as the human core of testimonies. It hence constitutes their potential as a social institution.

factual and personal features. As a sort of trustworthiness history, the witness capitalizes on their previous reputation and future actions. Hence, the witnesses' claim to truthfulness offers a strong hinge between the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility. For, if the witnesses have been sincere in their personal disclosure, they will necessarily display in their future action a consistency with what they have disclosed. This consistency corresponds to the requirements covered by a life-ethics based on responsibilities. To that end, testimonial volumes themselves serve as hard evidence of the witnesses' sincerity. In a sort of circular close circuit, the witnesses in disclosing their life experience in volumes of testimonials of social empowerment testify to their sincerity by devoting their narratives to the benefit of their communities' empowerment.

Finally, the validity claim to rightness carries on implications that are as important as the ones raised for truth and truthfulness. One would indeed be hard put to imagine a situation in which a witness would be called to testify in spite of their doubtful right in doing so. Besides, Ricoeur, as well as other scholars who defined testimonies, argue that the rightness to testify lies in the very words of the witnesses themselves. By stating 'I was there', they automatically acquire the right to be recognized witnesses. And yet, one could imagine criticizing the witnesses' validity claim to rightness in the simple sense that they somehow impose through their speech acts, if not truly their testimonies, at least apparently illegitimate relationships on readers. Still, producing unexpected relationships such as identification between characters and readers is among the most endearing power of literature. This being said, what remains of importance in Habermas's idea of rightness for testimonials of social empowerment is its considerable connection with empowerment itself. The witnesses in the volumes taken into consideration here decided to testify exactly because the process of empowerment reassured them about their right and competence to do so. Similarly their act of testifying to their predicament publicly asserts that right and purposes to inspire their community.

The witnesses' claim to rightness is best embodied in the remarks concluding their narratives. 'If I could realize my own right and competence to overcome this situation of injustice, I must tell others because others might then realize their right and competence to overcome and finally obliterate that injustice,' the witnesses seem to say. This sort of vindicating statement is expressed in what I came to call the witnesses' *vow*. All testimonies display these epiphany-like moments during which the witnesses realize the potency of empowerment and their right to testify in producing speech acts that are meant as instances of communicative action. In those key statements, witnesses realize their ability to reach

understanding with the audience. This understanding reaches full potency in generating motivation and eventually action against injustice. Therefore, the witnesses' validity claim to rightness corresponds to the rational motivation to agreement Habermas sees in speech acts' binding/bonding force. In this sense, motivation (or persuasion), that is the ability to generate understanding, confidence and eventually the coordination of action plans can be understood without the need of a normative context. Persuasion in this case does not merely aim at achieving a perlocutionary effect but rather at reaching a rational cooperatively shared understanding of the situation as the motivational basis for coordinating action plans (*Communicative* 2:69).

Since both the ethics of responsibility and the aesthetic of impact are narrative weaving threads that interlace as the text unfolds, validity claims pervade the texts' rhetorical structure. Accordingly, the ethics of responsibility also draws on these claims in its construction. The texts' ethics finds its rhetorical basis in a twofold procedure. These two stages approximately correspond to the individual and social features of empowerment. If the first one corresponds to introspective moments during which narrators realize their own worth, competences and responsibilities as a rational member of the lifeworld; during the second part of the process, narrators, drawing on their newly acquired reflective and critical abilities, uncover the socializing aspects of this individual responsibilization. Thus, this ethics of responsibility, encourages on the one hand an introspective critical point of view the individual learns to direct towards their own thoughts and actions; and, on the other, it encourages them to pass on that enlightened gaze to the community. Optimistic as this ethics may appear, the textual paradigms mitigate its optimistic outlook in playing on the different senses the term responsibility may carry. If the introspective point of view may encourage episodes focusing on the narrators' strengths, it can also carry scornful undertones. Similarly, the influence the audience can have on the issues at hand can be presented in the form of galvanizing incentives as well as disparaging reprimands. In Habermas's model, the addressee's response remains an integral feature of communication.

In the case of the ethics of responsibility, Habermas's speech act theory helps uncover an even closer link between rationality and responsibility in a more general way. Indeed, for Habermas a rational agent will *necessarily act responsibly*. Habermas considers a subject to be rational "only if he is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in the light of legitimate expectations [*i.e.* validity claims]" (*Communicative* 1:15). Yet, Habermas adds that "[w]e even call someone rational if he makes known a desire or an intention, expresses a feeling or a mood, shares a secret,

confesses a deed, etc., and is then able to reassure critics in regard to the revealed experience by *drawing practical consequences* from it and *behaving consistently thereafter*" (*Communicative* 1:15; emphasis in the original). A rational person, then, is someone capable of redeeming validity claims for their actions and utterances, on the one hand, and someone capable of acting consistently drawing from the practical consequences of her previous actions, on the other.

Consequently, a person's rationality can be measured from her ability for self-examination; that is, her ability to find rational explanations for her actions, to learn from her past actions *and* to act consistently in the future with this wealth of insight. This first step in in testimonials' responsible ethics covers moments of introspection when witnesses retrospectively assess past actions. Similarly, empowerment, within its first stages, enhances the individual's ability to learn about their competences and capabilities in controlling their environment through their actions. This learning process often develops through painstaking self-contemplation. The individual realizes how their previous actions could bring up apparently unforeseen negative consequences and how, in their effort to become responsible in controlling their environment, they can avoid such damaging actions in the future.

If one follows Habermas's point of view on agents' rationality, an individual who wishes to display a coherent rational behavior needs to act consistently, notably in maturing their responsibilities for action: "thus we call a person rational who, in the cognitive-instrumental sphere, expresses reasonable opinions and acts efficiently" (*Communicative* 1:18). Yet, Habermas adds, "this rationality remains accidental if it is not coupled with the ability to learn from mistakes, from the refutation of hypotheses and from the failure of interventions" (*Communicative* 1:18). Indeed, responsibility lies in reasonable opinions and efficient actions, which are derived from a competent interpretation of one's previous delusions. This introspective gaze is characteristic of all four paradigms. The religious paradigm's reliance on self-examination appears axiomatic; inasmuch as the witness presents their experience of injustice as an initiatory journey. Similarly, the legal paradigm enjoins the witness to undertake the investigative stance of the public prosecutor in assessing their personal experience. The social paradigm presents the activist's self-examination as the basis of the effort of consciousness-raising; in the sense that the first consciousness to be raised consists in the witness's own. Finally, the intimate paradigm is reminiscent of the psychoanalytical model of behavioral introspection. However, for testimonials' complete potential to unfold, *i.e.* for the empowerment process to be complete, self-responsibilization remains inadequate.

Habermas's theory also addresses the socializing aspects of the texts' responsibility ethics. Habermas indeed considers that an agent's true sense of responsibility expresses itself not only through their capacity for consistent rational action but even more so through their capacity for consistent rational *interaction*. He then argues that: "[i]n the context of communicative action, only those persons count as responsible who, as members of a communication-community, can orient their actions to intersubjectively recognized validity claims" (*Communicative* 1:14). Responsible agents are rational agents who consistently engage in communicative action, who consistently orient their actions towards reaching understanding in intersubjectively recognized validity claims. Responsibility is then not a solely individual matter but rather a communicative and cooperative competence. This view corresponds to Iris Marion Young's understanding of a socially connected model of responsibility for justice; a model developed hereafter in section II.4.1.2.2.

Accordingly, witnesses, when they engage in writing their testimonials, also engage in a procedure that presents both individual and social implications. Responsibility, *i.e.* the agent's consistent implementation of communicative action, corresponds to the binding force of speech acts. In this sense, speech acts, both for the speaker and addressee, involve obligations for the sequel of actions. A positive answer to a speech act's validity claims provokes a commitment. In the case of testimonials of social empowerment, the reader, in accepting the speech act offer of the witnesses, is influenced in adopting their responsibilizing stance and course of action against social injustice. The witnesses' vow is the specific textual moment when the binding commitment between witnesses and audience is created. The vow uttered in the religious paradigm generally takes the form of a parable, transforming the witness's story into an allegorical example that can be followed. The legal paradigm presents a more solemn formulation: it often directly proposes possible actions or new regulations to implement. The activist paradigm, as might be expected, displays the most militant and pugnacious language. In such cases, the witness's vow closely resembles a mission statement. Finally, the intimate paradigm requires a softer, indeed more personal, approach to the vow for social empowerment. In the manner of a friend providing advice, the witness seems to propose rather than to impose possible solutions (which often take on a 'we should have' or 'we could have' form). However, in all four cases, the vow efficiently exerts a climactic impact.

II.3.1.2 Testimonials as Debates over Social Issues: Habermas's and Benhabib's Model of Discourse Ethics

Through the formulation of my first hypothesis, I have broached a detailed conception of testimonials' procedure in implementing empowerment. However, the description of testimonials as speech acts oriented towards reaching understanding fails to properly emphasize their strong correlation with issues of social justice *per se*. We have seen above that Emmanuel Renault insists on the necessity for social movements to implement a normative dynamic along with their somehow natural practical dynamic. Likewise, testimonials remain texts deeply rooted in *both* a cultural *and political* moment. Indeed, even if the present critical approach is meant to be textual, the texts' content and the specific cultural and political environment in which they were produced and published remain of importance. These para-textual concerns led me to formulate a second hypothesis, in the form of an interrogation. How *can* testimonies as speech acts *actually have* an influence in debates over issues of social justice? The primary answer lies in the fact that these testimonials end up being published and thus enter the social realm of the lifeworld by ways of the cultural public sphere. The core of the procedure, here, is not really the performing of the speech acts *per se* (though in most cases it already is a *tour-de-force*), but rather their repercussions on the debate, *i.e.* their perlocutionary force. What is of interest in the case of volumes of testimonials is the authors' willingness to affect the widest audience possible in an effort to have their voices and opinions integrated in public debates.

Debates over issues of social justice, that is, what social movements seek and need to achieve through their normative dynamics, correspond to situations of communication in which people must, on the one hand, compromise their competing interests and, on the other, bring universalizable principles of justice into forms of life. According to Habermas, these are the purposes assigned to validity claims for legal norms. Debates over issues of social justice denote moments in the lifeworld when people engage in a bargaining process over specific claims serving, on the one hand, personal interests and, on the other, universalizable principles of justice correlated to a specific common situation. These bargaining processes correspond to attempts on the part of actors to collectively redress problematic issues through communication in reaching a new or renewed shared understanding of the situation. As the interest of this critical analysis lies in textual and dialogic procedures, it appears highly important to further refine the idea that, in situations of normative or ethical debates, agents engage in bargaining processes. Though numerous scholars since Habermas have insisted on using a plural when mentioning 'bargaining processes' in debates over social justice, I will

first present Habermas's monological point of view in favoring the sole procedure of argumentation and then refine his general theory using Seyla Benhabib's re-appropriation of discourse ethics and Iris Marion Young's criticism of argumentative democracy.

Habermas devises his theory of communicative action as well as his discourse ethics on the basis of what he calls "transcendental" (*Moral* 129) principles of communication, which correspond to a hypothetical ideal speech situation. The ideal speech situation represents a situation "in which all participants in a conversation are free to challenge what is said by any other speaker" (Edgar xvi). A situation, in Habermas's terms, "denotes a segment of the lifeworld that has been delimited in terms of a specific theme" (*Moral* 135). Themes arise in connection with actors' objectives and interests. They define the thematic matters relevant to the situation and are in correlation with action plans. Indeed, "[i]ndividual *action plans* help put a theme in relief and determine the *current need for consensual understanding* that must be met through the activity of interpretation" (*Moral* 135; emphasis in the original).

Needless to say, Habermas's ideal speech situation remains counterfactual. However, the transcendental principles it consists of remain of importance for all speech situations to the extent that they appear inescapable. Habermas designates them as "the general symmetry conditions that every competent speaker must presuppose" (*Communicative* 1:22) when entering debate, or simply conversation. To put it differently, these principles correspond to the normative rules that all situations of communication must presuppose. Seyla Benhabib, in an effort to make Habermas's formulation more convenient to our contemporary environment, proposes a concise formulation of these numerous rules and groups them under two major principles. Benhabib talks about principles of *universal respect*, according to which participants "recognize the right to equal participation between conversation partners" and *egalitarian reciprocity*, according to which participants have an "equal right to suggest topic of conversation, to introduce new points of view, questions and criticism into the conversation, and to challenge the rules of the conversation insofar as these seem to exclude the voice of some and privilege that of others" (*Claims* 37).[94] In this very sense, the ideal speech situation serves as the repository for transcendental and universal rules participants must refer to when they wish to communicate.

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[94] Benhabib specifically recognizes as participants all "whose interests are actually or potentially affected by the courses of action and decisions which may ensue from [the] conversation" (*Claims* 37).

Benhabib then contends that, in accepting the ideal speech situation, "we recognize the right of all beings capable of speech and action to be participants in the moral conversation" (*Situating* 29). We also recognize that these participants have symmetrical rights. If one formulates the general definition of the ideal speech situation as a situation in which, on the one hand, anyone can participate and, on the other anyone can challenge any validity claim for any utterance, "then ethics must focus on the process that people use to justify what they are doing, through challenges, and rational responses, of underlying moral values and principles" (Edgar xv). Habermas's approach to ethics is then procedural. His articulation of what he calls discourse ethics is meant as an unprecedented representation of the dialogical and cooperative procedures through which social actors come to a consensus about social norms. Those procedures stand as the bargaining processes that should be implemented in any situation of normative debate.

Habermas considers argumentation to be the only acceptable process to engage in for people who seek to transform an issue that is collectively problematic into something that is collectively valid; for he sees in argumentation a sufficient approximation of the ideal speech situation. He defines argumentation as "that type of speech in which participants thematize contested validity claims and attempt to vindicate or criticize them through arguments" (*Communicative* 1:18). Habermas further insists on the fact that "from this perspective argumentation can be conceived of as a reflective continuation, with different means, of action oriented towards reaching understanding" (*Communicative* 1:22). It is in this sense that Habermas's discourse ethics, as opposed to previous monological theories, focuses on cooperation: "[b]y entering into a process of moral argumentation, the participants continue their communicative action in a reflexive attitude, with the aim of restoring a consensus that has been disrupted " (Habermas, *Notes* 72). Moral argumentation may actually settle conflicts by consensual means. Habermas further insists that what is needed in contemporary ethics is a "*real* process of argumentation in which the individuals concerned can cooperate," (*Notes* 72; emphasis in the original) as opposed to previous models, such as Kantian ethics, in which decisions about social norms were based on thought experiments.

Habermas sees the realization of this real process of argumentation in procedures he calls discourses. He devises several types of discourses, which correspond to enclaves of the lifeworld in which the ideal speech situation can be approached and belief and values rationally challenged and justified through argumentative practices. Habermas, thus, separates discourses in three main categories based on their content and applications: moral discourses which serve to discuss universal norms of justice, ethical discourses which serve to question

forms of the good life and finally political-pragmatic discourses which concern what is feasible. Benhabib, by comparison, talks about practical discourses whenever dealing with the factual situation in which those procedures are implemented. She insists that "discourses are procedures of *recursive validation* through which abstract norms and principles are concretized and legitimized" (*Claims* 12). Discourse then, in Benhabib's lexicon, encompasses both procedural and situational considerations. Since I find Habermas's separation unsatisfying in the sense that factual discursive situations will necessarily interweave all three types of discourse especially when dealing with issues of social justice, I propose hereafter to privilege Benhabib's term, practical discourse, and its procedural implications.

Discourse ethics, then, as Andrew Edgar argues in his volume about Habermas's terminology, "emerges from the possibility of having to defend the rightfulness of what a competent speaker utters" (44). In fact, what is at stake is not only what competent speakers utter, but also what they do, and what they believe to be right or valuable. The point, whenever participants enter practical discourses, Habermas says, is to restore the intersubjective recognition for a validity claim after it became controversial or to assure intersubjective recognition for a new validity claim (*Notes* 72). However, Habermas heavily insists on the fact that discourse ethics offers a description of the *process* that can be implemented so as to reach solutions. It does not, therefore, secure the *products* of these argumentative practices. His main point, in delineating discourse ethics, is to foreground the very idea of intersubjective validation in the sense of reaching a shared understanding.

The concept of intersubjective validation opens an important concern for universalism that Habermas seeks to address with the two principles that govern his discourse ethics. Intersubjective validation means that all participants recognize a norm as valid. That is, when a norm is intersubjectively validated through practical discourse, this norm can be universalized. Habermas, thus, realizes that for intersubjective validation to take place one must refer to a principle, which permits to bridge the gap between particular observations and general hypotheses. This bridging principle is what Habermas calls principle (U). (U) is the universalizing moral principle according to which "every valid norm has to fulfill the condition that *all* concerned can accept the consequences and the side effects its *universal* observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of *everyone's* interests (and that these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation)" (*Notes* 71). To this universal moral principle Habermas adds a procedural one, principle (D). According to (D), valid norms can only be attained when participants engage in practical

discourses. That is, "a norm may claim validity only if all who might be affected by it reach (or would reach), *as participants in a practical discourse*, agreement that this norm is valid" (*Notes* 71). As such, (U) and (D) necessarily regulate ethical argumentation among a plurality of participants, "[they] even suggest[…] the perspective of real-life argumentation in which all concerned are admitted as participants," (*Notes* 71) and thus refer to universalized principles for any type of argumentative practices.

In such conditions, Habermas and Benhabib both insist on the importance of considering discourse ethics as a procedure to achieve *shared understanding rather than complete consensus*. For Benhabib's interest in Habermas's primary model of discourse ethics lies in its uniting potential for political debates in modern multi-cultural societies. In reaching a shared understanding participants emanating from different cultural backgrounds can come to confront their competing moral values in a rational dialogue aiming at reaching a form of agreement, whether a long-lived or temporary one. Benhabib thus definitely endorses the recognition paradigm for social justice. Habermas defines the process of reaching understanding as a form of agreement between speaking and acting subjects. These agreements meet the conditions of a rationally motivated assent and rest on common convictions. He argues:

> A communicatively achieved agreement, or one that is mutually presupposed in communicative action, is propositionally differentiated. Owing to this linguistic structure, it cannot be merely induced through outside influence; it has to be accepted or presupposed as valid by the participants. To this extent it can be distinguished from merely de facto accord […]. (*Communicative* 1:286-287)

Discourse ethics allows participants who engage in practical discourses over controversial normative questions to reach a shared understanding over the situation and to develop common convictions in an effort to implement universalizability.

Habermas considers universalizability a necessary feature of moral judgment exercised by agents competent in managing the human relationships constituting their shared form of life. The (U) principle embodies the notion of ideal role-taking G.H. Mead derives from the child's evolution towards adulthood and toward its ensuing more competent management of human relationships. Through the universal principle of practical discourses, agents can guarantee the impartiality of judgment crucial to issues of justice: "the impartiality of judgment is expressed in a principle that constrains *all* concerned to adopt the perspectives of *all others* in the balancing of interests" (Habermas *Notes* 70). It somehow compels to a universal exchange of roles. Benhabib recuperates and enhances this important notion in

showing its unavoidable necessity in contemporary multicultural societies. She contends that "to know how to sustain an ongoing human relationship means to know what it means to be an 'I' and a 'me', to know that I am an 'other' to you and that, likewise you are an 'I' to yourself but an 'other' to me" (*Situating* 52).

In the same way, separate communities in current multicultural states need to know what it means for them to be an *us* entity and as such know that there are others to share a life form with. She explains:

> Universalizability enjoins us to reverse perspectives among members of a 'moral community' and judge from the point of view of the other(s). Such reversibility is essential to the ties of reciprocity that bind human communities together. All human communities define 'some significant others' in relation to whom reversibility and reciprocity must be exercised. (*Situating* 32)

Benhabib borrows Arendt's term of "enlarged mentality" in order to name this reversibility of perspectives. This reversal of perspectives presents significant parallels with Bakhtinian dialogism. Such an enlarged mentality enjoins competent agents to enter practical discourses in the effort to reach a shared understanding based on an informed and cooperative debate from which judgments can be formed.[95]

Volumes of testimonials of social empowerment constitute arenas for practical discourses in which the enlarged mentality delineated above can be actually, in fact almost directly, implemented. They indeed stand as literal applications of Bakhtinian polyphony and dialogic textual format. Though Benhabib insists on differentiating this enlarged mentality from empathy—the former indeed "does not [only] mean emotionally assuming or accepting the point of view of the other" (*Situating* 137)—, the aesthetic of impact developed in testimonials appears to facilitate the reversibility of perspective Benhabib's concept recommends. First and foremost, the aesthetic of impact serves the purpose of not only opening but also sustaining a dialogue in creating a bond between speaker and listener. Benhabib similarly considers this enlarged mentality a condition to dialogue: "to 'think from

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[95] Hannah Arendt follows a very similar path in her own approach to judgment, in explaining that its power rests on a potential agreement with other participants, what she calls an "enlarged form of thinking" (qtd. in Benhabib *Situating* 133). Judging is not pure reasoning, "but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement" (Arendt qtd. in Benhabib *Situating* 133).

the perspective of everyone else' is to know 'how to listen'" (*Situating* 137). Volumes of testimonials of social empowerment, because of their polyphonic form, epitomize this capacity to listen to others and they enjoin their readers to behave likewise. Benhabib further develops this point:

> In ethics, the universalizability procedure, if it is understood as a reversing of perspectives and the willingness to reason from the other's/others point of view, does not guarantee consent, it demonstrates the will and the readiness to seek understanding with the other and to reach some reasonable agreement in an open-ended moral conversation. (*Situating* 9)

Benhabib defines discourse ethics as "the processual generation of reasonable agreement about moral principles via an open-ended moral conversation" (*Situating* 37). She also considers it "a yardstick to uncover the under-representation, exclusion and silencing of certain kinds of interest" (*Situating* 48). Thus defined, discourse ethics closely corresponds to the strategies by which the testimonials of the present corpus implement their strife for empowerment. Narrators of testimonials enter an open-discussion with all other participants in the hope to reach a reasonable agreement about empowering solutions aiming at a greater social justice.

The very procedure of discourse ethics anticipates non-violent strategies of conflict resolution as well as cooperative and associative methods of problem solving. Testimonials of social empowerment as instances of social movements propose a non-violent and ideologically tolerant realization of Renault's practical and normative dynamics. Indeed, they highlight Habermas's concerns for dialogical and cooperative procedures for ethics, and they do justice to Benhabib's concerns with marginalized voices. Not only do volumes of testimonials of social empowerment uncover under-representation, they also perform the very idea that "the decisions [emanating from practical discourses] should not exclude the voice of those whose 'interests' may not be open to formulation in the accepted language of public discourse, but whose very presence in public life may force the boundaries between the private needs and public claims, individual misfortunes and collectively representable grievances" (*Situating* 9).

Benhabib's contrasted handling of public discourse and claims as opposed to private needs is not innocent. Habermas concedes that practical discourses may unfold in manifold arenas, yet he considers the public sphere to be the most appropriate among these. Indeed, as the main point of discourse ethics is to achieve a shared understanding on a common public

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issue, the public sphere appears as the readymade democratic communicative arena. Habermas explains that "*[a] portion of* the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" (*Sphere* 49; emphasis mine) and discuss matters of general interest. However, Habermas's monological approach to the public sphere as the sole body capable of holding the government to account has been criticized since its very formulation. The notion of a unitary public sphere has often been countered on the grounds that, because of the way in which Habermas had first defined its population, it was obviously condemned to remain fenced out to minorities.

Benhabib thus proposes a renewed and pluralized approach to the public sphere, which can come to encompass all arenas in which discourse ethics is implemented in the hope to solve particularized issues. She considers that the public sphere remains a crucial domain that permits mediation between the macro-political institutions and the sphere of private needs and concerns but that, as such, it can no longer be considered unitary. "I plead for a radically proceduralist model of the public sphere neither the scope nor the agenda of which can be limited a priori, and whose lines can be redrawn by the participants in the conversation," (*Claims* 12) Benhabib argues. Benhabib thus comes to separate what she calls the official from unofficial public sphere in our current societies. Both types of public spheres are aimed at executing a form of deliberative democracy and participatory politics. Benhabib explains:

> In deliberative democracy, as distinguished from political liberalism, the *official* public sphere of representative institutions, which includes the legislature, executive and public bureaucracies, the judiciary, and political parties, is not the only site of political contestation and of opinion and will formation. Deliberative democracy focuses on social movements, and on the civil, rural, cultural, religious, artistic and political associations of the *unofficial* public sphere, as well. The public sphere is composed of the anonymous and interlocking conversation and contestation resulting from the activities of these various groups. (*Claims* 21)

Unofficial public spheres (the plural form must be emphasized) include but are not limited to counter-publics and social movements: their goal is to enter the national dialogue and to propose their own arguments in the ethical debate so as for them to be taken into account in the final resulting decisions.

Jane Mansbridge in her own conceptualization of deliberative democracy calls these spheres "enclaves," and enumerates their goals:

> [They] [...] include understanding themselves better, forging bonds of solidarity, preserving the memories of past injustices, interpreting and reinterpreting the meaning

> of those injustices, working out alternative conceptions of self, of community, of justice and of universality, trying to make sense of both the privileges they wield and the oppressions they face, understanding the strategic configurations for and against their desired ends, deciding what alliances to make both emotionally and strategically, deliberating on ends and means, and deciding how to act individually and collectively. (58)

Needless to say, these multiple goals are the ones testimonials seek to attain. Moreover, they show interesting overlaps with Renault's dynamics for social movements. Mansbridge, in listing these goals, echoes Habermas's overarching concept of public opinion: "the expression 'public opinion' refers to the tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally—and, in periodic elections, formally as well—practices *vis-à-vis* the ruling structure organized in the form of a state" (*Sphere* 49). Consequently, whether one refers to them as enclaves, counter-publics or unofficial public spheres, the fact remains that these groups' powerful critical capacity in democratic debates needs not be underestimated. Testimonials of social empowerment can, in their own right, be considered as unofficial public spheres offering solid arenas for debating issues of social justice.

The fact that testimonials base these deliberative democratic debates on personal narratives is far from insignificant. Benhabib appears more sensitive to questions of private as opposed to public matters than Habermas might have been. Habermas had, from his very first delineation of discourse ethics, privileged matters of universal justice over matters of privacy, or of the good life, as constitutive of ethical debates. Though Habermas in his later works on the public sphere mentioned that it could come into life wherever and whenever people engaged into practical discourses, he still insisted on the fact that those discourses had to relate to issues of "general social and political norms" (Benhabib, *Situating* 100). Benhabib, on the other hand, heavily insists on the need for opening the public spheres' debating scope: "[a]ll struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by redefining what had previously been considered 'private,' non-public and non-political issues as matters of public concern, as issues of justice, as sites of power which need discursive legitimation" (*Situating* 99-100). She even goes on to argue that this possibility of rejecting all limitations but constitutional and procedural ones makes of discourse ethics the most libertarian mode of democratic debate. She argues that "[d]iscourse ethics has one distinctive virtue when compared with other variants of contractarian and universalist models of normative validity: its participants feel free to introduce into the dialogue their life-world moral dilemmas and

conflicts without any constraints imposed by counterfactual experiments and idealizations" (*Claims* 13).

Though self-disclosure is not compulsory, it can decidedly be considered as proper grounds for further discussion. Benhabib thus obliterates Habermas's separate concerns about justice and the good life or any other separation between public and private matters:

> If in discourses, the agenda of the conversation is radically open, if participants can bring any and all matters under critical scrutiny and questioning, then there is no way to predefine the nature of the issues discussed as being public ones of justice versus private ones of the good life. Distinctions such as between justice and good life, norms and values, interests and needs are 'subsequent' and not prior to the process of discursive will formation. As long as these result of a radically open and procedurally fair discourse, they can be drawn in any number of ways. (*Situating* 110)

Benhabib sees in this articulation of public and private matters the capacity of adult competent agents to listen to others (and to value their arguments as a consequence) and view others, on the one hand, as representatives of universalized rights and duties and, on the other, in their quality of rational concrete individuals. This differentiation between a generalized and a concrete figure of the other is of particular importance when analyzing the textual procedure of testimonials as examples of discourse ethics implemented in an unofficial public sphere. Benhabib's figure of the generalized other is embodied in the ethics of responsibility the texts seek to encourage. She argues that when agents consider others in their capacity as a generalized other "they assume that the other, like themselves, is a being who has concrete needs, desires and affects, but that what constitutes [...] their moral dignity is not what differentiates them from each other, but rather what they, as speaking and acting rational agents have in common" (*Situating* 159). In so doing, agents recognize among one another moral categories such as right, obligation and entitlement. These three categories are easily subsumed under the sole term responsibility, in the sense it carries for the texts' ethics of responsibility. Responsibility assumes, in such a frame, both a positive and negative sense: as citizens, agents have rights and entitlements and are responsible in exercising them competently, but they also have obligations they must live up to. It is because the readers recognize the witnesses as generalized others that they can assess their worthiness.

Worthiness is indeed one of the moral categories Benhabib associates with the figure of the generalized other. She also mentions respect, duty, and dignity. In supposing that the witnesses, as figures of the generalized other, share these same values of respect, duty and

dignity, readers assess witnesses' past actions, their current narrative of these past actions and their consequences. Similarly, if recognizing the other in their capacity as a generalized other leads the readers to surmise shared values of moral dignity, this may prompt the reverse gesture of personal assessment the ethics of responsibility presupposes. Benhabib indeed considers that the main relation derived from the agent's relation to generalized others is that of reciprocity coupled with formal equality. Because readers recognize generalized moral values and categories in witnesses' narratives, they engage in a self-reflexive procedure assessing these same values in regard to their own experience.

Symptomatically, testimonies enable a double, and very convenient, form of literary identification according to which even if generalizable values can be extracted from these individual stories, they remain nonetheless strictly personal. As opposed to literary characters to which allegorical considerations can be abstractly attributed, witnesses remain "individual[s] with a concrete history, identity and affective—emotional constitution" (Benhabib, *Situating* 159). The figure of the concrete other enjoins agents to rise above their commonality and to "seek to comprehend the needs of the other, […] their motivations, what [they] search for and what [they] desire" (Benhabib, *Situating* 159). The texts' aesthetic of impact allows for these individualistic affective and emotional considerations to unfold and to gain intensity and efficacy, especially because of their reliance on authenticity. For one must not forget that it is through impact that testimonials manage to create the necessary bond with their readers. Again, Benhabib lists bonding as one of the moral categories associated with the figure of the concrete other alongside with sharing and the obligations it entails. Benhabib ranks feelings of love, care, sympathy and solidarity as emanating from these moral categories. Those are the exact chords to strike for testimonials to attain their enlightening and empowering goal. Their order of importance is established in accordance with the paradigm the narrative is framed in, but the authenticity of the witness's voice will remain of utmost significance; for it is this prominence of authenticity or concreteness that creates feelings of civic friendship and solidarity.

Because of their capacity of interweaving these concerns of both generalization and concreteness, testimonials of social empowerment best accomplish discourse ethics "for it institutionalizes an actual dialogue among actual selves who are both 'generalized others,' considered as equal moral agents, and 'concrete others,' that is individuals with irreducible differences" (Benhabib, *Situating* 169). And, indeed, Benhabib herself suggests considering life stories as untapped reservoirs for issues deserving concern, this because they factually embody this intricate correlation. Benhabib, as a disciple of Arendt, considers that human

agents are thrown into webs of narratives from which they are supposed to extract their own life narrative, which will make sense for them as unique selves. However, as those narratives are meant to follow specific rules, only a few range of options are available to those wishing to weave their own life-narrative: "these options are not ahistorical but culturally and historically specific, inflected by the master narratives of family structure and gender roles into which each individual is thrown" (*Claims* 15). This of course explains the recurrence of the four paradigmatic textual formats. Though each testimony in no way resembles any other, the literary and cultural history of the testimonial genre remains active in the background in the same sense as the lifeworld serves as a repository of unquestioned cultural givens raised in argumentative debates (see Habermas, *Moral* 135).

Indeed, it is solely if witnesses' voices manage to enter the debate that their project of bettering society through empowerment can become prosperous. First, as speech acts oriented towards reaching understanding, testimonials enact Habermas's theory of communicative action in the sense that their narratives dovetail the binding/bonding effect of illocution. In their pledge to retrieve the different validity claims, witnesses open a communicative exchange with their audience as well as commit this exchange for providing an answer in reaching a shared understanding. Whether this answer is positive or negative is of no importance since, as Habermas argues, the very bond of speech acts lies in their calling for an answer. Similarly, the polyphonic format of the volumes taken into consideration here allows for the creation of an arena favorable to debates over issues of social justice. Because of the plurality of voices the volumes propose to the audience, they factually embody discourse ethics in the open-ended moral discussion it stands for.

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Throughout this section, I sought to set forth two textual hypotheses indicating that testimonials of social empowerment are indeed significant components of the public sphere and its critical debate over society. As such, testimonials represent for the witnesses their own capacities in having become empowered reasonable moral citizens who not only possess but also exercise their political rights. Both hypotheses also emphasize the social intent informing such an exercise of political rights. The narrators, as members of unofficial public spheres created within the published volume, engage in a communicative practice governed by the rules of discourse ethics and are thus driven by ideals of inclusion, participation and universalized concepts of justice. On the basis of their experience, the witnesses gain empowerment and wield the new power thus garnered in a reasonable, fair and

nondiscriminatory way. However, having these volumes published, that is having these unofficial public spheres created, is not enough for the whole process of empowerment to be completed. The publication of the volumes and the enactment of these two literary hypotheses correspond indeed to Renault's two dynamics for social movements. Yet, it leaves them in an introverted position engaging a rather inward-looking procedure. The eventual goal for testimonials of social empowerment is of course to seek compensation and vindication for victims, but more importantly, as the victims voice it themselves, to better society as a whole. And for this, witnesses cannot act alone.

II.4 Supporting the Empowerment of Others in the Community

> "I was supposed to edit the story, but after reading it over and over, I felt the words needed to remain the way they were. Untouched. The words held power. [...] The more I stared at the words, the more I began to realize I have been blessed through someone else's misfortune. Maybe someone will feel the same way after learning about my experience. I wanted to reach out to her to let her know that she wasn't alone. I wanted to tell her I know how she feels, to show sympathy, to be a true friend to her. I never found her. But now I know that I am not alone—an that has made a difference."
>
> —Diary 72, *The Freedom Writers' Diary*

The final step of the general model of empowerment thus deals with the socializing procedures it entails—the very idea that the skills the agents gained through the first part of the process must be enlarged to the agent's community and society as a whole. If testimonials of social empowerment had for sole purpose the empowerment and psychological recovery of the witnesses whose narratives they present, their publishing would probably appear pointless. Though the contemporary boom of memoirs and first-person narratives has raised a number of interrogations about readers' drive towards what has been scornfully called *Mislit*, it seems that most critics came to realize the possible social impact such texts could have.

Chantelle Warner makes this point in her discussion of Margaret Seltzer's spurious memoir *Love and Consequences*. Though Warner, in her volume, is interested in what she calls German social autobiographies and their pragmatics, she proposes an excerpt of Seltzer's defense faced with the accusations of forgery that were raised against her work as a possible explanation for the connection between autobiographical writing and social or political goals. Seltzer argues:

> I though it was my opportunity to put a voice to people who people don't listen to. I was in a position where at one point people said you should speak for us because nobody else is going to let us talk. [...] I just felt that there was good that I could do and there was no other way that someone would listen to it. (qtd. in Warner 1)

Seltzer's memoir recounts a young woman's childhood (allegedly her own) as a half-white half-Native American in a Black ghetto in Los Angeles. The memoir, before it was exposed as a fake, was praised as a most successful depiction of the life of adolescents confronted with growing up among gangbangers. Besides thwarting the whole issue of truth-telling and autobiographical writing, Seltzer's comment also addresses the important notion that autobiographical writing is about sharing one's experience in an effort to raise awareness on specific issues. Warner contends that "among the various modes of representation available to

Seltzer were a range of documentary and journalistic genres and her claim is that, within this space of possibilities, first-person testimonies *mean differently* than other kinds of texts" (2; emphasis mine). It thus appears that publishing first-person accounts of personal experiences is a significant gesture when trying to enter the literary (or simply cultural) public sphere.

Testimonials of social empowerment through their published volumes indeed seek to help reform social institutions and norms that provoked contemporary injustices. Their choice of first-person narratives is therefore decisive. Warner argues that what she calls German social autobiographies rely on "authenticity effects"(9)—that is, different types of literary tropes that "strive to a similar subjective aesthetic; in which the authentic, lived experience of the individual is granted a particular symbolic, ethical and practical importance"(3).[96] Though Warner's corpus focuses on German literature and on single voiced autobiographies, her considerations on the affective and persuasive power of autobiographical writing echo my own approach of the testimonial aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility. Her authenticity effects correspond to what I propose to call a perlocutionary use of realistic descriptions resulting in a sense of authenticity.

In this section, I aim to develop the textual (rhetorical and pragmatic) strategies of witnesses' narratives so as to underline their literary and social efficacy. Testimonials of social empowerment deserve their position in contemporary literature in the sense that they represent efforts akin to those of oratory rhetoric in non-fiction writing. Similarly, these texts duly deserve to occupy a specific niche in political communication as forms of discourse ethics produced in the context of a specific unofficial public sphere. Literary criticism and critical political discourse analysis here merge in the stir of interdisciplinary considerations on the place of the literary work in the national debate over issues of justice. As scholars engaged in an effort to approach literature with the view of an effective humanism, the critic's task therefore consists in analyzing the literary craftsmanship these texts devote to their participation in a form of deliberative democracy.

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[96] Warner's use of the term "effect," which she models after Barthes's "reality effect," is arguably an unfortunate borrowing from poststructuralist terminology. The use of the term "effect" in poststructuralism is indeed always meant as a gesture of demystification. In Barthes's case, its target is realist mimesis.

II.4.1 Beyond Argumentation: Narrative, Greeting, Rhetoric and Authenticity in Testimonials' Aesthetic of Impact and Ethics of Responsibility

Seyla Benhabib is not the only scholar who sought to pluralize Habermas's unitary model of the development of communicative action in the public sphere. Most significantly, it is in its political implications that Habermas's theory came to be most widely exploited and diversified. These developments and their consequential correlation to political communication offer a convenient approach to the textual format of testimonials of social empowerment and to their possible efficacy. Habermas's model of a society based on communicative action and a public sphere in which debates would be governed by discourse ethics gave birth to a new theory of democracy. Habermas himself opened the way for what he called a theory of "deliberative democracy" (*Normative*) as opposed to the liberal and republican models. Deliberative democracy is based on discourses (pragmatic, ethical and moral ones) which function as "a network of fairly regulated bargaining processes and of various forms of argumentation" (*Normative* 25). The latter facilitates the rational political will-formation at the basis of the creation and criticism of democratic norms and institutions. Though Habermas's theory appears to have evolved from that of a unitary enclosed public sphere to that of a plurality of bargaining processes and forms of discourse, his focus remains attached to one single form of political communication, the fact that it may permit different usages according to the "communicative presuppositions and procedures" (25) notwithstanding. People in the public sphere, whether engaging in pragmatic, ethical or moral discourse will still be in a situation of *argumentation*.

Argumentation is defined by the OED as "the action or operation of inferring a conclusion from propositions premised; [a] methodical employment or presentation of arguments; [or a] logical or formal reasoning." It is accordingly often the communicative mode speakers use when they appear to be in the position of trying to *persuade* their addressee. In the case of political communication, as well as that of testimonials of social empowerment, *persuasion* is indeed the chief element to consider. Numerous scholars appear to agree on this significant point. Iris Marion Young, in her description of the deliberative model of democracy contends that democracy is based on "institutions and practices of political discussion and criticism in which participants aim to persuade one another of the rightness of their positions" (*Inclusion* 22). Similarly, Kimberly Nance in her discussion of the rhetorical format of Latin American *testimonio* contends that even though the texts have often been labeled as first and foremost didactic efforts, their actual project is "a rhetorical

project of persuasion" (16) as well as "a project of social justice" (19). She, most meaningfully, talks about *testimonio*'s rhetorical project as one of engaging "tropes of persuasion" (7) in "socioliterary" (51) narratives. Chantelle Warner in her volume on German social autobiographies makes the same point. These stories do not seek to inform or entertain, "[s]ocial autobiographies rather *entreat* their readers to react" (180 ; emphasis in the original). This she calls the "argumentational force of testimonies," which she further characterizes as "real-world pragmatic and political [efforts]"(146). In this case, one must understand the term entreat in its sense of making an earnest request as well as its older meaning of "entering negotiation" (OED).

Argumentation represents a specific form of communication based on arguments participants can conclude from shared premises. It would seem inappropriate, however, to describe the textual format of testimonials of social empowerment as argumentation, *per se*. The texts rather enact an argumentative force, that is, their illocutionary force pertains to persuasion. Iris Marion Young, in *Inclusion and Democracy*, convincingly dismantles the overpowering position of argumentation as the solely acceptable form of political communication aiming at persuasion in deliberative democracy. In her effort to promote ideals of inclusion in contemporary political criticism, Young proposes to include other, generally despised, forms of communication in the political stage. She names three specific communicative formats: greeting, rhetoric and narrative. In her re-contextualized model, she recommends abandoning the term deliberative for the benefit of *communicative* democracy, so epitomizing her inclusive ideals. In the framework of communicative democracy, testimonials are then specific forms of communication (*i.e.* communicative action) that should be considered as valid as other forms of communication entering the national dialogue.

Young, in depicting her reasons for including greeting, rhetoric and narrative in the category of valid forms of political communication, establishes a valuable structure for the literary critique of testimonials. Indeed, all three communicative formats find echoes in the fundamental climactic elements of the witnesses' narrative weaving. Young's structure, in fact, makes it possible to debunk Habermas's dogmatically formalist approach to literature. In his development of communicative action, Habermas, indeed, rejects literary works—that is forms of the poetic function of language—as genuine communicative speech acts. He argues that instances of language in which the poetic is the dominant, determining function propose "disempowered" speech acts "robb[ing] [them] of their illocutionary force" (*Poetic* 390). Poetic language "retain[s] illocutionary meanings only as refracted by indirect reporting or quotation" (*Poetic* 390). Literature because of the "world-generating" (*Poetic* 390) capacity of

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fiction displays illocutionary force by imitation. In creating another world, the literary work proposes "quasi-speech acts" (Ohmann qtd. in Habermas, *Poetics* 390) which neutralize their binding/bonding force and release readers from the pressure to make decisions intrinsic to everyday life practices. Habermas's project is here to establish the autonomy of the linguistic work of art. His partition, however, appears unconvincing and at the complete opposite of what this research demonstrates.

Habermas contends that what demarcates literature from everyday discourses resides in the fact that "the world-disclosing function of language predominates over the other linguistic functions and determines the structure of the linguistic construct" (*Poetic* 391). It is when the world-disclosing function of language "gains independence vis-à-vis the expressive, regulative, and informative functions" that "rhetorical means of representation depart from communicative routines and take on a life of their own" (*Poetic* 392). Habermas's criterion appears particularly unsatisfactory in the case of testimonials. The narrators' texts as rhetorically creative as they may be overtly seek to keep a meaningful contact with the expressive, regulative and informative functions of language as demonstrated in the texts and para-text. Habermas's total reliance on a singular formal pragmatic criterion in separating literature from the lifeworld appears even less convincing in his convenient avoidance of examples. Though he refers to Mary L. Pratt's list of genres challenging the criterion of unambiguous fiction for the demarcation of literature, Habermas carefully avoids discussing Pratt's mention of nonfiction, memoirs, or travel reports and handily chooses Capote's *In Cold Blood* so as to provide a representative example of his formal criterion in a case where the boundary between the fictional and real world is blurred. Habermas insists that it is Capote's "exemplary way of dealing with [the factual events]" that "makes it the occasion for an innovative [...] representation depart[ing] from communicative routines" (*Poetic* 393). One nevertheless wonders whether other examples, most meaningfully texts less carefully crafted, would so easily fit that frame.

Moreover, Habermas may have well planted the seeds of objection in his own discussion:

> In a certain respect, it is the refraction and partial sublation [...] of illocutionary validity claims that distinguishes the story from the eyewitness statement, teasing from insulting, irony from misleading, hypothesis from assertion, fantasy from perception, the training maneuver from the act of warfare, and the imagined scenario from the report on an actual catastrophe. But in none of these cases do the illocutionary acts lose their action-coordinating binding and bonding forces. Even in the cases adduced

for the sake of comparison, the communicative functions of the speech remain intact insofar as the fictional elements cannot be detached from contexts of life-practices. (*Poetic* 392)

If refracted speech acts may indeed conserve their illocutionary force when anchored in life-practices, one can easily imagine cases where linguistic works of art would display such an anchorage. The whole tradition of engaged and Human Rights literature is a prime example. Moreover, George Yùdice carefully devised the aesthetic of testimonial literature as an aesthetic of life practices *per se*. Testimonials, hence, stand as a form of literature that may fully capitalize on their communicative potentiality because of their direct connection with issues "carrying on the world's business" (Ohmann qtd. in Habermas, *Poetics* 390). Similarly, Young's appropriation of greeting, rhetoric and narrative as acceptable modes of political communication fits in this exact same procedure. Greeting, rhetoric and narrative would be, in Habermas's understanding, refracted communicative speech acts, but their intimate link with matters of the lifeworld enable them to retain their full illocutionary potential. I will thus here briefly review Young's account of communicative democracy and its inclusion of greeting, narrative and rhetoric as valid modes of political communication and then devote a separate section to all three modes of speech in a more detailed analysis of their correlation with testimonials.

Young, in her depiction of deliberative democracy (which she contrasts with an aggregative model), insists that democracy, thus organized, needs to be understood as a discussion between participants, the citizens. The deliberative model, she contends, has been historically rooted in ideals of inclusion, political equality, reasonableness and publicity. The democratic processes of decision-making must include all those affected as participants. These participants must have equal effective opportunities of taking part in these processes. And, as participants, these subjects are assumed to possess a set of dispositions that make them reasonable. Among these dispositions are: the fact that they enter discussion with the aim of reaching agreement and that they enter the discussion with an open mind. This implies that participants are willing to change their opinions if persuaded that these opinions are incorrect or inappropriate. Finally, these interactions between participants constitute them into a public—"[which] consists of a plurality of different individual and collective experiences, histories, commitments, ideals, interests, and goals that face one another to discuss collective problems under a common set of procedures" (25)—in which people hold one another accountable. Young heartily endorses these principles. She, however, doubts the fact that in

some formulations of the model, argumentation is presented as the primary and only factually acceptable form of political communication.

She asserts that "while argument is an important contributor to political discussion, there are reasons to be suspicious of privileging argument, and especially certain interpretations of what good argument means, over other forms of communication" (37). What appears problematic in argumentation is that the chain of reasoning relies on shared premises. As was demonstrated by scholars of the recognition theory and as Renault meaningfully develops in his definition of the experience of injustice, these shared premises often do not exist for the victims of injustice. Trauma, indeed, may shatter linguistic and sometimes epistemic premises, while procedural premises often exclude victims from the discussion. Young's point in debunking argumentation is to emphasize the fact that "a lack of shared premises or discursive framework for making an argument about a need or injustice, however, does not imply that there are no ways to communicate the need or injustice to others" (37). It there remains to find, and implement, these ways to communicate.

More significantly, Young argues that even in cases when the participants do share premises and a common idiom, the norms assumed in the discursive decision-making processes may still privilege some and disadvantage others. She here refers back to the ideal of reasonableness presumed as governing deliberative forms of democracy. "In particular, expectations about norms of articulateness and dispassionateness [that] sometimes serve to devalue the efforts of some participants to make their claims and arguments to a political public" (38) can bring about silencing effects. For Young, being reasonable means being able to listen and willing to change one's ideas or preferences if persuaded that these ideas or preferences are inappropriate or wrong. According to this understanding, being reasonable "requires no special education or training beyond the significant demands of co-operative social interaction" (38). This ideal of reasonableness is to be contrasted with that more often, and more widely, valued, which implies articulateness, clarity and dispassionateness. Young insists that these ideal principles are culturally specific in that they embody the standards of higher education. The norm of reasonableness she seeks to impose is meant to be universal: namely, "a general norm of communicative action that aims to reach understanding" (38).[97]

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[97] Young's conceptualization of reasonableness actually corresponds to Habermas's understanding of the behavior of rational beings according to which being reasonable corresponds to express reasonable opinions and act efficiently, educational ideals notwithstanding.

Young's formulation of the ideal of reasonableness is, of course, of particular significance when integrated in the context of testimonials. Witnesses, in engaging their narratives in a publishing gesture enter the national dialogue as rightful reasonable participants. The empowerment they acquire through writing is inscribed in the rhetorical figure of reasonable speakers of their narrative project. Similarly, as reasonable speakers they are willing to listen and to engage in a discussion that might change their views, which they will nevertheless defend in an effort to persuade their readers. Conversely, they will expect their readers to act as reasonable participants in the discussion, participants willing to listen to others' story and willing to abandon their primary opinions if persuaded that these are no longer appropriate. Young's reformulation of the principle of reasonableness further amplifies the hypothesis that testimonials of social empowerment as speech acts are instances of communicative action. As disturbing and as challenging as these texts may appear, they, first and foremost, seek to *reach understanding* with their audience so as to engage, together, in the struggle for social justice.

Before further developing Young's project of integrating greeting, rhetoric and narrative within the standardized forms of political communication, it appears necessary to briefly outline her description of the public sphere. Young's wish for more inclusive standards of political speech goes hand in hand with a plural understanding of the public sphere. Though her criticism does not directly bear on its unitary quality, she nevertheless questions another of its conventional aspects. Young asserts that another problem of the accepted depiction of the deliberative model of democracy is that instances of deliberation, and, as a consequence, enactments of the public sphere, are conventionally understood to be face-to-face discussions. Young is thus here picking on another type of unitary format, that of the medium. Young contends that in our contemporary societies, such a restricted approach to the media through which political communication can be established is arbitrary and utterly inconsistent. She then refers to Habermas's notion of a "'decentered' conception of politics and society" and advocates the idea that "the processes of communication that give normative and rational meaning to democracy occur as flows and exchanges among various social sectors not brought together under a unifying principle" (46). The public sphere, thus pluralized, can be invoked in manifold situations and through numerous media. This, in turn, implies the possibility for written as opposed to oral dialogue, as well as for staggered dialogue.

This idea of a decentered public sphere has positive implications for testimonials for two main reasons. First, the fact that Young insists on a plurality of media acceptable for

political communication beyond the sole possibility of face-to-face discussion, allows for testimonials of social empowerment to effectively function as unofficial public spheres. The written medium, more specifically first-person narratives, is then acceptable as a possible way of enacting political debate. Moreover, Young's emphasis on *flows* of communication also carries the implication that political debates can occur on a differentiated basis in both time and place. Young rejects the idea of static debates meant to happen only in specific fora and only at specific purposeful moments. It is not because the debate was initiated by witnesses who at some point in time and in a specific place wrote down their narratives that readers, obviously sitting in another time and place, cannot answer with regard to the issue that was raised.

Second, the notion of a decentered public sphere carries on semantic connotations that echo important concerns for social positioning. Young insists that decentered must not be understood as decentralized, which would then mean uncoordinated and probably organized on a hierarchical basis. Decentered rather means moving between the centers to the margins in a somehow dialogical movement. Symptomatically, testimonials, more especially their Latin-American counterpart, have been considered by critics as instances of the margins speaking back to the center in the frame of the postcolonial effort for publicizing voices emanating from minorities. Similarly, testimonials of social empowerment represent ways for the voices of the oppressed to be efficiently expressed within the public debate. This decentered view of the public sphere allows for the inclusion of voices emanating from the margins but on an equal footing with those emanating from the center.

Young starts from her criticism of reasonableness to support her idea that other forms of political communication should be included in the debates of the public sphere. The ideal of reasonableness, as it is currently understood, corresponds to speech forms which are generally articulate: they reproduce the standards of higher education, namely dispassionateness. These speech forms therefore value reason over emotions, and imply a commitment to disembodiedness, precluding any overt use of body language. According to this standard, participants in the discussion should display objectivity, which is again falsely equaled with calm, and an absence of emotional expression. Reasonable speech then, conventionally, privileges literal over figurative language. However, Young contends, emotional expression, figurative language and embodied forms of speech are valuable tools for reasonable persuasion and reasonable judgment (the pragmatic offshoot of persuasion). Young also considers the notion of civility as being part of these necessary conditions for political communication. Civility in the sense of expecting a calm and exemplary behavior in

instances of public discussion might also have a discriminatory effect on the expression of particular issues. Though I do not totally adopt Young's point of view in this case, as she seems through her approach to civility to somehow justify violent behavior such as aggressive demonstrations or wildcat strikes, civility may still be of interest in the position testimonials of social empowerment should be granted in society.[98] Again, those narratives could easily be deemed aggressive, shocking, or too intimate, and as such be dismissed from public debates.

Articulateness, dispassionateness, disembodiedness and orderliness, Young contends, are inherent to the ideal of reasonableness applied to political communication. They constitute as such forms of *internal exclusion* in the processes of democratic decision-making. Internal exclusion, according to Young, should be contrasted with external exclusion. It occurs in circumstances where subjects are formally included in a forum or procedure but where their claims are not taken seriously or with equal respect. The primary status of argumentation and its ideal of reasonableness in political communication represent such a form of internal exclusion. Because some participants may not display the necessary articulateness, dispassionateness, disembodiedness or orderliness, their intervention in public debate might be diminished or discarded altogether. The way in which Young lists the necessary standards of reasonableness alludes to the possible portion of the public silenced by those types of internal exclusions. Whereas articulateness obviously refers to immigrant minorities, dispassionateness and disembodiedness might imply feminine types of speech and orderliness serves as a somehow convenient way of indicating possibly troublesome social activists— needless to say that those individuals largely (but not totally) compose the witnesses of testimonials.

Young therefore includes three other forms of speech in the toolkit available for political communication: greeting, rhetoric and narrative. Those forms of speech are meant at mitigating existing forms of internal exclusion. As these are modes of communication that appear in everyday interactions, they are available to all participants and refer to less demanding standards—though their mastery demands a certain level of socialization and can be demonstrated with differing levels of skill—than argumentation. Their everyday-life characteristics are meaningful to Young's theory. Indeed, she considers the purpose of her effort for inclusion in political communication as akin to that of Habermas's discourse ethics. She seeks to elaborate "a method of normative theorizing that makes explicit the implicit

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[98] The issue of civility has led to important disagreements and criticism between Young and Benhabib (see, notably, Benhabib's introduction in *Democracy and Difference*).

are not writers" (20). Yet, she continues, "[l]ess has been said about the fact that their communities generally regard them as skilled orators" (20). In some cases, this skill is not a conscious one. Some witnesses have indeed worked on their ability for storytelling as part of their self-developing journey, but others appear simply unconscious of their actual capability as skilled orators or writers. This suggests meaningful correlations with Young's remarks about issues of internal exclusion in political debates. Often potential participants silence themselves in thinking that they do not possess the necessary skills for speaking in public. Testimonials of social empowerment then propose convenient alternative fora for self-expression. Their skill as orators lies in their ability to construct powerful accounts of first-hand experience in weaving finely-wrought narratives of their selves. Their argumentation is linguistically implemented in weaving a narrative on threads that allow for a powerful rhetoric based on both rational and affective appeal. However, their texts alone would not be able to achieve the goal they have set for themselves. As a consequence, the para-textual apparatus and the editorial processes and decisions represent a form of greeting, or public acknowledgment, which needs to be discussed as well.

In the remainder of this chapter, I wish to describe the modes of greeting, rhetoric and narrative in their specific correlation with testimonials of social empowerment. I will first focus on greeting in an effort to describe the text's way of presenting the witnesses to their readers. I will also offer some considerations on the question of "addressivity," (Warner 144) or the way in which the authors address their audience and finish on some open-ended remarks on the question of reception. As the narrative format of testimonials appears to be the most straightforward of their textual characteristics, I will then focus on the two specific narrative threads they display. I will first explore their reliance on an aesthetic of impact based on a development of a specific understanding of the notions of sincerity and the sense of authenticity it effects in disclosing intimate experiences of injustice. I will, then, examine the texts' use of the ethics of responsibility in the hope to trigger a sense of action in their readership. The last part of this section is devoted to rhetoric. I propose a comprehensive description of the four paradigmatic *ethe* the witnesses, who have now become narrators/orators, construct. The forensic, religious, activist and intimate paradigms will be first explained in general terms and then further detailed, in the following section of case studies, with the help of examples of close-reading.

II.4.1.1 Greetings

norms guiding everyday communicative interaction" (53). In spite of the hopes she entertains for these three modes of communication, Young insists that her point is not to propose them as substitutes for argumentation: "rather than substituting for the role of political argument, I offer practices of greeting, rhetoric, and narrative as enriching both a descriptive and normative account of public discussion and deliberation" (57). Greeting, rhetoric and narrative are not meant to replace argumentation but rather to back it up in the project of including usually silenced voices in political debates.

Greeting, first, or "Public acknowledgment" as Young proposes to call it in political contexts, "is a mode of communication where a subject directly recognizes the subjectivity of others, thereby fostering trust" (53). Greeting allows for a preliminary recognition of the participants as both generalized and concrete others, to recall Benhabib's terms, and makes it possible to create an auspicious bond for the acceptance of the speech acts that will follow. As for rhetoric, it refers to the different ways in which political arguments may be expressed. It "has several functions that contribute to inclusive and persuasive political communication, including calling attention to points and situating speakers and audience in relation to one another" (53). It is mainly in that last function, that of Aristotelian *ethos*, that rhetoric comes of interest for testimonials. Narrative, finally, according to Young, covers functions that resist internal exclusions and can efficiently back arguments. "Among other functions, narrative empowers relatively disenfranchised groups to assert themselves publicly; it also offers means by which people whose experiences and beliefs differ so much that they do not share enough premises to engage in fruitful debate can nevertheless reach dialogical understanding" (53). The reputable power of narrative is no longer to be demonstrated in the case of testimonials. Yet, it is their specific way of constructing their narratives that is of interest in this critical approach.

Testimonials of social empowerment as textual constructs rely on all three of these modes of communication. Besides, it is important to insist on this idea of construction. Those texts have their right place in literary analysis for the simple reason that they are indeed examples of literary craftsmanship. The literary legitimacy of these texts might indeed reside in the fact that non-fiction, though it is meant to offer a stronger, if not complete, sense of verisimilitude, remains as powerfully and sometimes as beautifully designed as fiction. Even more so in the case of testimonials of social empowerment, it is the literary power (call it beauty, poetry, affectivity, authenticity or any other type of thing) of the everyday words that is emphasized. Their literary craftsmanship can easily be correlated to the art of the oratory. As Nance insightfully puts it: "much has been made of the fact that most testimonial speakers

Greetings, as Young recalls, correspond to gestures of respect and politeness. They often literally embody these communicative moments when speakers acknowledge the presence of the other participants. In a gesture of recognition, greetings include participants in the discussion. Young argues that it is in this sense that greetings need to be taken into account when analyzing political communication. If democratic discussions are aimed at becoming more inclusive, moments of greeting must be properly spelled out so as to become gestures of recognition towards all potential participants. Young, with her approach to greetings, interestingly proposes a significant reversal of perspective in recognition politics. When considering greetings, recognition is no longer an end to achieve; it rather becomes a starting point, *a condition for* proper reasonable discourse. Greeting in its most colloquial everyday usage is meant to properly acknowledge participants in the communicative situation in their particularity. When greeting someone, the speaker will, either directly or indirectly, name the other as a specific individual participant in the conversations. Therefore, Young argues, "situations of political communication in which participants explicitly acknowledge the other participants are more substantively inclusive than those that do not" (*Inclusion* 57). She adds that "the political function of moments of greeting are to assert discursive equality and establish or re-establish the trust necessary for discussion to proceed in good faith" (60). Young finally asserts that without these specific moments in the communicative situation, people might simply stop listening to one another.

Greetings are "forms of speech that lubricate discussion" (58). This broad definition confers the advantage of placing moments of greeting everywhere in the dialogical situation. Greetings can virtually occur at all stages in the conversation. The definition, moreover, remains sketchy enough regarding to these forms of speech. Situations of colloquial greetings remind us of the fact that these are more often than not realized as extra-linguistic gestures. They nevertheless represent forms of politeness and, sometimes, mild flattery that facilitate discussion. Young thus defines greetings in political communication as public acknowledgment:

> [it] names communicative political gestures through which those who have conflicts aim to solve problems, *recognize* others as included in the discussion, especially those with whom they differ in opinion, interest or social location. By such Sayings discussion participants acknowledge that the others they address are part of the process and that we who address them must be accountable to them, as they to us. (61)

In this passage, Young refers to Levinas's philosophy of language. Levinas considers greeting a form of Saying, rather than Say. Say comprises all communicative actions through which

speakers seek to convey meaning. As opposed to those, acts of Saying are forms of subject-to-subject recognition but do not convey any meaningful information. Greetings in their Saying status embody illocutionary force. Saying is the moment when the speaker announces 'I am here', hoping for the addressee to answer 'I see you'. A witness necessarily testifies to someone and a testimony is accepted as such—authenticated, in Ricoeur's terminology—only through the addressee's acknowledgment. More significantly, greetings make it possible to acknowledge the other, to whom the witness testifies, as a rightful participant in a reasonable discussion. Greetings, thereby, embody the offer testimonies—which, by nature, are rightful speech acts oriented towards reaching a shared understanding—make to their addressee.

However, Levinas also insists that Saying are moments of exposure, vulnerability and risk: "[i]n such an announcement the speaker responds to the other person's sensible presence, by taking responsibility for the other's vulnerability, but without promise of reciprocation" (Young, *Inclusion* 58). This instance of vulnerability is heightened when dealing with political communication and practical discourses. Argumentation, like all acts of persuasion, is more sensitive to this vulnerability and exposure towards the hearer's response. Greetings in testimonials of social empowerment might suffer even more from this vulnerability towards the hearer's decision to respond at all. However, as Young explains, they are indispensable:

> Communication would never happen if someone did not make the 'first move', out of responsibility for the other to expose herself without promise of answer or acceptance. Greeting [...] is this communicative moment of taking the risk of trusting in order to establish and maintain the bond of trust necessary to sustain a discussion about issues that face us together. (58)

Without this first move on the part of witnesses, without their decision to literally expose themselves and their story, no discussion over specific issues of social injustice would ever take place.

This dimension of trust is also of substantial importance. Testimonial discourse and trust are, by essence, mutually concomitant. Indeed, all four paradigmatic testimonial *ethe* rely on a particular understanding of trust. In the frame of the forensic paradigm, trust is invoked both in the speech of the different parties when testifying at the stand and in the judge's verdict. Indeed, the very notion of trust in justice itself is a recurring motif in the narratives. The narrators display their trust in justice, which, in spite of having been (sometimes violently) put to the test, remains the very engine of their social actions. This motif appears most fully established in the activist paradigm. At the same time, the religious

paradigm opens up the frame of faith, whereas the intimate paradigm encourages trust in bonds of friendship and care. Each narrative, because of its testimonial nature, from its very beginning and in its own way of greeting readers, seeks to establish trust in the content that is disclosed. But these narratives also testify to the different dimensions of trust that underlie the communicative and cooperative moves of the social world.

Now, in published volumes, this first move, these greeting-like gestures, may obviously be more difficult to delineate than in oral conversation or even political addresses. Writing, especially in its literary format, seems less appropriate to offer to greet readers as participants in a communicative situation. However, texts directly addressed to readers do exist and testimonials of social empowerment, just as any other engaged type of literature, are, I contend, part of these. Greetings in testimonials thus correspond, at first, to the publishing gesture. The texts, in being published, enter the public sphere as well as the debate over social issues, and, in doing so, acknowledge their readers and other texts to which they may answer as participants in an ongoing conversation in implementing Bakhtinian dialogism. Greetings are also embodied in the narrative's para-textual apparatus. The introductions by editors, the appendixes, the information readers can read about the witnesses before beginning their narratives proper, and most meaningfully the narrators' portraits (whether pictures or drawings) are all forms of greeting in the sense that this apparatus's presenting and contextualizing function acknowledges the presence (and importance) of readers as well as their need for context. Greetings, in such cases, acquire a dimension Young does not necessarily focus on, that of doing the introductions. It is in this sense as well that greetings may more effectively develop trust. The most emphatic example of this form of introduction correspond to the 'Dear Diary' paradigmatic formula in the *Freedom Writers'* *Diary*. As I developed in an article, it is indeed possible to see a shift in the meaning of the formula at some point in the volume. The 'Dear Diary' at some point becomes the equivalent of a 'Dear Reader' which coupled with direct addresses, not only acknowledges the presence of the reader but seeks to secure her privilege bond with the narrators.

Greetings gestures, in testimonials of social empowerment, seek to build up trust between narrators and readers in particularizing their social bond. Social bonds in the lifeworld are created between figures of the generalized other, people in societies because their share similar rights and responsibilities are bound to one another in a given society. However, these bonds are constantly particularized when established between concrete other figures. Young contends that for a form of public acknowledgment to properly achieve its goal, it must not be a mere appeal to all reasonable persons. It has to be particularized. Hence,

witnesses and editors, appeal to specific readers through their volumes. It seems important to mention that some speakers in certain volumes directly partition the audience and seek to address only the parts that would be more inclined to answer or react. In greeting their readers, the narrators emphasize their concreteness as individual human beings, just as they highlight the individuality or specificity of their readers. Indeed, through greetings, witnesses and editors acknowledge the presence of readers not only as participants in the discussion over social justice, but, more importantly, as *a very specific type* of participant.

The very notion of particularizing addressees is already of importance in Levinas's model of Saying as well as in its implications for testimonies. Levinas contends that the moment of Saying can also be epitomized in likening the ethical relationship it creates between speaker and addressee as that of a captor and a hostage (Young, *Inclusion* 59). More significantly, Young specifies that "the unconditionality of being hostage is not the limit case of solidarity, but the condition of all solidarity" (*Inclusion* 59). Of course, solidarity is one of the most important parts of the message testimonials seek to convey. They are, however, aware of the potency of the possible hostage feeling it may stir up in their addressees. Testimonies are vulnerable speech acts, vulnerable because highly demanding on the part of their addressees. Jean-François Lyotard, as recalled by Kimberly Nance, proposes in *The Differend* the necessary components of a proper testimonial contract. When describing the testimonial addressee, Lyotard specifies that it must be someone "not only willing to listen and accept the reality of the referent, but also worthy of being spoken to" (qtd. in Nance 48). Nance contends that this demanding status for the addressee is one of the factors that have been adversary to the actual success of *testimonios*. On the other hand, testimonials of social empowerment seem to draw most of their force from this very distinctive way of particularizing the audience they would like to acknowledge.

Though I will further specify their understanding of responsibility in the next section, it is because they present their audience as reasonable and responsible citizens that the witnesses hope their project to be successful. In a paradoxical use of Lyotard's demanding paradigm of the ideal testimonial addressee, witnesses on the one hand rely on the impact of the shock their narrative may produce in taking their readers as hostages of their experience of injustice. And on the other, they hope for their readers to realize that they are taken hostages because of their specific status as reasonable and responsible citizens who are, as such, capable of displaying the necessary solidarity for proper political communication to take place. Acts of greetings in testimonials of social empowerment already correspond to their persuasive effort of including the audience in their struggle for social justice.

II.4.1.2 Narrative

Young titles her subsection on narrative: "narrative and situated knowledge" (71). Indeed, as a disciple of Arendt, she sees a purposeful correlation between narrative and human experience. In the same way as Benhabib does in her approach to discourse ethics, Young understands human life as a web of narratives that most notably permit, on the one hand, to recount lived experiences, and, on the other, to assess the value of those experiences. Accordingly, "narrative [as a mode of political communication] serves important functions to foster understanding among members of a polity with very different experiences and assumptions about what is important" (71). As a mode of communication, narrative "can speak across our differences to promote understanding" (72). With this simple formulation, Young introduces narrative as one of the paradigmatic formats for communicative action. Narrative or storytelling serve as speech acts oriented towards reaching understanding. Young's primary approach to narrative, thus, seems to already support the hypothesis according to which testimonials can function as instances of communicative action. As a way to plug the gaps between the lived experience of a subject and that of another, testimonials effectively function as speech acts oriented towards reaching understanding. This understanding serves, at first, to share a situated knowledge necessary for the contextualization of the issue of justice.

Young makes a purposeful distinction—interestingly on pragmatic grounds—between narratives in general and political narratives, in the sense that they differ in their intent and audience context. "I tell the story not primarily to entertain or to reveal myself, but to make a point—to demonstrate, describe, explain or justify something to others in an ongoing political discussion" (72). These argumentative, *i.e.* persuasive, overtones suggest of course a number of remarks critics of testimonial literature with social implications have previously voiced. Thus, Nance, when she focuses on the "socioliterary" (7) format of *testimonio,* insists that the testimonial genre needs to be defined in terms of end and means, a genre aimed at increasing social justice trough the telling of lived experience. Likewise, Warner regards social autobiographies as testimonies aimed at more than informational or entertaining purposes: "testimonies related to the experiences of marginalized social identities not only serve to inform or evoke sympathy from their audience, but through their personal, intimate portrayals, compel their readers to change their behavior and the behavior of others" (146).

This simultaneous attention devoted to narrative as a way of linguistically formatting experience with specific pragmatic intentions again confirms the communicative-action hypothesis.

Young's approach to narrative offers a convenient parallel to Benhabib's in its close connection with the importance of the figure of the concrete other and the debate over where to put the boundary between public and private matters. Benhabib insists on the fact that it is only through their life narrative that I can really know the other with whom I engage in conversation by virtue of their position as a generalized other (thus having similar rights as a participant in the discussion). Through their self-narrative I can truly recognize them as concrete others with concrete needs, desires, and emotions that I need to take into account in the political debate. Young emphasizes two similar effects narrative can assume in blurring the frontier between the public and the private. She, indeed, concurs on the notion of erasing the public/private boundary in an effort to create a more inclusive form of democracy. Narrative, first, facilitates the creation of local publics—"collective of persons allied within the wider polity with respect to particular interests, opinion and/or social positions" (73)—and the articulation of their private interests with collective affinities. As she encourages a decentred approach to democracy, Young admits that publics tend to multiply and become smaller. The multiplication of what she terms "local publics" calls for the concentrating power of narratives on two different grounds. On the one hand, it allows members of local publics to identify one another through storytelling: in realizing the affinities of their stories, people come together into a new collectivity. On the other, narratives are used in the publics' effort to politicize and publicize their situation, much in the sense of consciousness-raising. Secondly, narrative supports this interfacing of the private and the public in the sense that it facilitates the understanding of the experience of others and counters (wrongful) pre-understandings. "Storytelling is often the only vehicle for understanding the particular experiences of those in particular social situations, experiences not shared by those situated differently, but which they must understand in order to do justice," (74) Young argues. In this view, testimonies regain their forensic power, providing an answer to people doubting the legitimacy of specific claims.

Still exploiting Arendt's legacy over the deep correlation between political theory and narrative power, Young further argues that narrative aids "in constituting the social knowledge *that enlarges thought*" (76; emphasis mine). Like Benhabib, Young encourages Arendt's notion of enlarged thinking as the proper type of situated knowledge from which reasonable judgment is to be concluded. By means of a sort of moral addition, "[narrative]

[...] reveals a total social knowledge from particular points of view" (76). The pragmatic strength of testimonials of social empowerment lies in this understanding of enlarged thinking. It is because the volumes of testimonials are presented as polyphonic works, thus uniting (and adding up) voices emanating from different social positions, that they persuade their readers to pass, over the experiences they are disclosing, a judgment of social injustice. As such, testimonials of social empowerment can be considered public spheres in their own right and contribute to the national dialogue.

Narrative does not only facilitate empathy (as a restricted expression of enlarged mentality), it facilitates understanding and reasonable moral judgment. Young explains:

> Narrative [...] exhibits the situated knowledge available from various social locations, and the combination of narratives from different perspectives produces a collective social wisdom not available from any one position. By means of narratives expressed in public with others differently situated who also tell their stories, speakers and listeners can develop the 'enlarged thought' that transforms their thinking about an issue in a way that takes account of the perspectives of others. (76)

The two narrative threads of the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility are here sketched out. The impact of discovering about the experience of others through narrative leads the listener to somehow accept the responsibility indulged by enlarged thinking and moral judgment.[99]

A few more words on the notion of experience will bridge the gaps between social and literary theory. If the two critical hypotheses I derived from Habermas have made it possible to partly theorize the sociological implications of testimonials and their literary status as crafted texts, the notion of experience and its significant relation to narrative will serve to complete the picture. Indeed, Young argues that narrative can help solve *différends*—thereby interpreting the latter term in a way that departs from Lyotard's postmodernist premises:

> Storytelling is often an important bridge in such cases between the mute experience of being wronged and political arguments about justice. Those who experience the wrong, and perhaps some others who sense it, may have no language for expressing the suffering as an injustice, but nevertheless, they can tell stories that relate a sense of

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[99] This impact is for Young of a didactic nature: "the general normative functions of narrative in political communication, then, refer to teaching and learning" (77). Similarly, numerous scholars referred to the didactic force of testimony; see Fellman and Laub, Beverley, Derrida, Dulong, Gugelberger, Nance, Sommers, Ricoeur, Warner.

wrong. As people tell such stories publicly within and between groups, discursive reflexion on them then develops a normative language that names their injustice and can give a general account of why this kind of suffering constitutes an injustice. (72)

In this very sense, narrative represents the mode of communication through which sociologists and other scholars can access the experience of injustice Renault writes about.

Narrative serves Renault's practical dynamic in literally using words as communicative *speech acts* against injustice. Yet narrative also carries out his normative dynamic's task as it offers a new normative stage *and* idiom for injustice to be discussed. Similarly, literature in the contemporary era seems to have displayed a comparative "hunger for experience" (Warner 175). Warner contends that the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century have been the stage of a renewed search for reality where "[i]t did no longer have to do with touching the truth but with touching reality" (175). Warner contends that reality somehow "had to do with finally having an experience" (175). The boom of memoirs, what Fellman and Laub have called the age of testimony, and Leigh Gilmore the culture of confession, are symptomatic of this craving for lived experience. Similarly, the contemporary upsurge of reality entertainment testifies to "the thrill of confession" (Warner 175) audiences are so eagerly looking for.

It is then on the narration of their lived experience that the narrators of testimonials of social empowerment draw the literary and social empowering might of their texts. Far from offering ostensibly shocking examples of uninhibited self-disclosure, they seek to use the impact of recounting their first-hand experience of social injustice in an effort to engage in a communicative speech act aimed at persuading their audience to react. It is this notion of impact that is primarily based on the power of the authenticity of experience and the authenticity of witnesses' voices pervading the testimonies. This kind of authenticity is closely intertwined with a deep sense of sincerity, according to which the authors seal a pact of truth and outspokenness with their readers. In this sense, their aesthetic of impact somehow enacts Warner's "thrill of confession" in the sense that it "lies in the moments when true emotions seem to be revealed in spite of the art form, the script and sometimes even in spite of the speaker's own self-will" (175).

And yet the image of the pact is not simply metaphorical, for the pact, as a formal agreement, involves a sense of moral duty. Testimonials of social empowerment do not, cannot, solely rely on the emotional chord, lest they fall in the templates of victimization proper to trauma literature and miss their social goal altogether. As Warner argues, "the uptake of these works as authentic testimonies, and thus as vehicle for social change, is

contingent upon their ability to incite the appropriate emotional *and ethical* responses from their readers" (180; emphasis mine). The narrators' weaving of a powerful ethics of responsibility is then paramount to their texts' proper functioning. The term responsibility in my formulation may appear excessively general and somehow misleading. Responsibility can be understood as a sort of "blame game" (Young, *Responsibility* 96) or as a political sense of duty. As a matter of fact, it is thanks to the intricate connection of both these meanings that the ethics of responsibility in testimonials can be woven. Witnesses do not necessarily *seek to* blame a few culprits (or even themselves) for what has gone wrong in the system of social justice, although blame lurks in the texts' rhetorical shadows and serves the aesthetic of impact as well. They rather hope to promote a form of what Young calls a "socially connected responsibility" (*Responsibility* 105) according to which, because everybody is somehow liable of the malfunction, everybody should in a forward-looking effort be true to a regained sense of civic responsibility and solidarity.

II.4.1.2.1 Aesthetic of Impact

Testimonials of social empowerment are not texts produced for the mere entertainment of their audiences. Their purpose, and the texts overtly say so whether in the para-textual apparatus or in the narratives themselves, is to compel people to react. As Nance puts it, readers are not meant to sit back. The texts "carr[y] a potential to invoke obligations and to evoke actions from them" (51). One does not read a testimonial as one reads a novel. Testimonies have in their nature the power to leave a trace, to produce a deep impact. It is on this impact inherent to the genre that testimonials first rely in the hope of creating a unique and peculiar bond with their readers. Even though the narratives are meant to be received as illocutions aimed at reaching understanding, these speech acts' primary effect has the power of a shock, of putting in plain sight what was supposedly not meant to be seen. Derrida calls witnesses bearers of secrets. Warner argues that "to testify, rather than simply narrate or depict experiences, implies that the story one tells reveals things which were previously publicly inaccessible" (29). Testimonies' uncovering function has often been discussed and explained in various ways, notably by scholars who were investigating the correlations between the question of trauma and its impossible expression. However, the impact witnesses' narratives manage to create, even when disclosing highly distressing events, represent their very affective force, their actual capacity of (re)creating the social bond. Warner indeed contends that "[…] as readers, we consider not only what happened, but what it means to the teller of the tale and what we think it should mean for us" (4).

This affective force is based on a perlocutionary use of realism displayed by testimonials, or autobiographical forms of writing—what Warner inadequately terms "authenticity effect(s)" (9). These effects, Warner insists, are not only part of the question of "the tellability of the story" (4) but also establish for the readers a relation of obligation or responsibility. Perlocutionary realism is central to our perception, as readers, of the testimonial power of a text. It signifies that "as published literature, autobiograph[ical writing] is transformed and becomes everybody's experience [...] [and] it also becomes everybody's problem" (Warner 5). That is, when a story has been disclosed to the reader, as deranging as it may be, and as much resistance the reader has been willing to put up against it, the act of transmitting experience remains loaded with an undiminished impact. This impact is akin to what Warner calls the "thrill of confession" (175). The texts invest on their truth-feeling and convey a sense of immediacy and compellingness to their readers. Warner, indeed, contends that the testimonial power of what she calls social autobiographies "is tied to their ability to touch the readers; they do not merely communicate experience, but attempt to make them perceptible in the form of a relayed reader response" (28). The impact is that of lived experience *per se*, as if readers were reliving the author's experience through realism, immediacy, and a disarming honesty.

Though this section is concentrated on narrative, it nonetheless involves rhetorical questions in the description of narrative weaving. Since I focus on aesthetic considerations based on emotionality, I need to deal with the concept of *pathos*. Indeed, the point of the aesthetic of impact, of the power of its disarming honesty, is what Emmanuel Danblon calls, the "adjustment of the audience".[100] Danblon explains that *pathos* (in Aristotle's sense) is the way through which the orator can bend up the audience's emotional state, so as for the audience to issue the judgment that will most conveniently serve the goal the orators seek to attain with their speech. As for this specific molding function of *pathos*, the phrase disarming honesty almost speaks for itself. The audience, faced with the directness of testimonial speech, is meant to drop any defense against the emotionally overpowering disclosure of the experience of injustice. Much as witnesses felt crushed by the unfair system of social justice, readers are overwhelmed by the strength of the reality of experience and the directness conveyed by the voice of the testimony.

The powerful perlocutionary realism testimonies rely on expresses through a sense of the "rawness" (Warner 64) of experience. The impact of the texts lies in their power to

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[100] All quotes from Danblon are in my translation.

transcend mimesis in a sort of direct contact with reality. Warner, and other scholars before her, of course, warns against the fact that this sense of directness remains a textual and cognitive construct. She argues that "authenticity is not an inherent feature of autobiography, but a cognitive-pragmatic effect of the encounter between the reader's habitualized (i.e. cognitive) dispositions, the stylistic and rhetorical features of the text, and the fields of practice which it is (perceived as) participating" (34). However, this *raw mimesis* allows for an understanding of authenticity as the real impact the text can achieve, even more so that the readers are actively participating in creating and legitimizing it. "Literary testimonies garner symbolic power because they are perceived by their readers as readable traces of the experiences to which they refer," (63) Warner further contends. Similarly, Aristotle in his discussion of the evidence rhetoric relies on in its effort to achieve persuasion, places testimonies on the side of external evidence. Much like data or exhibits, testimonies are indisputable facts, raw material because of the *authenticity* they convey as instances of a direct experience of the facts (Danblon 34). This, of course, does not preclude possibilities in which witnesses may be fooled about the situation and their emotional response to it. Again the polyphonic format of testimonials of social empowerment provides a compelling answer to this complication. The multiplication of voices enhances the intensity perlocutionary realism develops. *Testis unum, testis nullum,* it is by accumulating exhibits that the volumes make their case.

Lionel Trilling in his leading-edge volume *Sincerity and Authenticity*, writes on the advent of the terms sincerity and authenticity in art and society in the course of the last four centuries. Though it was to thrive only with the philosophical current of existentialism, authenticity appeared in the wake of the modern world along with the great revolutions of the eighteenth century. Authenticity is based on the idea of originality or faithfulness to an original (Guignon 278). Trilling consequently sees its advent in the moment when, the encounter of the "substance of life" in the work of art came as a surprise to its audience, "as if it were exceptional in its actuality, and [thus] valuable" (93). Authenticity, then, is the word "which denotes the nature of this being and which accounts for the high value we put upon it" (93). Authenticity derives its strength from the surprise it causes: the audience *experiences the substance of life itself.* Trilling adds that the provenance of the term was, at first, the museum; a place where the substance of life was embodied in objects, in products of craftsmanship, of civilization. There, authenticity was decided by experts who "test[ed] whether objects of art [were] what they appear[ed] to be or [were] claimed to be" (93). In a mirror image, authenticity in the work of art imposes two different, however equally significant, positions

for the audience to adopt. The audience is, at first, surprised by the occurrence of the substance of life in the work of art. Yet, then, as experts of this substance, the audience recognizes the craftsmanship involved in its faithful recreation. This twofold process testifies to the impact of the feeling of authenticity emanating from testimonials. The readers on the one hand feel overpowered by the surprise of raw experience and on the other feel assured of their own expertise as people able to recognize the substance of life.

Warner also addresses this notion of expertise in the readers' cognitive response to testimonies. She quotes James Young who contends that the feeling of authenticity in autobiographical writing corresponds to a kind of reassuring gesture:

> We grant referentiality to autobiographers because we need to believe in our ability to refer in our own lives. Through the autobiographies of others, we test our understanding of reality. A referential commitment to reality is a necessary quality of testimony, not only because of generic category requirements, but because our belief in our ability to speak meaningfully about our lives and our experiences relies on the preservation of these social acts. (25)

Testimonies, and other forms of referring into our life, are guarantors of the social bond, of our ability to create meaningful relations with the other as well as with the substance of life. Similarly, Trilling contends that the fact "that the word [authenticity] has become part of the moral slang of our day points to the peculiar nature of our fallen condition, our anxiety over the credibility of existence and of individual existences" (93). Authenticity, as opposed to its inauthentic pendants, refers to optimal ways of living—or at least optimal moral relations towards one's own life.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, as Emmanuel Danblon argues, our societies entered the era of the "*cité désenchantée* [disenchanted polity]"(149). Men abandoned the ideals of the Enlightenment. Reason, truth, progress and faith in humanity were all boxed in a utopian realm. In such a pessimistic environment, the only moral value that was left was that of resentment (Danblon 154). However, post-modernism may have painted a possible way out. "The antidote to disenchantment" might indeed be our "contemporary will to embody universality in individuals" (Danblon 150). In such a framework, readers of testimonials of empowerment recognize in the texts' authenticity not only the substance of life but also moral values that are associated with the substance of what could become a good life. Their expertise in recognizing this authenticity serves as an antidote to the pervading disenchantment. In these individual instances readers may recognize the universality of the meaning of life.

In an analogous understanding, Trilling places the current moral value attached to authenticity into this effort to seek a new meaning for life:

> Certainly the modern audience does not seem to regret having had to exchange indulgence and flattery for the exigencies of its new relation to art. On the contrary, the devotion now given to art is probably more fervent than ever before in the history of culture. *This devotion takes the form of an extreme demand*: now that art is no longer required to please, it is expected to provide the spiritual substance of life. (98; emphasis mine)

As we all live in an alienated condition, we need to find a way to soothe our anguish about the actual substance of our existence. And this substance, the credibility people could actually restore into their lives, may actually spring up from others' verbalization of their own experience of life. Accordingly, Trilling contends that "nowadays, our sense of what authenticity means involves a degree of rough concreteness or of extremity" (94). Testimonials offer the authentic connection with the substance of life through the raw—though mediated by the literary—matter of lived experience. Though this concreteness is unpolished and conveys a deep sense of harshness, it nevertheless impacts its audience in reconnecting them with the substance of life.

The impact of concreteness—of authenticity, Trilling argues, is akin to the impact of the sublime:

> But when we admire it, as we should, we cannot fail to see that its offensiveness is part of its intention. That this is so suggests that authenticity is implicitly a polemical concept, fulfilling its nature by dealing aggressively with received habitual opinion, aesthetic opinion in the first instance, social and political opinion in the next. (94)

Analogous to the sublime, authenticity amazes but also "arouses terror and calls for the power to master it" (Trilling 94). It is in this deep, yet paradoxical, sense that authenticity embodies testimonials' aesthetic of impact. The effect of disclosing experience is meant to entice as well as to admonish.

In this relation between the sublime and authenticity in the work of art, Trilling also sees, the meaning of personal authenticity. The authentic self or individual is the one who truly lives the sentiment of being. "The sentiment of being is the sentiment of being strong," Trilling adds (99). The possible bond between authenticity and the process of empowerment is manifestly noticeable here. Faced with the strength of the authentic experience of struggle against injustice, readers first feel the impact of a shock and the fear it may arouse. But subsequently, their reaction is to surge for the power to master the shock, the sentiment of

being strong, the need for feeling empowered. Testimonials thus depend on their ability to convey the impact of a *pathos* of authenticity. This *pathos* corresponds to the emotional state in which they need to plunge their audience: that of awe and fear, of indignation and responsibility for a better future.

Trilling also insists on the fact that authenticity, because it is opposed to the artificial, can be understood as a *validation*. Now, authenticity as validation carries important implications for testimonials of social empowerment. On the one hand, authenticity as validation further emphasizes the correlation of testimonials with Habermas's model of communicative action. Witnesses, in proposing their testimonials as speech acts, agree to recover *validity* claims whenever challenged to do so. Habermas argues that in the case of cultural values argumentation adopts a varying format, that of aesthetic criticism. He explains:

> In this context, reasons have the peculiar function of *bringing us to see* a work or performance in such a way that it can be perceived as *an authentic expression of an exemplary experience*, in general as the embodiment of a claim to authenticity. A work validated through aesthetic experience can then in turn take the place of an argument and promote the acceptance of precisely those standards according to which it counts as an authentic work. In practical discourse reasons or grounds are meant to show that a norm recommended for acceptance expresses a generalizable interest; in aesthetic criticism grounds or reasons serve to guide perception and to make the authenticity of a work so evident that this aesthetic experience can itself become a rational motive for accepting the corresponding standard of value. (*Communicative* 1:20; emphasis mine)

The aesthetic of impact of testimonials, their *pathos* relying on authenticity, is thus as valuable, as *valid*, as arguments in the effort to persuade the audience; though it fully expresses only when coupled with the ethics of responsibility which shows greater affinities with practical discourse.

Authenticity in testimonials of social empowerment also carries more direct implications with one of Habermas's other validity claims. Though, in this respect, I could create a meaningful correlation between authenticity and truth, I do not wish to completely enter the lively debate over the issue of truthful testimonies and forgery. Forgery, obviously, remains a major counterargument against authenticity, all the more so that speech act theories do not offer support for absolute reality criteria which would help to distinguish between referential statements and fiction. My partial rejection of the debate is grounded in two reasons. First, my primary interest lies in the texts' format and in the effectiveness of that format. In such a project, the audience's trust in the content disclosed is based on their

awareness of the possibility to subject testimonials to a reality test, a factual verification. As was exemplified with a number of misery memoirs, false witnesses are exposed and face (sometimes fierce) public reprobation.[101] The witnesses' entrance in the public sphere carries a number of responsibilities, which they somehow accept to shoulder as soon as their texts are published. Second, since the texts are always polyphonic and appear connected with wide-encompassing projects of community help, the question of the truth of the experiences disclosed is not as problematic as it might appear in the case of personal memoirs for example. As an interview with editors as well as their comments in the introductions to the volumes reveal, witnesses' narratives are cross-checked with factual sources a number of times before their publication.[102]

However, concerns with validation always to a greater or lesser extent show a connection with the question of truth. As a consequence truth can be tackled in considering the texts' powerful use of authenticity as a validation for the speakers' pledge to sincerity, all the more so in the frame of Lynch's pluralist theory. In such a frame, understanding the validity claim to sincerity as the witnesses' treatment of truth appears definitely convincing. Indeed, Trilling claims that works of art in the contemporary period have not only sought to be authentic, they have also claimed their sincerity: "the works are sincere and authentic, sincere *because* authentic" (115; emphasis in the original). And, one could add authentic because sincere. Sincerity, thus, in its sense of a pledge/claim to validity is what testimonial authenticity seeks to validate.

Lionel Trilling defines sincerity as one of the major moral features composing our understanding of the figure of the individual. Sincerity, he says, is "a congruence between avowal and actual feelings" (2). The meaning of the sincere individual, Herbert Read seems to agree, lies in "the one who has the ability to find words that exactly (or to himself, convincingly) express his feelings" (55). In an effort to find the proper emotional chord, sincerity is comprised in the *pathos* of an individual's speech and action every time they seek to express their state of being. Read talks about the "compelling force of an emotional attitude" (55) that would *persuade of the truth* of a statement.

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[101] Famous examples include: *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* by Binjamin Wilkomirski, *Love and Consequences* by Margaret Seltzer, *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey and *Misha: A Mémoire of the Holocaust Years* by Misha Defonseca.

[102] For the complete interview with Juliana Sloane, development and communication director to Voice Of Witness, see appendix.

Sincerity appears thus as an intrinsically dialogical moral virtue. A person can pledge to the sincerity of their words, *claim to their validity*, but it is on the shoulder of the addressee that the burden of evaluating the validity of this sincerity rests. Habermas concurs with this, as he argues that the validity claim to sincerity can only be verified afterwards, *ex post facto* (*Communicative* 1:41). Sincerity in this very sense carries indeed important moral implications for individuals themselves and for their relationships with others. Sincerity towards one's self is an essential condition for individual virtue. As such, it means being true to one's self in one's actions and speeches, "true which is to say loyal, never wavering in consistency" (Trilling 4). However, Trilling insists, sincerity is not equal to "the unmediated exhibition of the self, presumably with the intention of being true to it" (9). Sincerity involves a reason for being true to oneself, and that reason according to Trilling is the social bond. The point of being true to oneself is that you will be true to others. In this very sense, sincerity is an intrinsically social virtue, an intrinsically social or dialogical expression of the moral bond that binds individuals in their interactions.

In view of this, one realizes the significance of sincerity for authors of testimonials of social empowerment. Witnesses rely on a steady relation between their narratives and sincerity. They pledge sincerity both to themselves and to their readers. It is the truth of their own selves, the selves they wish to be true to, that they put down on paper. And, symptomatically, it is the encounter with true selves, with concrete other human beings that provokes the impactful authenticity of these texts. This testimonial power is probably due to the reinforcing conjunction of referential sincerity—that is, their factual truth—and their emotional resonance, as in a semiotic twining. Without the strength of a sincere act of self-disclosure, the texts would fail to produce the proper *pathos*. The authenticity of the experience witnesses are sharing serves as a validation for that inner truth they seek to convey as well as for readers' emotional adjustment to it.

Of course, it is important to bear in mind that this use of sincerity, as calculating as it may appear, still depends on the audience for its proper legitimation. Sincerity demands dialogism, just as testimonies demand a dialogic communicative situation. As Jean-François Chiantaretto remarks, if sincerity can only be declared by one's self, it can only be demanded by someone else (15). Sincerity in witnesses' texts is thus both an element of their narrative weaving, of the *pathos* of their speech, *and* an element of the content imposed by the psychological journey through empowerment. As empowered beings, they are now individuals deserving interest and able to show the virtue of sincerity in their behavior and

actions. But they also have become empowered narrators, who are able to show sincerity in disclosing their authentic experience.

However, scholars agree in saying that sincerity, though it can be defined as a virtue, is also and more importantly an effort. Jean-François Chiantaretto argues that when sincerity does not appear as a virtue according to which the speakers would protest the sincerity of their words, it is an effort akin to those found in the incipits of autobiographical works—I will try to tell the whole truth about myself (15).[103] Similarly, French novelist, Serge Moscovici says about his effort at writing his autobiographical work: "sincerity appears to me more as a will than as an effect of desire" (47). Trilling adds that, "if sincerity is the avoidance of being false to any man through being true to one's own self, we can see that this state of personal existence is not to be attained without the most arduous effort" (5-6). Sincerity, scholars insist, is not to be equated with spontaneity. It is not an effortless mode of speech or being. It cannot be equated with a limitless form of spontaneity through which the speaker would be free to say and/or do anything simply for the sake of being true to oneself. Sincerity represents a practice oscillating between a demand not to keep anything to oneself and a freedom to say it all.

Moreover, sincerity as opposed to spontaneity involves a form of self-consciousness. This self-consciousness expresses itself in the projection of specific motives. Herbert Read contends that sincerity can never be disinterested (54). Trilling remarks that sincerity always involves a *reason*, which he devises as the expression of the social bond. Therefore, in displaying sincerity, the authors of testimonials mark another strong bond with the process of empowerment. Empowerment, at the individual level, represents a form of self-investigative stance thanks to which the subjects can realize their own abilities and moral value. Empowerment mobilizes morality in its deeper meaning as well as the ability to reason, for it is thanks to them only that the subjects are able to use their newly acquired power without infringing on the right of others, and finally work for the empowerment of the community as a whole. Sincerity thus carries numerous meaningful implications for witnesses both in acknowledging their own empowerment as well as in carrying out their project of persuasion. Sincerity is the reason for which the audience should believe the witnesses but also the reason which the audience can invoke when assessing the texts and their message.

Sincerity, because it is presented as a meaningful—that is, purposeful—mode of action carries on yet another important ramification for testimonials of social empowerment.

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[103] All quotes from Chiantaretto's volume are in my translation.

It is one of the most important components of the texts' aesthetic of impact. Sincerity is indeed meant to convey the impact of authenticity on the audience. Trilling considers that sincerity can be a form of shock in itself. Sincerity, when it is understood as telling a truth, can also mean "telling the [or an] offensive truth to those who had no wish to hear it" (22). In that sense, sincerity is akin to plain speaking and amounts to making visible rather unpleasant issues that had heretofore remained hidden. In the frame of the aesthetic of impact, sincerity serves the purpose of shocking with exposure: the exposure of truths on the one hand, and the exposure of individual and community power on the other.

Trilling seems aware of these possible empowering consequences of sincerity, especially in their political applications. Though he remarks that people generally understand sincerity as a feature of individuals' private life, it is also, he contends, a public and political value, a trait of society in its expression of citizenship. Accordingly, he argues that "a salient trait of society, […] and what differentiates it from the realm or the kingdom and even from the commonwealth, is that it is available to critical examination by individual persons, especially by those who make it their business to scrutinize the polity" (26). He considers sincerity as a constitutive trait of scrutiny which intervenes on three different levels: that of the individual judge, that of the degree of correspondence between a society's principles and its actual conduct and, finally, that of the degree to which this society fosters sincerity in its citizens. In this case, one can surmise meaningful connections between the forensic, religious, activist and intimate textual paradigms' treatment of truth and Trilling's understanding of the scrutinizing power of sincerity. Sincerity, hence, ensures the proper functioning of institutions, of political representation and of citizenship because of its criticizing power.

Testimonials use both the individual and social implications of sincerity in their aesthetic appropriation of the concept. In a dichotomous dissection of their personal understanding of the lifeworld, they embody what Trilling sees as the cultural relativity of sincerity. Trilling indeed develops an interesting dichotomy between a French and English tendency for sincerity. He summarizes those cultural distinctions as follows:

> In French literature sincerity consists in telling the truth about oneself to oneself and to others; by truth is meant a recognition of such of one's own traits or actions as are morally or socially discreditable and, in conventional course, concealed. English sincerity does not demand this confrontation of what is base or shameful in oneself. The English ask of the sincere man that he communicate without deceiving or misleading. Beyond this, what is required is only a single-minded commitment to whatever dutiful enterprise he may have in hand. Not to know oneself in the French

fashion and make public what one knows but to be oneself in action, in deeds, [...]

this is what the English sincerity consists in. (58)

Witnesses in testimonials of social empowerment rely on both these definitions. The impact of their sincerity draws on the French will to tell about their confrontation with base or shameful aspects of their experience of injustice. Several narrators in *The Freedom Writers' Diary* thus begin their entry by apologizing to their diary in overtly recognizing a mistake or weakness. Student of Diary 34 tells of her shame at disclosing her alcohol addiction: "dear diary, you're going to be disappointed in me, [...] I'm tricking people into believing that I'm something I'm not" (67). But testimonial impact draws all the same on this English will not to deceive others in the very sense that witnesses' decision to act against injustice has to be publicized. The texts have an impact because they shock in disclosing concealed facts and truths but they also have an impact in showing the course of action a sincere individual, a sincere citizen, should adopt.

The inscription of sincerity in the texts is also expressed in a significant feature of the texts' perlocutionary realism. This specific feature directly correlates with the primarily oral quality of testimonies. Testimonies in their essence correspond to speech acts *per se*, that is specific modes of communication in oral speech. They are factual cases in which witnesses decide to disclose their first-hand experience to an addressee in a dialogical gesture. It is from their intrinsically oral nature that testimonies draw their capacity to most overtly express sincerity. Chantelle Warner contends that the texts' sense of raw experience relies mainly on a specific form of expressivity, which in turns secures legitimacy and the author's reliability. She bases her explanation on the fact that the audience generally relates with narrators of a testimony in assessing their "narrative *voice*" (64; emphasis mine). She sees in "vocal styles" (64) the power of autobiographical expressive qualities such as sincerity and openness.

The concept of a narrative voice is not only important in the sense that it underlines a feeling of immediacy through an oral-like quality. It also powerfully permits an individualization of the text. Warner describes this phenomenon as follows:

[I]n colloquial and political parlance, voices are owned and can consequently be found, lost, and even stolen. Voices belong to particular individuals, and although they can be shared and given, they are perceived as most authentic when they come straight from their rightful owners. (65)

Warner's argument can actually be echoed in Dave Eggers's similar understanding of the powerful narratives he publishes in the Voice of Witness series. Trilling argues that the birth of sincerity is symptomatic of the birth of the individual: sincerity appeared when subjects

started to consider themselves in the new light of the individual (24). The concept of narrative voice, of the audience hearing the narrative voice as the open expression of the witnesses enhances the impact of sincerity and its legitimation as the account of an authentic experience.

Warner sees in the concept of narrative voice an important relation of iconicity. In Charles Sanders Peirce's terms, iconicity implies likeness and is conceived as the analogy between the form of the sign and its meaning. Warner argues that it makes it possible to "'see' the object in the sign" (65). In a logic that resembles the Derridean concept of logocentrism, voice thus permits some kind of direct access to the witnesses' sense of lived authenticity and confirms their sincerity while enhancing the impact of the text. Nadine Vasseur in her article on sincerity and autobiographical writing remarks that she understood that truth could be accessed somehow in terms of ear. "Some voices sound right, almost in the musical sense of the phrase, voices that sound in tune, like a musical chord […], and some, on the other hand, ring hollow," (36; my translation) she argues. This very idea of *hearing* the voice of the text, but also of seeing it as *inhabited* by the individual points to the power of one-to-one conversation, of two differentiated voices coming into dialogue. Warner is positive in saying that we evaluate testimonials according to a principle of resemblance: "Does the narrator *talk* (or, in the case of literary testimonies, *write*) according to the reader's expectations of what a person like this might *sound like* in this situation" (65). She here concurs with Ricoeur's and Dulong's findings on human resemblance and the significance of affectivity. The impact of sincerity is in fact that of direct dialogue. Hence, the numerous direct addresses in the texts.

The concept of voice also carries undeniable importance for the text's polyphonic format. The collective arrangement of testimonials of social empowerment permits a plurality of voices to be heard, which on the one hand enhances the weight of the message they seek to deliver and, on the other, conveniently bypasses the danger of autobiographical representativity according to which the voice of one can be equaled to that of many. Editor Rebecca Jones, besides, remarks that editing oral history demands cautious crafting "necessary to transform the stories from a private one-to-one form […] to a public, one-to-many form" (39). She also draws attention to debates on power and authority through the process of editing and an ongoing debate in oral history questioning the authenticity of the author's/narrator's/witness's voice. However, as Warner notes: "the ability to say 'I' in the testimonial act is always connected to a statement of shared identity, an 'I am so' or 'It was so for me', which implies 'We are so', 'We experienced it this way'" (64).

Through each volume, it is the power of several voices speaking together that the readers can experience. They are faced with a sort of sincerity of the mass, the sincerity of the experience of injustice in the largest sense of the term. The readers faced with several voices that all ring true because inhabited by authentic individuals are overwhelmed by the impact of the most sincere approach to authentic life-experience. Authenticity legitimizes testimonies in stressing their authors' reliability because of their sincere self-disclosing gesture. Warner here borrows from Susan Lanser the idea of a "mimetic authority" (68) for the narrator. Narrators gain authority in the framework of their story by virtue of the authority they assume in the lifeworld in being honest and sincere, intellectually and morally trustworthy as well as competent. The principle of the narrative voice offers a form of reliability, which is beyond questioning because of "a cumulative effect of social identity and textual behavior" (68). The narrators are reliable because their speech is honest and sincere, as well as because of their position in the lifeworld. As first-hand witnesses of social injustice, they are intellectually and morally trustworthy and are competent enough to present the story in a tellable way.

Testimonials of social empowerment thus rely on an interweaving of sincerity and authenticity in achieving their aesthetic of impact. Because they propose accounts of raw experience, the texts offer a direct access to the authentic experience of social injustice. In their effort to make an impact on their readers so as to further embark them in the struggle for justice, witnesses sincerely make a clean breast of their bitterness against the system but also against themselves facing the errors they may have committed. In this very sense, the impact of their sincerity is that found in French culture. However, authors also use sincerity as plain speaking in an effort to uncover troubling truths. This predominantly English trend is coupled with a second ramification of sincerity: that of acting consistently with one's morality and reason(s). Testimonials are projects of persuasion, this means that their use of a sincere mode of communication, however plain it may appear, is indeed a rhetorical effect of *pathos*. The authors in seeking reliability are playing the card of authenticity in a kind of seductive gesture (it is besides not unusual to speak of sincerity as a mode of seduction), offering enthralling real voices to be heard. Similarly in wishing to legitimize their testimony, they rely on a strong concept of life-experience as authenticity, as the real matter of life. The emotional adjustment the narrators advocate is that provoked by the sublime, thus provoking both the awe and fear expressed in the authenticity of sincere self-disclosure.

II.4.1.2.2 The Ethics of Responsibility

Aristotle, in his rhetorical theory, considers that for a speech to fully unleash its persuasive potential, *pathos* cannot function as the sole engine. Though emotions shoulder the important role of tuning the audience in perfect harmony with the orator, persuasion also needs to significantly rely on reasonable arguments. Reason, which Aristotle calls *logos*, must govern the content of the arguments presented in a speech. Emmanuelle Danblon contends that *logos* corresponds to "the reasoning capacity operated by a speech" (34). In proposing arguments mainly based on examples and syllogisms based on common grounds (what Aristotle calls *topoi*), the speech calls to its audience's reason. Testimonials of social empowerment display this meaningful reliance on reasonableness most meaningfully in their effort to describe a new line of thought for reflecting about what a moral and reasonable behavior for citizens should correspond to in contemporary societies. The impact on emotions is important so as to raise awareness. Yet it is insufficient in triggering action. For readers to react, they must be touched in their judgments over the consequences their actions, as citizens, can have over the situation of injustice they are now aware of. Richard Kearney speaks about narrative's "indispensable function of ethical responsibility," (35) which he assigns to "direct-impact narratives" (33). These narratives, notably exemplified as Holocaust testimonies, unravel the power of "an agency of ethical empathy," (33) granted by their ability to lead the readers to "feel and experience […] as if they were there" (42). Narrators propose a model of ethics based on responsibility as the proper ground for agents to reason out their capacity for meaningful action against injustice. Testimonial narrators, in relying on an ethics of responsibility, construct a complex interweaving of *logos* and *pathos*, of reason and emotion as their persuasive ground.

The OED defines ethics as "a set of moral principles, especially one relating to or affirming a specified group, field or form of conduct". Through their deep concern with sincerity (most notably in its English application), testimonials of social empowerment already affirm their considerable reliance on issues of morality. The texts are pervaded with questions over the moral consequences of the different characters' actions. The witnesses wonder about their own behavior or try to analyze the deeds of other members of their community. Warner explains "in social autobiographies in particular, the act of testimony is motivated by moral judgments, and thus the act of narrating one's experience as well as the act of hearing or reading such an account (or the decision to choose not to) always resides in the frameworks of ethic and social norms" (147). Empowerment, the newly gained capacity to act according to one's own authority seems to go hand in hand with self-investigative issues of good and evil. Ethics, thus, is indubitably part of the empowering process the witnesses

wish to disclose. The texts do not obviously propose a list of the moral principles, which come to define the form of conduct empowerment represents. Nor do the witnesses seek to propose philosophical statements of what the ethics for proper social justice should be. However, one can read between the lines of narrators' introspective journey and somehow extract some general ethical principles newly empowered people should observe.

Before talking about ethics proper, let me further develop the correlation between *logos* and the texts' functioning. Aristotle considers that an orator's capability for reasoning can be expressed through enthymemes and examples. It is indeed possible to describe the functioning of witnesses' textual presentation of ethics in the form of an enthymeme, that is a form of incomplete syllogism in which socially shared premises, *topoi*, are omitted. The conclusion of the witnesses' ethical syllogism is that, when individually empowered, subjects understand their position in society as autonomous agents who deserve to have specific rights but therefore also have to shoulder specific responsibilities. Empowerment, though implemented as an individual journey of initiation, implies social consequences. The conclusion witnesses wish their readers to reach is based on the premise that, on the one hand, agents live in a democratic society—that is, a society in which citizens have a say in institutional structure and governance. This society, it is surmised, implements a deliberative model of publicity and citizens' participation based on the ideal of discourse ethics.

On the other hand, testimonials allude to the fact that readers are able to realize their own position as citizens, who can achieve the same level of empowerment and take on the same political responsibilities in solving issues of social injustice by identifying with the witnesses' experience of injustice. The identification process postulated here is based on commonplace inductions, which would go along the lines of 'If I could make it, why could you not'. The *topoi* in witnesses' texts are in fact the democratic and deliberative premises defined earlier. The narrators never overtly state the rights and/or responsibilities citizens need to shoulder, nor do they overtly state that the United States are taken to be an instance of deliberative democracy—though a number of narrators state the fact that they know they have rights and are fully aware of what these rights stand for (see notably Tabatha Rowley's, Raed Jarrar's or Charlie Morningstar's testimonies). Those are, indeed, considered to be obvious *topoi*, commonplace statements citizens of the United States necessarily endorse. The best possible argument to support this thesis is the witnesses' overt reliance on the image of the American Dream. The American Dream has from the very foundation of the United States implied an ethics based on responsibility. This motif is most especially developed in narratives from illegal immigrants, though their journey was motivated by the pursuit of

endless possibilities, their ethics remains that of hard work and commitment as they seem to understand that these possibilities cannot be achieved without significant efforts (see El Mojado's or Jose Garcia's testimony).

Under the entry ethics, the OED proposes a short delineation of the main philosophical trends known in the Western world. Though I do not wish to enter into a detailed philosophical debate here, these trends are worth considering as a starting point to understand testimonials of social empowerment's correlation with ethics. The OED proposes Aristotle's, Kant's and the Utilitarian models as the main currents ethics developed in the Western world. Aristotle proposes as virtues, or right values, principles of conduct that would benefit both the person who acts according to them *and* the person's polity. Ethics, then, is not solely an individual issue it involves *recognizing* others. Kant, on the other hand, emphasizes the notion of duty.[104] Kantian ethics is governed by a categorical imperative according to which individuals are rational beings and, as such, orient their action in such a way as to show some respect to other rational beings. In Kant's terms, any proposition that renders an action or inaction necessary falls under the category of an imperative. At first, he formulates his categorical imperative as follows: "act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law" (30). Kant, like Aristotle, bases ethics on an open acknowledgement of others in the tailoring of one's actions. The OED finally mentions utilitarianism. According to the utilitarian model, the moral behavior of individuals should be oriented towards the happiness of the greatest number.

Testimonials of social empowerment, in the sense that they seek to empower society as a whole, could lay claim to all three models in their crafting of an ethical attitude for citizens. Their ethics could be Aristotelian as witnesses acknowledge the fact that they acquire new virtues, which are aimed at benefiting themselves and society. Their ethics is Kantian in the sense that the texts are based on universalistic principles— those of Habermas's discourse ethics. Their ethics is utilitarian in the sense that empowerment is a process that makes it possible to strive for the happiness of the greatest number. However, it is on another Kantian

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[104] I developed Habermasian discourse ethics in the previous section by explaining its moving away from the Kantian model. If Habermas's procedural conceptualization, as opposed to Kant's thought-experiment, serves as a more appropriate model for testimonial ethics, the Kantian reliance on the concept of duty as the substance of ethics remains particularly relevant.

principle that testimonials of social empowerment primarily ground their ethics: the idea of duty.

Narrators of testimonials indeed construct ethics on a specific form of duty: the principle of responsibility. Being an empowered agent means displaying a moral and reasonable behavior, which in turn means shouldering one's responsibilities. Though I seemed to equal responsibility with the idea of duty, the notion necessarily demands a closer investigation as its numerous definitions suggest. Scholars indeed seem to separate responsibilities in at least two main categories: positive—allotted by rights citizens enjoy—and negative responsibilities—one's liability towards one's actions. The OED defines responsibility as (1) "the state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or of having control over someone", (2) "the state or fact of being accountable for or to blame for something", (3) "a moral obligation to behave correctly towards or in respect of" and (4) "the opportunity or ability to act independently and take decisions without authorization". The principle of responsibility, thus, involves a strong sense of duty as well as a no less significant sense of liability. But responsibility also implies the fact of enjoying a form of autonomous status. To be responsible means accepting to shoulder a number of obligatory tasks and accounting for the consequences deriving from these because of one's specific position and of one's autonomous will as an agent. As a consequence of the intrinsic reciprocity between positions of autonomous power and responsibilities, empowerment, as the process of gaining new capabilities, necessarily points to the personal, moral, legal, and social responsibilities that are thereby assigned to the agent.

Iris Marion Young, in her volume *Responsibility for Justice*, addresses the issue of responsibility and its correlation with social justice in contemporary societies and sociological theories. Testimonials, in their development of the notions of responsibility and responsibilization, echo most of the issues Young tackles in her delineation of the concepts of personal and social responsibility. In their fight for a better social justice, the texts do indeed focus on witnesses' newly gained responsibilities as empowered social agents, and they also wish to inspire their readers with these same responsibilities. This social understanding of the word responsibility, though it seems to be lacking from the OED's definitions, is of importance as shown by an additional definition of the term in the *Free Online Dictionary*: "[responsibility is] the social force that binds you to the course of action demanded by that force". Responsibility is thus also a form of social *power with*—as Ferguson described, a force that binds social agents to act in a specifically moral way. For this specific definition, the dictionary proposes as a synonym the phrase *noblesse oblige*. It is in this very sense of

noblesse oblige, of a model of responsibility as a "social connection" (Young 96) or "solidarity" (Young 120) that responsibilization must be understood. What I call responsibilization in fact embodies the offer understood in speech acts' binding/bonding force. Witnesses, in constructing their narratives, draw on a self-questioning process about their own responsibilities so as to spur that same effort in their readers. The actual model for ethics in testimonials is that of a "socially connected responsibility" (Young, *Responsibility* 105) for social justice and its proper implementation.

Young derives her primary approach to personal responsibility from contemporary considerations regarding the social issue of poverty. She contends that during the last decades, poverty has been increasingly described in terms of personal responsibility rather than in terms of structural effects. To put things in a simplistic way, poor people are to blame for their situation because they failed to properly shoulder their personal responsibility in engaging in deviant or self-destructive behavior. In depending on others and on state largesse, they take advantage of policies of social welfare, which fail to achieve their purpose in the sense that they encourage poor people to go down the road of accepting help for which they do nothing in exchange. This view is grounded in a common intuition about responsibility; that "a person should be considered personally responsible for aspects of her situation that she has actively chosen, or that are the consequence of such choices, but not for aspects of her situation that arise from circumstances beyond her control" (5). On those premises, Young argues, personal responsibility has been derived from theories foregrounding agency as opposed to social determinism. The basic understanding would be that if agents claim agency, they should account for the responsibilities that go with it. If social determinism is a delusion and if agents indeed have the necessary capabilities of influencing their position in society, then poor people must necessarily be responsible of their unenviable situation.

Young contrasts this individualistic view of personal responsibility with an older understanding of the term. According to her, responsibility in the mid-twentieth century was taken to encompass social duties: "the members of a whole society collectively bear responsibility for taking care of one another's old age, health care, and children, and for keeping us out of poverty" (9). However, as time went by, the focus placed on individual responsibilities no longer encompassed the responsibilities for the larger good that lie at the individual level. They rather came to designate the responsibilities individuals must maintain in their individualistic development. In a dangerous oscillation between the two senses of the term individualism, personal responsibility came to broadly encompass issues pertaining

mainly to work and the family.[105] Young remarks that, in the current vocabulary, "to be responsible means that you work for subsistence rather than depend on others or on state largesse" (10). In an effort to internalize the consequences of their actions, it is the individuals who solely bear the costs. It is then immoral to expect the help of others. Young argues that it is based on these presumptions that the blame or fault model of responsibility surfaced. According to this model, the point in questioning responsibility is to pin liability on a bunch of agents so as to absolve others.

Young of course questions the actual import of such a negative understanding of responsibility. In this view, responsibility carries on the negative meaning of the blame for a fault obscuring any positive connotations of the term. According to this "blame game", based on a "whodunnit" (90) approach to actions, "a capable responsible person does not depend on others" (23). People who depend on public assistance are thus, by definition, not taking responsibility for their person. However, Young rapidly pinpoints the unrealistic aspect of this definition. Even though a number of theoreticians and members of society are somehow seduced by this easier, and morally exempting, understanding of poverty and other social issues, she remarks that "few people think in their sober moments that being a responsible citizen means simply and entirely that one avoids dependence on others" (24). She thus proposes a more realistic understanding of the term—"one that better matches what people think" (24). A responsible person, she contends, "tries to deliberate about options before acting, makes choices that seem to be best for all affected, and worries about how the consequences of his or her action may adversely affect others" (25)—an almost exact match for Habermas's description of rational beings.

Young is obviously conscious that, in spite of reflecting the widest beliefs, this definition lays down a demanding standard. Interestingly, it is on this ideal that witnesses' delineation of responsibility chiefly relies at first. Being empowered, means trying to act reasonably *and* responsibly notably according to that widely shared belief that one must weigh all options of action. Therefore, narrators very sincerely recognize their past and probable future failure at living up to these expectations—a fact that reveals the crucial importance of both narrative threads. Kimberly Nance, in her analysis of *testimonios,* insists on this kind of dual self-representation she finds in speakers of what she calls deliberative

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[105] Individualism in this case implies a positive assessment of the individual as ground from which society can grow as opposed to a doctrine praising a self-centered attitude.

testimonios. Deliberative *testimonios* are, for her, the unique form of testimonials that overtly foreground their persuasive effort.

Nance contends that "to be judged worthy of reader intervention, victims must demonstrate appropriate actions as well as positive character traits such as determination, persistence, intelligence and faith" (74). Narrators of testimonials of social empowerment similarly try to present themselves as responsible reasonable agents whose course of action is indeed aimed at fighting social injustices. On the other hand, Nance also remarks that "in deliberative *testimonio*, suffering must be borne and revolutions made by insistently ordinary and fallible people" (75). She mentions that, for the sufferer's depiction to be effective, it needs to include "reminders of normalcy", among which, she includes a "matter-of-fact" (75) and spontaneous style of writing. These reminders of normalcy are in the case of testimonials borne by the sincerity the authors display. Impact is also achieved in transforming the extra-ordinary nature of the experience of injustice into the ordinary speech of testimonies. The texts rely on a paradoxical depiction of the witnesses addressing both the positive and negative implications of the term responsibility— as developed below, the best example of this paradox is epitomized by Anthony Letcher's testimony. In showing their profoundly human character, the narrators hope to trigger a specific form of identification, which lies at the foundation of social responsibility.

Young, in order to introduce her own delineation of a model of social and political responsibility, first relies on Arendt's separation of the two concepts of guilt and responsibility. From Arendt's theory, Young derives two opposite models for understanding political responsibility: a model based on liability as opposed to one based on sociological networking. The socially connected model for Young appears as the most sensible answer to the issue of political responsibility in our contemporary societies. Young disagrees with Arendt's depiction of political responsibility as being derived "from the sole common membership in a nation" (76) which entails full liability of its citizens for the wrongs inflicted in that nation's name. Young sees in political responsibility "a duty for individuals to take public stands about actions and events that affect broad masses of people, and to try and organize collective action to prevent massive harm or foster institutional change for the better" (76). Young's depiction of political responsibility promotes, thus, a strong idea of moral duty oriented towards the greater good as well as a standard for political action against injustices that would necessarily be collective.

Young, *de facto*, lists a series of argument against the liability model. Although assigning blame on some specific actors may be part of the narrative construction of

responsibility in testimonials, the fact remains that most of Young's arguments are of importance for the narrators' persuasive prospects.[106] Persuading readers to act against injustice, as Kimberly Nance argues, requires a specific depiction of the unjust situation. Narrators, Nance contends, "must present injustice not only as ongoing or in danger of happening again but also as potentially avoidable" (73). Now, if witnesses were to directly blame individuals, the unjust situation would appear "self-liquidating" (Nance 74): blaming the culprits and asking for reparation would seem to suffice in expunging the injustice from the social background.

Additionally, this blame game as Young calls it can, and very often does, end up in blaming the victims themselves. Indeed, Young argues that pinning blame focuses the audience's attention on some culprits and fails to make them consider the responsibility of others as well as the structural conditions of a specific situation. Narrators, in disclosing their experience of injustice, seek to pinpoint systemic malfunctions to which some specific agents are actively contributing but also to which most citizens passively contribute in remaining silent or simply disinterested. Focusing on blame, Young adds, distracts from future tasks and turns the mind inwards. Blame forces us to look back on past events and to dwell on these in an inward stance, which very often leads to resentment. Though—and Young is acutely aware of this—an analysis of past events is of importance in an effort to learn from past mistakes, what lies at the very heart of testimonials of social empowerment is a message of hope for the future rather than one of resentment.

Young finally argues that "blame squirms defensiveness rather than cooperativeness" (Nussbaum xxii). Once again, the polyphonic format of the volumes prompts this idea of cooperation. The narratives are provided as a bundle of conversing voices that are already engaged in practical discourses that could lead to a new format of social justice. Their limited reliance on a blame speech is in effect meant at stimulating cooperation with their audience. Young's argument about the propensity of blame to squirm defensiveness is paralleled in Warner's and Nance's concerns about the audience's response to testimonials.[107] Both scholars are aware that these types of texts seek to provoke in their audience a reaction that, if successful, can lead to social action. This being said, these speech acts remain provoking

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[106] The format according to which witnesses assign blame to some actors is notably due to the fact that narrators construct characterization according to Greimas's actantial model. In identifying helpers and opponents, a form of blame appears unavoidable.

[107] See Nance, 48 and ff.

gestures that may easily be experienced as pragmatic face-threatening acts. Warner explains that "in testifying to their suffering, [the authors'] narratives implicate some subsection of the readers as accountable" (149). "These texts are provocative, sometimes wrought out with rebuke, and require a great deal of negotiation to avoid altogether offending their targeted readers," (149) she adds. So as to be sure that readers might not enter defensive psychological strategies, the authors of testimonials must present responsibility as a *shared* bundle of duties for all citizens to endorse.[108] Warner's concern with negotiation is factually implemented in the volumes' alternating reliance on the carrots and sticks expressed through the style of the four different rhetorical paradigms.

Directly blaming readers for their inaction or lack of awareness, though indeed an imaginable strategy (notably endorsed in the activist paradigm—see Patricia Thompson's narrative), remains a risky rhetorical line to adopt. Young's model of socially connected responsibility offers a suitable depiction of the narrators' effort to present responsibility for social justice as being shared among all citizens. Young emphasizes the priority of political responsibility. Passivity, she contends, can never be an answer to social injustice and suffering, whichever dismissive arguments individuals may advance. Political responsibility dwells on all those who live in a social system that leaves ways open for wrongdoing. In the specific cases where structural injustices are installed, "[citizens'] passivity produces a political vacuum" (Young 85). A vacuum were "the attitudes and behaviors of the majority is so privatized that there exists little organized public space in which actors can appear to others with their judgment of events, let alone join in collective action to transform them" (Young 85). The very purpose of testimonials of social empowerment is to remedy this situation.

In producing polyphonic volumes imbued with the ideals of discourse ethics, testimonials construct unofficial public spheres, which should permit the outpacing of passivity and trigger collective political action. The messages of these texts run along these lines:

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[108] Nance proposes a number of these defensive strategies in her discussion of Lerner's *Belief in a Just World*, among which blaming the victim is the most recurrent. Similarly, Young mentions four main strategies that make it possible to avoid responsibility: reification (invoking the immutability of the situation of injustice), denying one's connection with the situation, immediacy as dismissive arguments of time and space, and finally the 'it's not my job' type of response (Young, *Responsibility for Justice* Chapter 5).

Because we dwell on the stage of history, and not only in our houses, we cannot avoid the imperative to have a relationship with actions and events performed by institutions of our society, often in our name, and with our active and passive support. The imperative of political responsibility consists in watching these institutions, monitoring their effects to make sure that they are not grossly harmful, and maintaining organized public spaces where such watching and monitoring can occur and citizens can speak publicly and support one another in their efforts to prevent suffering. (Young 88)

Young's words are echoed at the end of each narrative in volumes of testimonials. This call for political responsibility on the part of all of us is what I call the narrators' vow to society. Each, in their own words and voice, make a vow to their political responsibility and to the fact that it has to be shared by all as members of one same society. The bottom line lies not only in the fact that one has responsibility, but, much more significantly, in the fact that one *must take* responsibility.

This responsibility that all of us must take is described in positive undertones. Responsibility is a shared duty, which springs up from the connection that society forms out of individuals' interactions. It derives from our belonging to a common "system of interdependent processes of cooperation and competition through which we seek benefits and aim to realize projects" (Young 105). Within this system, we all expect justice. Thus, "[a]ll who dwell in the system must take responsibility for the injustices they cause, though none is specifically liable for the harm in a legal sense," (105) Young argues. According to this model based on social connections, narrators can effectively portray an ideal reader to whom their audience should identify. As Kimberly Nance contends, "the rhetorical strategy is to get readers to accept a certain definition of themselves so that they will then feel obligated to live up to it" (59). The strategy in the framework of politically shared responsibility is particularly powerful because, as Young remarks, in such circumstances, the victims of the injustice share the same responsibility as the other members of society. Consequently, the narrators of testimonials of social empowerment propose even more powerful communicative speech acts, in seeking a form of absolute cooperation.

The *Freedom Writers' Diary* proposes sort of maxims their ideal readers should follow. As "Civil Writers" (Headline 222), the students are taking the "freedom writing part to heart" (Diary 75 156) and design the moral boundaries for civility. As people who "care about the future of kids in America" (Diary 89 175), the Freedom Writers contend that their readers should speak, take action and see past tolerance in a responsible way. "In any and

every situation, nonaction is never a sane and emotional approach," (185) student of Diary 94 remarks. "It is better to take a chance and make a change, than it is to pass and pity," (170) student of Diary 85 argues. "Silence ensures that history repeats itself," (248) student of Diary 129 concurs. The narrators, nevertheless, realize the considerable and sustained efforts that such a position would imply, "being able to look into another's person life is one thing, but doing something about it is another" (Diary 79 161). Their message however remains adamant: "I feel that we have the potential to help those who fear to speak for themselves" (Diary 79 161). "That is the power of the written word" (Diary 109 212).

This section ends on the remarks on the forward-looking stance of Young's model of socially connected responsibility. As mentioned previously, testimonials of social empowerment, in spite of their connection with issues of memory and the (im)possible sharing of trauma, essentially propose a hopeful prospective point of view. Witnesses do not come to the literary medium with a sort of mournful gaze towards their past sufferings but rather with the bright eyes of hopeful empowered beings. Young sees in this effort to look forward for collective corrective actions one of the best expressions of what Derrida calls "political friendship" (Young 116). She chooses to call this same concept *solidarity* (the second aspect of *testimonio's* aesthetic according to Yùdice). Young explains that this solidarity can be compared to a form of enhanced identification: "as I am understanding it, solidarity is a relationship among separate and dissimilar actors who decide to stand together; for one another" (120). Solidarity then resembles the enlarged mentality Benhabib proposes as the bond linking concrete others in a politically powerful public. Testimonials, as they act as unofficial public spheres, offer a proper stage for this solidarity to develop. The point of testimonials of social empowerment is to foster solidarity for the sake of justice. As Young says, people in this solidary framework are "tentative and humble" (120) but are nevertheless determined to improve society as a whole.

II.4.1.3 Rhetoric

Rhetoric, since Plato, has suffered from a derogatory reputation. Rhetoric is all too often defined as the art of using speech in order to manipulate audiences or, at best, as the art of using complicated figures of speech. In spite of its contemporary revival among academic theorists, rhetoric remains suspicious especially when coupled with types of speech or literary genres involving a sense of spontaneity such as autobiographical writing and testimonies. Worse still, rhetoric is highly despised in public, or committed speeches where rationality and its ideals should prevail, speeches from which emotion, figurative language, unusual or

playful forms of expression should traditionally be banished. Rational speech, in Thomas Spragens' terms, should "engage the mind rather than ignite the passions" (qtd. in Young 63). However, rhetoric, understood in its primary and broadest sense as the art of constructing persuasion, cannot be avoided when dealing with speech *per se*. If rhetoric is the art of persuasion and all utterances at some level somehow engage in a persuasive gesture towards their addressees, Ruth Amossy contends, then "every utterance carries on an argumentative aspect" (42) and is consequently rhetoric. Amossy defines the adjective rhetoric as "aiming to exert an impact on the other" (42). A person's speech, whether oral or written, is never utterly spontaneous and always necessarily implies a form of construction for the simple reason that it is always coupled with a pragmatic goal. Warner remarks that even pieces of writing aimed at being fully authentic rely on a construction of authenticity. Rhetoric is not only the art of persuasion, rather it is the art of exerting impact on the audience so as to achieve a persuasive or argumentative gesture.

It may seem strange to invoke Habermas's theory of communication, for the analysis of the rhetoric of testimonials, especially if the latter are defined as instances of speech acts aimed at reaching understanding. Habermas discards rhetoric on the grounds that as opposed to rational speech, which fosters communication, rhetoric endorses a strategic function. As such, rhetoric can neither be a form of acceptable political communication, nor of socio-linguistic interaction. As Young mentions, Habermas's view is that "rhetorical speech […] aims not to defend understanding with others, but only to manipulate their thought and feeling in directions that serve the speaker's own ends" (63). Young voices considerable suspicion about such a seemingly idealistic understanding of rational versus rhetorical mode of communication. For her, "because rhetoric is an aspect of all discourse, the temptation should be resisted to base a theory of deliberative democracy on a notion of non-rhetorical speech that is cooly and purely argumentative" (64). And her first argument to support her thesis is simply that Habermas's ideal of a disembodied and disembedded reason appears impossible for the simple reason that it already informs about a specific rhetorical position—that of deflecting attention from the particularities of discourse.

Young further questions Habermas's model of pragmatics in so far as it separates reason from rhetoric. Based on the tri-partition of locution, illocution and perlocution, Habermas suggests that illocutions represent speech acts' performative intention of reaching understanding. Speech acts imbued with rhetoric would, on the other hand, rather focus on perlocutionary effects in enacting the speaker's effort to manipulate others into serving the speaker's own ends. According to Habermas, "aiming to produce specific effects on listeners

[...] distorts the communicative interaction by introducing this instrumental element" (Young 66). Habermas considers that "language with an orientation to reaching understanding is the original mode of language use from which indirect understanding, giving something to understand or letting something be understood, and the instrumental use of language in general are parasitic" (*Communicative* 1:288). He adds that Austin's distinction between illocution and perlocution factually makes it possible to separate original from parasitic uses of language. He nevertheless agrees that some side effects the speaker does not foresee constitute "trivial perlocutionary effects" (*Communicative* 1:289) which he does deem interesting to discuss.

Young rejects Habermas's view on the grounds that his separation is arbitrary and, as I already developed, contrary to Austin's primary formulation. If one is to follow Austin's model, a communicative speech act, in Habermas's terms, could easily be imbued with the illocutionary force of aiming to reach understanding *as well as* the perlocutionary effect of 'manipulating' the audience in serving specific ends. Symptomatically, the specific end speakers may strategically try to impose can be that of reaching understanding. To Young's argument against arbitrariness, one can add a critique of the use Habermas makes of the notion of reason. As mentioned earlier, rhetoric, in its call to *logos* as one of the possible evidence proposed in argumentation, factually relies on reasoning. Aristole's *topoi* are examples of the enactment of reasonably shared premises. In this sense, rhetoric appears literally as a form of reasonableness which engages the mind. The fact that it can as well rely on *pathos* and ignite passions in no way affects this appeal to reason.

Young, thus offers to positively approach rhetoric in political communication in highlighting its "affirmative uses" (62). Rhetoric does not necessarily mean manipulation or propaganda. It can also be used in situations of wholesome political communication. Though Young's first argument may appear underdeveloped by literary standards, her attempt to draw attention to the actual political power of rhetoric remains notable. She thus argues that the first positive function of rhetoric is that "rhetorical moves often help to get an issue on the agenda for deliberation" (66). Rhetoric can, indeed, be considered an inventive and efficient way of calling attention to issues that have up to that point remained unaddressed. A specific *pathos* and specific tropes are widely used in bringing into focus a speech's specific content. Young's depiction of the factual enactment of this affirmative use of rhetoric is, however, probably less convincing. She apparently seems to correlate rhetoric with "demonstrations, [...] emotionally charged language, [and] publicly ridiculing or mocking the exclusive or dismissive behavior of others" (67). Though these strategies could be imagined as pertaining,

to some extent, to rhetoric, they seem to reduce, in a rather simplistic way, its rich paraphernalia to aggressive clichés.

Young's second argument is more directly relevant to the communicative situation. She argues that "rhetoric fashions claims and arguments in ways appropriate to a particular public and in a particular situation" (67). As from the first formulation of rhetorical theories, orators' sensitivity to their audience has been significantly underscored. Young explains that political communication appears in a sphere of publicity, a sphere in which "claims and reasons should be uttered in a way that can be accepted by anyone" (68). Rhetoric demands on the part of the orator a significant awareness of her audience's specificities so as for both the orator and the audience to sing from the same songbook:

> Rhetoric helps situate claims and arguments that meet the universalistic criterion of publicity within the particular context of a discussion. As dialogic, an effective contribution to public discussion engages with its audience, and reflectively includes in its mode of expression attention to the interests, assumptions, values, meanings, and situation of this particular audience. (68)

Rhetoric constructs a relation between speaker and hearer and in this very sense cannot be dismissed from virtually any forms of communication. Young adds that "rhetoric constructs the speaker, audience, and occasion by invoking or creating specific connotations, symbols and commitments" (68). Rhetoric thus appears a drivingly forceful way for reaching understanding.

Finally, Young argues that "rhetoric motivates the move from reason to judgment" (69). She indeed explains that political communication and argumentation are always ultimately based on judgments.[109] Those judgments are aimed at criticizing but also, and more importantly, at prompting action so as to find solutions to specific problems. In this framework, "the situated, figured, and affective appeal of rhetoric helps make possible the move from thinking to committed action that such a political judgment involves" (Young 69). Young presents the motivation for moving from reasons to judgments as one of the orators' most powerful capacities. "The good rhetorician will lead his listeners to judge, but even more important to become the judges, he will not 'give' them the judgment'" (Young 70). Being a good rhetorician then involves a *sort of* manipulative capacity: that of literally endowing

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[109] Aristotle himself mentions judgments in his understanding of the political use of rhetoric. Indeed, deliberative speech is symptomatically aimed at reaching judgments on present actions.

one's audience with the power to judge and to (re)act. Thus rhetoric does, indeed, carry a manipulative capacity, that of empowering the audience in their capacity of judging.

For these same reasons, testimonials of social empowerment obviously rely on rhetoric to a considerable extent. Though they are indeed instances of communicative action in Habermas's sense, they still rely on rhetoric in an effort to ensure through perlocution their specific empowering goal. As Young puts it, "every communicative effort both intends a contextualized force for its assertion and aims to produce specific effects on those to whom it communicates" (66). This contextualized force in the case of testimonials is that of creating a newly shared understanding of specific situations as being instances of social injustice. In order to do so, they rely on the significant impact narratives produce on readers. Reaching understanding can obviously be achieved in different ways, where Habermas proposes argumentation, testimonials prefer an emotionally enriched use of rhetorically constructed narratives. What remains significant is that, as shown by the publication of the volumes, both communicative processes can serve in the construction of practical discourses. In spite of the fact that testimonials' speech acts are imbued with a significant aesthetic aspect aimed at impacting their readers as well as at raising their awareness and sense of responsibility, the point is indubitably to reach understanding with the audience in the hope to enter the process of deliberative democracy.

Testimonials of social empowerment rely on rhetoric in two different theoretical implications. First they need rhetoric, the art of persuasion, so as to achieve illocutionary and perlocutionary impact. Second, their texts enact stylistic devices and formats that appear as the most natural, indeed authentic, mode of communication for the narrators. Narrative in its simplest format depends on specific rhetorical structure and stylistic devices just as all other modes of speech or literary genres do. This being said, the texts are also profoundly rooted in oral forms of communication and as such appear persuasive by nature. Rhetoric was, in its first theoretical depictions, the art of the oratory. In this sense, and as Nance also remarks, the texts' literary worth could indeed reside in the narrators' talent at (re)producing, in writing, the impact of oral speech acts. Acknowledging witnesses' reliance on both aspects of rhetoric should not, I contend, amount to discard their project as communicative speech acts, but should rather serve their emphatic reliance on empowerment. It is because of a skillful rhetoric that the narrators manage to put their unjust situation on the cultural and political map. It is also because of their specific use of *pathos* and *logos* that they can, on the one hand, impact their readers in particular ways and, on the other, empower them as judges of

institutions and the current social order. Rhetoric, thus, deserves in its own right to appear in a critical approach to testimonials.

The testimonial format indeed, demands a shrewd rhetorical construction in the sense of enhancing the persuasive nature of the texts. Paul Ricoeur, in his ethical system for narratives, delineates a threefold basic model this rhetoric can adopt ("Life"). He first contends that narratives, in essence, seek to persuade. He argues that because no account of the world can be neutral, a narrative will always imply some kind of pact between the narrator and their readers. Ricoeur's concept of a pact is systematically mirrored in testimonials' construction of a privileged bond between narrator and reader—a bond epitomized in the narrator's *ethos* or figurative identity woven through the text, as will be developed hereafter. Ricoeur, then, mentions a second step for narratives' ethics, which, in a moment of vision, calls to imagination so as to envision connections between actions and their ends.[110] Narratives create a chain of causality that envisions past consequences and future ends. This double movement is reproduced in what the enactment of empowerment and the texts' ethics based on responsibility. The third step Ricoeur considers for narratives to exert their ethical impact is their capacity to trigger initiatives. In identifying goals and motives, narrators can inaugurate new beginnings. The postulate that personal narratives can, indeed, trigger new social beginnings, lies at the heart of the interpretation of testimonials. It is the narrators' and editors' effort to trigger a collective commitment to action against social injustices that opened the—most successful—niche these texts occupy in contemporary American culture.

Kimberly A. Nance in her volume on *testimonio*, aims to add new impetus to the critical understanding of Latin-American testimonials. She contends that it is, in part, because of a generally improper critical analysis of the texts that their original effort to implement social change apparently ended up in failure. She suggests changing the critical stance from that of a sad observation of the texts' ineffectiveness to that of a rhetorical questioning of their persuasive intention. She considers that it is because critics failed to acknowledge the intent to persuade audiences, the most basic rhetorical function of all, that testimonials failed to attain their proper target. She, thus, recommends separating testimonials into three categories according to Aristotle's paradigmatic rhetorical speeches: the forensic, the epideictic and the deliberative. In spite of this apparently multiple rhetorical framework, Nance proposes a very

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[110] This understanding of narrative as enacting a chain of causality is common in narrative analysis and has been developed by other scholars, most notably Paul Cobley and Jerome Bruner.

limited model testimonials should implement so as to appear effective. Through a blunt rejection of the forensic and epideictic models, she contends that deliberative speech is the sole proper standard for framing persuasion. Nance seems to discard both the forensic and epideictic speeches notably on the grounds of their enlarged reliance on, respectively, judgmental positions and *pathos*. Still, though Nance seems to frame her rhetoric in Aristotle's theory, she solely focuses on his three models for speech, forgetting about Aristotle's understanding of rhetoric as a model in which features of *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos* interact. Moreover, Aristotle's point in devising a theory of rhetoric is to present *the art of persuasion itself* (Danblon 33). Consequently, all three genres of speech carry on a power of persuasion that they will base on a different treatment of the available discursive features. All three genres will be persuasive, yet they will simply operate differently.

Nance's rejection of the forensic and the epideictic models for testimonials appears problematic, then, because of a confusion of rhetorical levels. Nance fails to keep in mind that all three modes of speech strive for a form of persuasion and that their separation is based on the circumstances in which the orator will try to persuade her audience. Moreover, they appear as kinds of meta-genres, as Aristotle proposes to mirror them in literary genres in a transversal gesture. In fact, all three modes of the forensic, deliberative and epideictic, appear in literary genres when characters respectively need to accuse or defend, persuade or dissuade, praise or blame. One can then easily imagine that testimonials, if they really hope to achieve a persuasive impact on their readership, do rely on all three modes. For obvious reasons, they are "works in which speaking subjects who present themselves as somehow 'ordinary' represent a personal experience of injustice [...] with the goal of including readers to participate in a project of social justice" (Nance 7). Nance's own definition of testimonials carries implications for all three modes of rhetorical speech. In being representations of 'ordinary' personal experience, they will necessarily include some epideictic moments relying on *pathos*, in their undeniable correlation with questions of justice they are necessarily forensic and in their hope to make readers part of their redressing social project, they will obviously display structures borrowed to deliberative speech.[111] The point, here, is not to

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[111] The term deliberative requires some clarification. Nance contends that only deliberative *testimonies,* that is, testimonials following the deliberative rhetorical format can effectively achieve persuasion. However, testimonials of social empowerment, because of their polyphonic format, enter a situation of deliberative democracy in creating an unofficial public

totally reject Nance's rhetorical approach but to somehow redirect it on a different aspect of rhetoric. Rather than focusing on modes of discourse, I propose to focus on the more important features of what Aristotle called a discourse's *technical evidence*.

Aristotle sees in the art of rhetoric the art of uncovering (through persuasion) the relative truths, the *verisimilitudes [les vraissemblances]* of human affairs (Danblon 33).[112] In order to do so, the orator can rely on different types of evidence, some external to the technicality of discourse and some others internal to it. Aristotle seems to include the genre of testimony directly in that of external evidence, that is, testimonies are factual information and as such do not need to include other textual technical clues. For Aristotle, testimonies, because of their authenticity, appear as indisputable facts on the same terms as data, and forensic evidence; they are facts, which "were already there" (Danblon 34) before the effort of persuasion. However, literary testimonies (just as any other forms of constructed discourse) present a use of technical evidence in constructing this authenticity Aristotle seems to take for granted (cf. Warner).

Aristotle mentions three main categories of technical evidence, which can be separated according to their connection with affective and rational characteristics. Rationality is typified in *logos* for which Aristotle proposes two main models of reasoning: enthymemes and examples. The point of this rational evidence is to make reasoning more accessible to the audience: the idea is that the audience should be in a position to supplement the missing part, the *topoi* (Danblon 35). Affectivity, on the other hand, is typified in two different categories, that of *pathos* and that of *ethos*. *Pathos,* as I already mentioned, corresponds to the affective adjustment of the audience. *Ethos*, for its part, corresponds to the way in which orators presents themselves to the audience. Aristotle insists on the fact that *ethos* must be "an effect of the speech" (Danblon 34) and, as such, must be constructed through the text. Because of this intrinsically technical nature, *ethos* is, according to Aristotle, the most effective type of textual evidence.

Though stylistic devices already express in the correlations between *pathos* and the texts' aesthetic of impact as well as *logos* and the texts' ethics of responsibility, this concise account of Aristotle's theory highlights the essential rhetorical focus that can be applied to

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sphere. Testimonials of social empowerment, because of their published structure, are then essentially deliberative.

[112] My account of Aristotle's theory is based on Emmanuel Danblon's discussion in *La Fonction persuasive.*

testimonials. It is in their multiple treatment of *ethos* that they prove most significantly and captivatingly articulate from a rhetorical point of view. Ruth Amossy proposes a comprehensive account of contemporary approaches to the rhetorical notion of *ethos*. She, indeed, underlines a number of interdisciplinary ramifications that appear particularly significant for the understanding of its considerable dialogical function. Drawing on theories borrowed from rhetoric, sociology and critical discourse analysis, Amossy demonstrates how *ethos* presents meaningful links with the key notions of identity, agency, responsibility and membership in society. She defines *ethos* as "the image the speaker constructs of him/herself through discourse" (18).[113] She adds that *ethos* "is a verbal construction which aims at ensuring effective communication" (18-19). Drawing on rhetoric's negative reputation, she contends that in rhetoric, self-representation is somehow paralleled with forms of influencing practices. In this sense *ethos* embodies the very idea that "so as to make someone subscribe to one's ideas, one must appear reliable" (16). She thus reformulates her basic definition of *ethos* as follows: "*ethos* is the image the speaker constructs of him/herself through discourse *so as to achieve reliability*" (25, emphasis mine). The construction of *ethos* in testimonies might somehow be paralleled to a way of representing the witness's history of trustworthiness or reputation, Ricoeur assigns to the process of authentication.

If *ethos* appears of paramount importance for testimonials, it is because the personae the witnesses create thanks to their style of writing makes them reliable. The authenticity the texts convey and that so significantly influences readers' responses is partly due to the *ethos* constructed through the narrators' style. Now, this idea of witnesses' narratives as so elaborately constructed may create an apprehensive atmosphere. Should the witnesses in these volumes really be approached as calculating, maybe even manipulative, individuals? There are at least three arguments that can be advanced so as to oppose such easily understandable skepticism. First, as Rousseau elegantly put it, all men are naturally eloquent. Because of our communicative nature, we are capable of entertaining and exerting some influence on our addressees without the help of oratory training. Secondly, and this is more important, we are all used to this tendency of creating a specific part for ourselves in our social life. This approach to social roles as a factual form of impersonation was developed by Erving Goffman in his theory of the presentation of self. Amossy insists on the significance of this social theory for understanding *ethos*. Goffman contends that we all, in each and every of our social interactions, play a "part" (21) aimed at somehow influencing other participants in specific

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[113] All quotes from Amossy are in my translation.

interactions. Goffman, thus, comes to identify this presentation as a socio-cultural regulation. Amossy summarizes it as follows, "[the presentation of self is] the way in which each of us tries to influence the way in which others perceive our behaviors, capacities, attitudes, intentions and numerous psychological, physical and social features" (32). Consequently, *ethos*, or the stylistic shaping of a specific persona, appears as one the manifold expressions of this universal socio-cultural regulation of social interactions.

Finally, one last argument can be found in critical discourse analysis and echoes previous concerns with authenticity and sincerity. Critical discourse analysis postulates a notion similar to *ethos* in its polyphonic approach to the written text. In written texts, the speaker appears as a pluralized subject corresponding at least to, one the one hand, the extra-linguistic individual and, on the other, a form of narrator. In their specific writing style, the extra-linguistic subjects necessarily construct a specific type of "voice" (Amossy 36). The term voice obviously refers back to Warner's concerns with authenticity. In this sense, authenticity, which so considerably appeals to the readers, must indeed be understood as a textual construct, as spontaneous and natural as this constructive act may be. Similarly, Amossy refers to Ekkehard Eggs' list of features one can expect from speakers if they really hope to be trusted. For the speaker to foster a sense of trust, Eggs mentions, their arguments will be competent, reasonable and deliberate, as well as sincere, honest and fair, and will show solidarity, benevolence and kindness (20). The voices, or the *ethe*, readers perceive in texts are stylistically constructed in the hope of fostering reliability and trust. This constructed aspect, which, at first, sounds highly strategic and consequently suspicious, when coupled with Goffman's theory of the social presentation of self is in fact understandable as a spontaneous effort of interaction management. When the audience hears voices speaking through the texts, these are the ones created through style. These voices remain a stylistic construction and should be considered as such but can very well carry the spontaneous sincerity we are all able to express in ours interactions.

Though spontaneity remains an important aspect of the witnesses' *ethe*, their construction nonetheless reflects cultural and sometimes stereotypical formats. Amossy readily emphasizes the correlation between *ethos* and cultural stereotypes: *ethos* is stylistically, or discursively constructed, and this construction is governed by cultural rules—what Benhabib considers to be the cultural web of narratives out of which individuals have to weave their own. If cultural rules were not to be taken into account, Amossy contends, "*ethos* would simply be inconsistent" (44). She most emphatically contends that stereotypes are the standard expression of the "social imagination" (44) *ethos* is dependent of. She defines

stereotype as "a fixed collective representation, a social model that circulates in discourses and texts" (45). Stereotypes "facilitate cognition in the sense that they divide and categorize our reality which would otherwise remain confused and unmanageable" (45-46)—an idea Warner concurs with in her depiction of authenticity effects. Amossy's definition of such a controversial term appears unexpectedly neutral. She however argues that its widely unfavorable connotations are based on its fixed and excessively simplifying nature. This being said, self-(re)presentation remains centrally organized around stereotypes. Presenting oneself in intersubjective communication requires one to identify with—or to reject (in the sense of negative identification)—stereotypical categories. Amossy, in a clever image of role casting, explains the presence of generic imperatives in the discursive construction of *ethos* as well as in everyday-life interactions (49). Thus, she argues that it is when the presentation of the self is generated in accordance with these imperatives that the speaker may gain adequate authority,[114] may forge close bonds and feel accepted or assimilated.

In this light, one can understand the significance of constructing an *ethos* in compliance with the generic expectations of the testimonial genre. As the major points of *ethos* are to construct relations of reliability and authority between writer and reader so as to facilitate the project of persuasion, it is the witnesses' interest to be able to recognize standard from non-standard testimonial *personae*. These generic considerations lead one to consider the usual cultural and/or literary environments in which one can find testimonies. Based on this investigation, one can extract four main typical forms of *ethos*. First, testimonies usually appear in a forensic environment: when one thinks of testimony, the thought generally conjures up a witness in a court of law. Second, and still thinking about social environments, testimonies are often operated in activist efforts on the part of social movements, as for example feminists awareness-raising groups in the 1960s. Third, still within the oral medium, testimonies, understood as experience sharing in the form of storytelling, often appear in intimate relationships such as a bosom-friend's confessions—this being said, the notion could be extended to the written medium with the format of the diary. Finally, if we rely on a double understanding of the term confession, testimonies serve as significant communicative gestures for religious communities in literature.

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

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[114] In this case, Amossy creates an interesting link with the notion of personal charisma. This somehow echoes Lanser's notion of mimetic authority in autobiographical writing.

Overall, there seem to be four paradigmatic types of *ethos* which witnesses in testimonials of social empowerment can in more or less significant ways identify with. It is to those paradigms that I devote the remaining section, based on textual analyses. Examples taken from *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* first propose an approach to the complex narrative construction *ethos* may rely on in written literary texts. Carolyn Ann Adams, Tabatha Rowley, Brenda Medina and Barbara Parsons Lane as long-standing members of Wally Lamb's writing group propose skillfully woven autobiographical narratives. Their construction of *ethos* appears thus more overtly indebted to techniques from fictional writing such as description, subtle transitions in modes of discourse and generally complex characterization. The second part of this last section will present excerpts from the Voice of Witness volumes. The texts are grouped under each paradigmatic category. The bosom-friend paradigm is first delineated. It presents the witness in a very intimately emotional position appealing to the readers' empathy. The forensic paradigm is addressed second: in such cases, the witness successively occupies the position of the defendant and the position of the judge so as to uncover injustice. The religious paradigm comes third and proposes a priest-like depiction of the witness where her testimony can be likened to a parable or sermon. Finally, the activist paradigm presents the witness as disclosing her personal experience in the hope to raise awareness through plain talk and overt harangue.

III. Case Studies

III.1. *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*

Each text in this volume opens with an introductory double-page. The left-hand one presents a current full-sized picture of the contributor. On the right-hand page, under a representative picture of the inmate's childhood, are listed the title of the essay, the narrator's name as well as autobiographical information—date of birth, grounds for conviction, sentence, date of entry and current status (imprisoned, released, or deceased). The decision to include pictures from the contributors enhances the sense of individuality the texts seek to convey. These inmates have names beyond their crimes, but they also have (smiling) faces. Even more significant is the decision to include personal childhood pictures. Since all contributions are to some extent retrospective in focus, presenting the inmates in their childhood years helps securing the empathizing bond of solidarity that is aimed for. The felicitous decision of separating the essay's title from the name of its author with a series of short vertical lines mirroring prison bars, on the other hand, reminds one of the dreary fate these women have been faced with (see fig.11-14).

The four narratives analyzed here have been chosen as full-fledged examples of the four paradigmatic *ethe*. Carolyn Ann Adams's "Thefts" stands as a beautifully crafted subtle approach to the intimate paradigm. Both in the events she narrates, as well as in her writing style, Adams seeks to create a significant bond of intimacy with her readers. In an earnest disclosure of child sexual abuse as well as the most traumatic events that paced her first days at the hand of the criminal justice system and York Correctional Institution, she seeks to raise-awareness on the sensitive issue of inmates suffering from mental illness. Tabatha Rowley's "Hair Chronicles" appear in sharp contrast to Adams's intimate highly symbolic narrative. In a conversational tone, Rowley's direct speech-like style tinged with colloquialisms parallels a talk one might imagine to exchange with an activist on the streets. From a seemingly naïve point of view, Rowley leads her reader through the prison cells as well as through the streets she paced as a child. Basing her story on a self-analysis that was primarily prompted by a "graphic autobiography" (99), she questions the meaningful correlation between "[her] locks and [her] life" (98). Rowley nevertheless centers her testimony on its outreach. By analyzing her own self-destructive bad habits and poor decision-making skills, Rowley offers a vivid depiction of a coming of age story. Her message stands for all to see and read; what she went through must serve as an example for educating youngsters in the dangers of the streets and addiction.

Brenda Medina's "Hell and I Got Here" somewhat unexpectedly proves a highly constructed, modern version of religious testimonies. Medina, by questioning her family's religious beliefs, investigates her own downhill journey in joining a violent street gang. Her self-questioning gesture is aimed at warning against the powerful psychological grip gangs manage to tighten over time: she "depicts their insidious hold on young people's lives and the cancerous destruction of their futures" (Lamb 7). It is through an epiphany-like moment triggered by family love as well as her poetry that Medina eventually digs out the hope she wishes to convey with her poignant narrative. Barbara Parsons Lane's "Puzzle Pieces" closes this section. Parsons Lane's text is remarkable in many different ways. The prize she was awarded for her narrative tells of the powerful message for the freedom of expression her courageous fight against adversity conveys. In a beautifully complex narrative, she constructs an interesting version of the forensic *ethos*. Parsons Lane manages to place her readers in the position of the investigator and judge who has to form an opinion on the injustice and malfunctions of the criminal justice system. In her artful paradoxical confrontation with rules and tradition, Parsons Lane manages to tangle the impact of her emotional aesthetic with the roughness of responsibilization her forensic *ethos* recommends. She ends her testimony with excerpts from her children's letters, as if to breach the dehumanizing gap prisons stand for.

"Thefts" by Carolyn Ann Adams

Convicted for larceny by embezzlement, Adams spent three of her five-year sentence in York Correctional Institution, from 1998 to 2001. Her testimony is divided into two parts: "The Right to Remain Silent" (66-72) and "The Right to Speak" (72-92). The two subtitles serve as emblematic representatives of the two narrative weaving threads that can be identified in testimonials. On the other hand, their contrastive nature tells of Adams's severe psychological discomfort. As if torn between the fear of what she *could say* and the pressing need to disclose what she *has to say*, Adams's rhetoric constructs her testimonial identity as that of a woman looking for the snug comfort of intimacy so as to disclose the unsettling extra-ordinary events that came to shake up her ordinary life.

Indeed, Adams's paradoxical subtitles are no innocent choices. In displaying a sort of unexpurgated sincerity, the impact that Adams seeks is that of facing readers with the authenticity of confusion. David Herman describes the impact of narrative as a sort of disruption: "narratives represent a structured time-course of particularized events which introduces disruption [...] into storytellers' and interpreters' mental model of the world evoked by the narrative [...] conveying *what it's like to live through that disruption*" (9;

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emphasis mine). With the subtitle 'The Right to Remain Silent', Adams anticipates her raw and yet vivid description of *what it is like* to live through the disruptions of the criminal justice system, whether as a victim or as a defendant. Adams seeks to create the special bond of testimony with her readers; a bond based on empathy yet also and more significantly on the specific relationship testimonial disclosure creates in facing the readers with a disruption in the mental model of world around them. Adams's text presents the intimate paradigm in its almost medical implications—implications she is, indeed, struggling with. As if a recorded account taken straight from the analyst's practice, Adams's seems to lie down on the couch so as to open her heart. Her sincerity is then that which Lionel Trilling assigns to the French cultural world, the strenuous exercise of disclosing one's traits or actions that are generally concealed.

Yet, 'The Right To Speak' Adams claims for herself implies the no less important English aspect of sincerity. Both in the hope to "communicate without deceiving or misleading" and "to be [herself] in action" (Trilling 58), Adams expresses the necessity to bear witness in order to disclose facts and events that had heretofore remained silenced. Adams's story, already through these meaningful subtitles, directly enacts Habermas's validity claims. Her right, here, is not only rightness or the necessary authority she needs so as to utter her testimonial speech act, it is also a duty. The right to speak becomes her complete responsibility, a responsibility she has to assume in the face of different concepts. Not only is Adams responsible for the truth-value of the events that are disclosed (hence the importance of her almost unexpurgated reliance on sincerity); she is also responsible for her contributions to the events disclosed, and more significantly responsible for the lessons to be learned from these events. These lessons may have emerged in Adams's heart of hearts, she nevertheless insists that this right to speak is to be appropriated by others and universalized.

Adams's text starts *in media res*: she is sitting in a busy corridor outside a courtroom on the morning of her arraignment. From the very beginning, she makes her anger as well as her ill-being in struggling with guilt perfectly plain: "I fidgeted and waited for my lawyer, whose fee had cost me my 1996 Dodge Spirit. [...] I exchanged quick glances with several of the others who'd been facing the Superior Court judge that day. We all looked guilty of something" (66). Adams obviously does not seek to minimize her presence at the Superior Court. She, however, resents the fact that her being caught led her to relinquish some of her comfort. Interestingly, in mentioning her Dodge, Adams introduces what will be a recurring motif throughout her text. Her technique is to focus on unexpected seemingly unimportant details so as to enhance the strangeness of her experience and, as a consequence, intensifying

its traumatic impact. Guilt nevertheless takes over as Adams takes a glimpse at one of her former acquaintances and meets with cold rejection.

She carries on contextualizing her criminal offense. Adams had been working in evaluating state-funded agencies providing psychosocial services for patients who had been discharged from hospitals. She had been embezzling advocacy board money for several years. Because of "psychiatric demons of her own" (66) as well as her position as an individual supposed to provide service to the community, Adams's guilt feeds on multiple grounds: the discharged patients would "trus[t] me to be their voice and I had betrayed them" (67). Interestingly, Adams develops a style in which the text's ethics of responsibility is expressed in a boomerang-like movement. It is in recovering her own voice that she expresses her guilt in failing to properly echo the voices of the ones she should have served. In her offence, she actually imposed on others a dubious 'right to remain silent'.

Adams's text, interestingly, disrupts the temporal linearity one might expect from personal narratives. It is only after a few pages that she describes the moment of her arrest. Though this might be expected from stereotypical depictions of such an event, the Miranda Rights formula—the right to remain silent—is never directly mentioned in Adams's narrative. The subtitle serves as a guiding line connecting the events together, and, in this case, the formula is to be taken in its legal meaning. Adams's description, in extremely sincere accents, proposes a rather unexpected shift into the raw despair triggered by the experience of being arrested. Upon being informed of her arrest, Adams loses her emotional balance:

> My hands began to shake. My mouth went sour with the taste of yesterday's booze. Having lost my prescription benefit, I'd been off my psychiatric medicines for months, medicating myself instead with a daily pint of Seagram's Seven. For half a year, I'd been trying to convince myself that I'd be able to handle this moment when it came, but I was wrong. (67)

Adams, then, in a climactic summit, describes her reflex of reaching for scissors with the intent of slashing her wrists. It is Adams's reliance on both the physical and psychological details of her reaction that more significantly sustains her effort to let readers feel and experience *what it is like*. As in an intimate confession to a friend, Adams seeks to make her pain as vivid as possible. Moreover, her eventual admittance to her failure to be equal to the ordeal makes her appear peculiarly human.

Adams's most efficient expression of the aesthetic of impact lies in her unusual yet incredibly subtle use of unexpected details. The key moments of her first few days in custody are all connected with details becoming—unexpectedly—highly influential, as if to properly

connect extraordinary events to the raw material of real life, thus maximizing the impact of her description. Adams describes her first lockup:

> As the door slammed shut behind me, the stink of urine, vomit, and sweat hit my nostrils. The cell was small and grim: cinder-block walls, a metal toilet with a drinking fountain on top, a metal bench along the back wall. Three women were seated there. A fourth lay on the floor without benefit of blanket or pillow. Instinct told me it would be safer to stand at the front of the cell than to sit with the others. So I stood there in my yellow Chanel suit and matching heels staring out. (68)

Embedded in this otherwise grim 'run-of-the-mill' fictional type of description of imprisonment, Adams's Chanel suit and heels strike one as a graphic return to reality. Her grotesque description of herself further emphasizes her feeling of ill-being as well as her sincere effort in depicting the authenticity of her experience. Her Chanel suit and matching heels represent the outward appearance she wanted to display to the outside world. It is an appearance she appears reluctant to abandon altogether.

Once again, this detail is symptomatic of her *ethos* based on intimacy. As if speaking to a friend, she knows the suit powerfully expresses the social face she is trying to preserve. However, in a sudden dramatic turn of events, this outward appearance no longer fits the reality she is living through. This episode somehow epitomizes her double reliance on the French and English models of sincerity. She exposes her shameful sense of guilt and acknowledges her past inability at being herself in her previous apparently superficial life. In depicting this radical mismatch, Adams acknowledges her inability to stand up for that appearance she had wanted to create for herself. In focusing on the suit, Adams also proposes a different interpretation of her right to remain silent. Rather than plainly stating her guilt and distress, the suit stands as a silent—yet all the more authentic—representative.

Adams resorts to this similar detail-technique in describing her wait in the holding room prior to her arrival to Niantic. Locked in the holding room, she looks through a safety-glass window, her sole contact with the external world. Then she spots the goose: "oblivious to the humans locked inside, it waddled along, doing what geese do: eating, shitting, and looking stupid" (70). Adams is exasperated: "I stood there, envying that son-of-a-bitchin' goose as it passed by on its way to greener pastures" (70). The goose, here again, appears totally ill-fitted in Adams's descriptive construction. It however allows her to reconnect her description with her sincere disclosure in expressing her envious feeling towards the bird. Again, Adams appears harsh on herself. Though her envy is targeted at the bird's freedom, the depiction of its characteristic activities somehow stands for what Adams considers to have

abandoned in being punished for her offense—the right to remain silent being one of these. Her description of the bird's "eating, shitting, and looking stupid" corresponds to what she deems a characteristic behavior for geese. This characteristic behavior of beings standing outside and "oblivious to the humans locked inside," is the behavior she had herself displayed when free. Somehow the goose symbolizes all beings out of these walls, minding their own business and forgetting about this place where Adams is now standing, exercising their right to remain silent about the community of the locked up—a right one necessarily abandons when entering that community. The goose embodies Adams' paradoxical feelings: she is longing for her past peace of mind, yet also criticizing the usually oblivious reaction people display towards imprisoned beings.

Adams beautifully handles her use of unexpected details in a paradoxical gesture that both enhances and defuses her poignant description of the most traumatic episodes of her incarceration. In a beautiful construction of the intimate paradigm, she seems to wish to avert the readers' eye from the traumatic events, when the details, in fact, enhance their authenticity. In an eerie return to her Chanel suit, Adams alleviates the shame of her first strip search and delousing shower:

> Midway through my delousing shower, an inmate entered the room and picked my clothes off the floor. 'Where are you going with those?' I asked. 'Laundry,' she said. When I told her my suit had to be dry-cleaned, she smirked. 'Aw, too late,' she said. 'I already washed it.' (71)

Faced with the dehumanized process she is forced to go through, Adams emphasizes her behavioral inappropriateness in focusing on her belongings. The suit, symbolizing Adams's previous life, in the sense of her privileged position as a free woman, her *self-confidence*, and pride is suddenly taken away from her. She is symbolically and literally left naked to face both her conscience and the experience of imprisonment.

Adams insistingly foregrounds her self-consciousness: "there I stood, a woman who had been too inhibited to appear naked before her husband unless it was in the dark, now facing [a] hostile stranger under the glare of fluorescent lights" (71). Indeed, her attention to details, expressed in the description of the female officer, foreshadows the latter's obnoxious and disparaging behavior. As Adams refers to Nazi-style pants-tucking as well as post earrings and gel-clad hair, her readers anticipate rough treatment. This description serves to indirectly address the problem of abusive authority on the part of corrections officers. This problem is epitomized in a necessary observance of one's right to remain silent. When facing corrections officers' abusive authority, silence often appears the only solution inmates are left

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with, lest they want to be faced with even rougher treatment, as Tabatha Rowley and Barbara Parsons Lane also explain. Adams's apparently misplaced question upon having delousing shampoo poured upon her cupped hands is concrete evidence: "she dumped the rest of the bottle over my head and scrubbed hard" (71).

Through these aesthetically compelling episodes, Adams seeks to create a powerful connection with her readers. Emphasizing her previous position as a middle-aged woman with conservative values wearing expensive outfits, she convincingly blasts her stylish self-image in an effort to most sincerely share her emotional predicament. This insightful yet agonizing self-depiction seems hardly conceivable in contexts other than the bosom-friend confession she is here constructing. Adams nonetheless remains a sort of undercover activist. Prior to her incarceration, Adams had long been fighting "psychiatric demons" (66) which, as she will explain may account for her ill-fitted position in society and for her criminal behavior. In spite of its intimate construction, Adams's testimony aims at questioning the dubious way in which the criminal justice system accounts for the mentally disabled.

During her trial, Adams experiences what Emmanuel Renault calls institutional depreciating recognition. The criminal justice system imposes a necessary slighting relation of recognition where interactions are so outwardly ranked that individuals standing in the lower levels of the hierarchy necessarily remain subordinated. This intrinsically authoritative system places defendants in the position of an agent who must be disqualified and stigmatized. Adams broke the rules, she no longer displays the necessary criteria for social interactions and is responsible for condemnable deeds. However, the system normally provides for facilitative procedures: among which stand defense counsel and mitigating factors.

In the description of her trial, Adams addresses the sensitive issue of lawyers' dedication to cases they have been assigned.[115] She rapidly realizes that her lawyer "didn't give a fiddler's fart about [her] case" (69). Resourceless, she is thus faced with a judge embodying the coldest expression of institutionalism:

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[115] This issue is developed in a lengthier discussion in Bonnie Foreshaw's essay in *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*, "Faith, Power and Pants" (186-208). Foreshaw was indeed convicted for the murder of a pregnant woman. She accidently shot the woman in trying to wound her own and the woman's aggressor. Lamb explains that: "legal experts familiar with the Foreshaw case maintain that her public defender failed to meet the minimum standard of competency provided by the Constitution [...]. Attorney Martin Werblin [...] contends that Foreshaw's trial exposes the court's gender and class bias" (209).

'I acknowledge that you have psychiatric things going on.' […] 'But I'm not a psychiatrist, and I don't profess to know anything about these issues. I've agonized over this decision all week, deciding finally that any mental-illness defense you may have had was forfeited when you accepted a plea bargain with the state. […]' (69)

Adams's point in recounting the judge's speech, though followed by no direct critical comment of her own—standing in the position of the defendant, Adams has but the right to remain silent—is to attract attention to malfunctions in the criminal justice system that need to be addressed. Though the system allows more human procedures, they fail to be actually implemented. This episode emphasizes the admonishing nature of Adams's story and creates a powerful connection between both parts. The judge's comment on the plea bargain Adams accepted refers back to the right to remain silent she has by then abdicated. In relinquishing her right to remain silent, she decides to exert her right to speak.

The right to speak Adams asks for in the second part of her essay is twofold. On the one hand, she speaks on behalf of inmates suffering from mental illnesses that are improperly dealt with in only sentencing them to jail. She does not demand straightforward amnesty for mentally disabled defendants, but asks for a better managing of their illnesses while incarcerated: "Like many people in the criminal justice system, my crime and imprisonment are directly related to my mental illness" (72). Adams acknowledges having been diagnosed with depression, bipolar, post-traumatic and dissociative disorders. She also confesses that she is still currently struggling with a compulsive addiction to money that developed during her childhood. Though she is, again, quite severe in the carving of her self-portrait, Adams mainly seeks to emphasize the fact that many of the people who end up being incarcerated are not only guilty of a crime but also and more importantly suffering from disorders imposed upon them by social circumstances. Although she is symptomatically not asking for leniency or forgiveness, she still points to issues demanding social reformation.

On the other hand, Adams, later on, voices the plight of survivors of child sexual abuse. "As an adult, I have stolen and paid the price. As a child I was stolen from, by a thief who went free," (72) she admits. This remark perfectly expresses her ethics of responsibility. Adams accepts her mistakes and shoulders the consequences she was henceforth faced with: she pays the price. However, it is also her duty, now that she recovered her voice, to denounce the events that started her psychiatric history. These events have remained hidden to the eyes of society for too long, she contends, and now need to be outspokenly addressed. Though the second part of Adams's testimony resembles a short autobiography that allows psychoanalytical insight on her personality, it is tinged with reprimand. In letting Adams's

thief go free, society failed to properly protect one of its members and, later on, abandoned her altogether.

This introductory comment on the necessity for the criminal justice system to further its sensitivity to offenders' psychological history also functions as a turning point in Adams's self-disclosure. The second part of Adams's essay is indeed devoted to memories from her childhood through which she seeks to enliven her psychiatric history. Alternating descriptive passages and flashback scenes glimpsed through little Carolyn's eyes, Adams, still faithful to her intimate *ethos*, shares vivid memories of her early childhood. Though no further mentions of her adult life and crime will be made in the rest of her essay, Adams's analepses skillfully bring perspective to her previous seemingly shallow self-portrait. The self-portrait she delineated corresponds to the one society forced on her in considering her as the embezzler in a yellow Chanel suit (an example of Renault's tearing recognition). In (properly) investigating her past, Adams seems to argue, her case might have been more humanely treated. The alternation between descriptions and flashback scenes is signaled typographically by a switch to italicized printing. This type-setting signal is effectively backed up in Adams's change of style: descriptions bear echoes of Adams's adult voice tinged with hints of nostalgia; the scenes, however, resonate of little Carolyn's soon to be lost childish innocence.

Adams's first memories mainly picture her primary acquaintances with money and the increasing materialism and consumerism of the fifties. The first scene pictures young Carolyn faced with what her older brother call the "poorhouse," (73) a place where "they take people who don't pay their bills" (73). As if to justify her later addiction to money, Adams describes in a childish gothic-like echo of her eleven-year-old brother's voice stories of dead people from the poorhouse thrown in the river and purple corpses eaten by crabs. The second memory fragment depicts Carolyn with her mother hiding from one of the latter's numerous creditors. True to herself, little Carolyn focuses on details—the ants she is poking with a twig, the 'woosh' sound her breath makes when she releases it after holding it too long—unable to understand her mother's panicky version of hide-and-seek. Only when Adams reverts to her adult voice do readers understand: "Mommy and I were always hiding from someone" (74). Adams's description of her large pauper-like family is, indeed, centered on the worrying figure of her mother. The latter came from a rather snobbish upper-class family and eloped with a French Canadian Catholic in his shiny black Ford.

Adams's memories up until page 80 seem to focus on her paradoxical handling of money, a resource her family was always lacking yet squandering in the blink of an eye on the novelty offerings of consumerism. This paradoxical behavior seems to have been bequeathed

to her by her mother who "looked pretty whenever she got something new from Shorty [the door-to-door salesman]" (75). Adams's unconditional love for her mother appears all too obvious. One can however sense the judgmental tone regarding the latter's compulsive purchases. Although the memories are undeniably personal and specific, they speak to human universals. As if confessing to a bosom friend, Adams shares her childhood memories in an effort to seek personal understanding of her current predicament but more significantly in proposing a *full-fledged* portrait of who she is.

These first episodes already hint at the figure of Adams's dysfunctional, alcoholic and violent father. Getting to the gist of the matter, the remaining memories she decides to disclose tell about her stolen innocence. The snapshots she proposes on pages 80 and 81 foreshadow, in a tension-laden crescendo, the unbelievable truth she prepares to reveal to her readers. Little Carolyn is sitting outside eating candy waiting for her mother to come home from work. Suddenly raindrops start falling from the sky, Carolyn is unwilling to go back home, her father is up there. Stopping at each landing, little Carolyn hopes for her mother to arrive before she gets to the family apartment. Her ascent towards the apartment ironically and inauspiciously resembles a descent into hell. The little girl finally hides behind the garbage waiting for her mother's arrival, preferring wetting her pants to her father's closeness.

In the next snapshot, little Carolyn is bed-ridden with the measles. Her mother has to leave for work and leaves her alone in her bedroom. The unthinkable is about to happen, little Carolyn, once again focuses on details. Her mother, before leaving, hands her a "wish book" (82), the Sears catalog, out of which to cut paper dolls. Little Carolyn "*cut[s] out a perfect Mommy and Daddy and [...] their children, a blond boy with a crewcut and a pretty, dark-haired girl with a Tonette permanent*" (82) for whom she designs a perfect family furnished flat. At some point, the young girl falls asleep and is awakened by the weight and smell of her father's body. As, "*Daddy reaches down with one hand*" (82), little Carolyn can hear her paper dolls tearing. The child escapes the scene:

> *I close my eyes and picture Dick, Jane and Spot. Someday I'll have a puppy just like Spot. I can feel myself rising out of my body, floating above my bed. I look down at what is happening below me, far away. I feel nothing. I'm not even there. (82)* [116]

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[116] Dick, Jane and their puppy Spot were the main characters of American popular basal readers.

Disclosing the most traumatic event of her young life, Adams is, here in the childish voice of Carolyn, relying on the same technique she previously used. Interestingly, this attention to detail corresponds to one of the disclosing techniques that can help fight the silence imposed by trauma. The right to speak Adams thus mentions at the beginning of the section is also the right to disclose untellable traumas. Her focus on the little paper dolls and on Spot the puppy permits her to alleviate the suffering of the memory as well as the readers' violent encounter with domestic sexual abuse. At the same time however, Carolyn's playing with the paper dolls emphasizes her childish innocence at the moment of the events. Her age is not directly mentioned until later in the story (readers actually have to work it out looking at the dates). In fact, Carolyn is only twelve when the episode happens. The perfect family little Carolyn carved out of the "wish book" testifies, on the one hand, to the child's hope for the future and, on the other, to her psychological reworking of the dysfunctional family she was born in. Faced with her father's sexual assault, her attention is focused on her father's body tearing down the paper silhouettes. In an ominous metaphor, the torn silhouettes stand for Adams' stolen innocence as well as for her already trampled future. Encouraging readers to focus their imagination on these torn silhouettes, Carolyn averts the eyes from the act in itself yet powerfully symbolizes her physical and psychological trauma. As symbolized in her rising-out-of- body experience, her own silhouette and mind are torn all the same.

Her future dream of starting the perfect family is even more shattered than it might have already appeared. Her father not only raped his twelve-year-old daughter, he also left her pregnant. Upon the news of her pregnancy, little Carolyn is unsettled. Lacking a proper sexual education, she is unable to understand where that baby is coming from or how it is going to come into the world, for that matter. Adams is thus sent to Woodfield, a shelter for pregnant teenage-girls. Though Carolyn appears well-integrated in the girls' community, her lack of understanding is patent. One night, when the girls share their stories of "how they'd gone 'all the way'" (84), Carolyn manages to switch subjects so as not to be found out. In spite of her apparent lightheartedness and lack of understanding, the young girl gradually starts to throw hints at the fact that her situation might be her fault. This happens first when the doctor gives her "a funny look" (83), then when Miss Day, in Woodfield, reprimands the girls for having disobeyed: "Wasn't this the very same kind of impulsive bad conduct that had gotten us all into our present pickle to begin with?" (84). Even the social worker gives her "that pitying look" (84). Struggling with guilt and post-traumatic stress disorder, Adams describes her young counterpart's predicament in the shelter in her adult voice.

Though this is not revealed before the end of Adams's essay, the right to speak she is asking for is also the one of telling that big secret. As if to set the record straight, Adams recalls judgmental looks and remarks she suffered only to defuse them in facing reality: she bore her father's baby and was pregnant because of rape, not out of impulsive bad conduct. Adams's discussion of the right to speak for survivors of child sexual abuse points to a number of sensitive problems disclosed in other testimonial volumes devoted to that specific issue; most notably that of blaming the victim. *I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, which was initially part of the corpus for this research, offers more comprehensive discussions of problems of imposed silence, liability misconceptions, and blame focused on the victim. Social values and their overall acceptance by members of society here hint at Iris Marion Young's model for socially connected responsibility. Society as a whole, Adams and her readers' included, participate in the fact that these issues are not properly addressed, if at all.

Adams describes the birth of her child in little Carolyn's voice. Interestingly, this snapshot is introduced by a sort of diary-like entry specifying place and date as if to more directly anchor the event in reality—Bridgeport Hospital, August 20, 1962. Crushed by pains she does not understand, Carolyn is praying: "*I'm certain my body is being torn in two. This is worse than what Daddy does*" (85). A nurse comes because of the noise, "*Maybe you'll remember this the next time you feel like spreading your legs*" (85). Little Carolyn is then brought to the delivery room and is sedated: "*Suddenly it dawns on me: I've had the baby*" (86). The young girl is not allowed to see her baby. The baby boy has been signed up for adoption. In spite of her shallow understanding of what exactly happened, Carolyn has chosen a name for the boy: Daniel. Little Carolyn's voice, most especially in disclosing this series of traumatic events, powerfully sustains Adams's *ethos* based on intimacy. Readers feel transported into the child's past universe, and at the same time, sit in a discussion with the adult woman she became.

When her mother comes to visit her, Carolyn's reaction towards the presents she receives testifies to her immaturity and the apparent innocence she still displays. Her usual attention to details returns, she describes the pink and white dotted Swiss dress and the pair of white leather flats her mother "*picked [..] out from Popular Club to make [her] feel better*" (87). She also receives comic books on the back of which she find paper dolls. The scene appears a usual gift-opening one: a young girl discovers presents from her mother and sister. Just as the Chanel suit during the first days of her imprisonment, the pink and white Swiss dress will serve as a fabric symbol of little Carolyn's new appearance, the one she has to done

for others to see, the one she can wear for the first day of school to start eighth grade (85). This appearance not only appears fabricated, it is also aimed at being part of the proper standards of the time. Just as the brand Chanel hints at a certain status in society, the pink and white dress picked up from "*Popular* Club" is meant to keep up upper-middle-class appearances as well as to questionably give her moral support. Symptomatically, Carolyn's reference to paper dolls points to the grim events that she will be forced to hide. Once again it is through seemingly meaningless details that the full impact of Adams's disclosure is being felt. Though these details always precede or follow realistic depictions or quoted remarks that in themselves narrate the traumatic events, it is through those details that she manages to permeate her text with sincere emotions she hopes to share with her readers.

Carolyn is told never to mention these events, "not even to your brothers and sisters" (87). Secrecy is presented as Carolyn's usual mode of communication:

> *I'm used not talking about things, especially things that have to do with Daddy. 'What happens in this house stays in this house,' Mommy always says. 'We don't air our dirty laundry in public.' So I know not to ask any more questions about the 'it' neither of us has seen"* (87).

This conversation with her mother obviously appears as the climactic moment in Carolyn's revelations and refers to her right to break secrecy. Adams's cry for a right to speak is symptomatic of the recurring motivation for the publication of the testimonial volume as a whole. The right to speak, Adams so beautifully and courageously manages to take responsibility for, testifies to Lamb's effort in disclosing the inmates' "victories against voicelessness" (9). For silence is, of course, never the proper answer to the social issues disclosed in the narratives. This '*it*' creeping in all the inmates' lives has to be overtly dealt with so as for these women to manage to regain control over the lives that slipped out of their, as well as society's, hands.

Throughout her essay, Adams questions social values and their damaging consequences. The empowerment she is seeking in telling her story is not exactly the one of being recognized a victim but rather the one of being freed of the labels imposed by social prejudices—most notably that of victimization—, which tellingly corresponds to one of the most important missions of testimonials. She is not the teenage pregnant girl, the survivor of child sexual abuse, the criminal in jail, the mental patient: she is none of them and all of them at the same time. Her important involvement in community service since her release in 2001 testifies to her will to help reducing these social prejudices (she volunteers at a wellness center for battered women, CRIS radio for the blind, and a service for the elderly). As for all

other essays in the volume, Adams's narrative is further concluded with comments from the editors on her current activities and hope for the outcomes she expects her narrative will trigger. These final comments are characteristic of all testimonial volumes, though these are generally spoken by the narrator herself. These comments appear as the witnesses' *vow*, their mission statement. Adams's "are to educate the public, to reduce social stigma of mental illness, and to assist people with mental disorders who have become enmeshed in the criminal justice system" (93).

"Hair Chronicles" by Tabatha Rowley

Tabatha Rowley offers a completely different type of testimony. Much younger than Adams, she nonetheless also proposes episodes borrowed from her childhood and adolescence along with current episodes from her life in prison—a structure that most contributors to the volume have privileged. The young woman in a colorful language tainted with street colloquialisms and lulled in superstitious popular wisdom offers to disclose the trials and tribulations of her journey towards a hopeful coming of age. Rowley was imprisoned at twenty-three for assault in the first degree. Her youthful naivety and carelessness, in spite of an already heavily checkered history, are violently shaken upon her entrance in the criminal justice system. Organized as a sort of conversational confession activists could informally engage in, Rowley takes her reader through the streets of her 'hood where domestic violence, racial conflicts and drugs run rampant.

Rowley's appearance serves as a guiding thread in this seemingly unstructured, paradoxically dialogical, monologue. Her imprisonment led her to engage in a process of self-investigation whose first outcome was picturesque narrative of the different hairstyles she went through in her rather short life. The initial drawing is reproduced in the book (see fig. 15). Her "graphic autobiography" (99) is meant as an investigative self-portrait but also as a metaphorical representation of the dangers of the street for minority kids. Rowley's drawing could easily be compared to a flier or leaflet activists could hand out to passers-by. Skillfully, her art allows her to summarize the issues she is willing to explore in written speech. A simple look at her graphic autobiography allows her, in a glimpse, to convey the gist of her story. Additionally, her matter-of-fact style and her direct addresses to the reader testify to her efforts to have her message reach its target.

Rowley's narrative starts with a jump into time that is meant to abruptly set the scene. She is, as a four-year-old, introduced to the world through adults' narrative reinterpretations of reality:

> Pete and Choo [her brothers who called her Blackie] teased me because they liked me, Mommy explained. When she pounded me, she did it out of love. Grandma drank to help her blood flow, and Auntie smoked weed so she could sleep. Uncle stuck needles in his arms to make his muscles big. (96)

This naïve description of a child's world reconstructed through adults' speech goes straight to the point Rowley hopes to make. Throughout her narrative her concern is to understand how she was influenced in doing or accepting things she should not have, had she critically thought about them twice. Her use of this childish voice is on the one hand meant at emotionally impacting readers, but more importantly at having them ponder over the actual benefits of such meant-to-be protective comments. Are thrashings and bullying less violent when validated by love? Is addiction less of an issue when covered by questionable excuses? Her questioning of the dangers of children being dangerously influenced by what they are told already hints at her activism for education about the dangers of the real world. Similar comments are, indeed, often easily made about imprisoned people. Is Rowley not describing the kind of typical background that research and statistics design for convicts? Rowley's description shows an interesting re-appropriation of the victim motif. In playing with stereotypical depictions, she seeks to defuse them by changing her reader's perspective in the way she had to change hers.

This preliminary questioning reaches a primary climax at the end of her introduction. That same year, Rowley was repeatedly molested by a neighbor. She readily confesses the "scariest part", as if to swipe the memory away: "what Uncle Wesley did made me feel loved" (96). As Rowley sets the scene for her self-disclosing gesture, the effect for the reader is close to that of a punch in the face. In but a few lines, social problems as varied as alcoholism, drug addiction, domestic violence, racial discrimination and child sexual abuse come out in broad daylight. This matter-of-fact yet pictorial style is Rowley's trademark. Her introductory paragraphs are meant for readers to reach the core of the matter in the glimpse of an eye. As if these paragraphs were captions to her graphic autobiography, it is the messy broader picture that strikes first. It is only when the eyes are getting used to the entanglement of images that they can focus on the crucially significant details and the underlying message.

Rowley's reliance on a stereotypical description of ghettoized black American youngsters is her primary rhetoric strategy. Her initiation into street-life and weed smoking stands as a representative example. Her older brother Pete sees to her entrance into the real world: he wishes to make her tough and "streetwise", "so that [she]'ll survive"(97). Rowley's style gets more oral-like as she discloses what her brother taught her about life. Using short

sentences, numerous questions as well as onomatopoeia-like answers or linking words between paragraphs, Rowley takes readers down in the streets. Her brother is "schooling [her] to the game" (97). The rules are simple: "get or get got," "take or be taken" (97). Rowley learns "how to cop, bang-up, and sell cocaine and weed[,] [h]ow to load and shoot sawed-offs, thirty-eights, and nine-millimeter clips" (97). The more matter-of-fact and the livelier the description, the more natural the bond with the reader Rowley seems to say. Rowley mobilizes the activist's *ethos* trademark: a bond between narrator and reader created out of shock and directness. Her naivety and apparent carelessness remain striking. Talking about her life prior to incarceration, Rowley does not seem to make a clear distinction between what her brother calls *the game* and criminality. Engaged in a one-to-one conversation with this thuggish yet lovable adolescent, the reader can do nothing but relate and ponder over society's failure at teaching justice to the youth of the projects.

However, the adolescent rapidly enters the ethics of responsibility. Enhancing her conversational tone, Rowley maturely looks back on these facts as if to answer questions her reader might have asked:

> Did I know Pete was bad news? Sure. But I told myself I knew his secret, too: that, beneath his thugged-out exterior, he was hiding a good heart. Did I know the difference between right and wrong? I did. But back then, I was more interested in scoring junk food than wrestling with the ethics of my behavior. After you smoked a couple of blunts, those munchies would kick in full force. (97)

Rowley's conversational style has at this point hit its stride. This ping-pong-like use of questions and answers includes readers in her self-questioning retrospective gaze on the events. Most emphatically, she seems to try and bring the readers to identify with that adolescent point of view, as if she was, in fact, lecturing adolescents. More importantly, in investigating her own thinking at the time she offers possible answers to the behavior of street youngsters society has so many difficulties to fathom. Her "wrestling with the ethics of her behavior" obviously happened later in her life, too late probably, when she was behind bars. Yet one can sense that she alludes to the possibility of helping others picking that fight earlier in life before facing actions that cannot be undone.

In one of the key passages of her narrative, Rowley's personal street-like style thrives in a fireworks explosion that projects readers into the core of the volume's matter. The description of her offence conveys her natural sense of immediacy. Shoved to the ground by her violent boyfriend, Rowley describes her grappling with "reasoning clouded by alcohol, angel dust, and weed" (98). Her brother's lessons pay off, "*get before you get got*," (98)

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Rowley shoots the man. Though her boyfriend survived the wound, the judge rejects her self-defense argument and sentences her to seven years. It is her arrival in prison, an obviously traumatic episode, which best epitomizes her colorful vocabulary. Rowley speaks of a place that nurtures depression, danger and disease where "you resign yourself to being ripped off and jerked around" (98). As she considers that she is better off imprisoned than dead, she rapidly understands that she has to "smile pretty for the staff and watch [her] back" (98). In short, "[she] thank[s] [her] god and [her] good luck that the Duracell battery stuck up in [her] butt hasn't conked out yet" (98). Rowley's own appropriation of testimonial aesthetic of impact is based on her direct, oral, street-like speech. Her use of slang affects readers with raw, unadorned authenticity. She never beats around the bush; all the things she wants to disclose are dealt with in the most straightforward manner possible, in a sort of extreme sincerity.

Interestingly, as aggressive or unsettling as this speech may appear at first, it is Rowley's personal non-fictionalized street-style that allows the readers to relate to her. The colorful image of the Duracell battery she uses in describing her courage in facing prison is touching because of its directness and inventiveness. In the same way as passers-by could initially feel annoyed or amused at an activist who accosts them, but might end up feeling concerned, Rowley uses shock tactics in order to secure empathy. More importantly, her speech *feels* authentic and triggers the most powerful feature for identification: a sense of shared human experience. She, significantly, ends her climactic introductory paragraph in directly addressing her reader: "So call what you're reading 'The Hair Chronicles of Tabatha Rowley.'" (98). This address epitomizes her will to speak *to* someone. As if she was aware of the dialogical nature of sincerity scholars have developed, Rowley suggests that the plain talk she is so keen on demonstrating is useless if not validated from the outside. This need for validation is here particularly crucial: Rowley's first addressee remains the criminal justice system where sincerity and truth are critically decisive. However, because she is speaking from the inside of a correctional institution, it is equally significant for her to be read on the outside.

Rowley's resort to the ethics of responsibility appears as straightforward as her aesthetic directness. Her life in prison symptomatically testifies to her entry in a successful coming-of-age process that she symbolizes in the connection she sees between her "locks" (98) and her life. Art, she reckons, helped her investigate her own self and her past actions as well as the environment she evolved in (this is most notably expressed in the shambles of images surrounding her evolving self-portraits in her drawing). Rowley expresses how

memoir, songwriting, performance and drawing stood, for her, as resilient procedures. Her graphic autobiography could, indeed, represent a convincing example of the construction of what Cyrulnik calls the autobiographical chimera. As she pondered upon the connections between "[her] styles and [her] self-esteem" (98), she acquired personal recognition. It is this recognition she is now demanding from her readers.

Rowley expresses the first steps corresponding to her text's ethics. In "beg[inning] to understand who [she is] beneath all those bad habits and bad actions" (98), she voices her willingness to move away from these as well as start anew as a more responsible individual. This wish is obviously epitomized in her detoxing from alcohol. There is hope for rejuvenation. Interestingly, Rowley also indirectly addresses responsibility in the sense of liability. Her depiction of her offense indirectly expresses her feeling of guilt through a retrospective critical description. Calling her ex-boyfriend "my victim," (98) obviously testifies to her accountability. Similarly, Rowley mentions her clouded reasoning, as well as her "luck" (98) that her victim survived, in an effort to critically analyze the chain of events that led her to enter prison. Her coming-of-age process is symptomatically expressed through her recalling her brother's maxim. Though at the time, it appeared as the mantra she had no choice but to follow, she implies her current reevaluation of this unhealthy principle of conduct.

Rowley directs the critical gaze she has acquired thanks to her empowerment towards prison as well. It is in her remarks on prison life that she most powerfully serves the cause of testimonials of social empowerment. Her description of prison being "not a nice place" (98) makes it possible, in a formulaic sentence, to raise most sensitive issues about inmates' living conditions. In spite of her acknowledgement of the seemingly general resignation among prisoners to substandard healthcare, violence and wariness, she still raises these issues in the hope that solutions will be worked out. Her sort of introductory tirade shows her willingness to denounce faults in society's management of incarceration premises.

Truthful to her mental process, the episodes aimed at criticizing living conditions in prison are all primarily focused on her hairstyles. Upon her arrival at York, Rowley was sporting dreadlocks. She insists on the fact that she picked this hairdo for reasons of style and not out of political or religious commitment: her style at the time signaled her belonging to the street-community, which favors a "wild, thuggish look" (98). Rowley recalls feeling insulted when asked, upon her arrival at Niantic, to wash her hair with delousing shampoo. In a meaningful gesture, she connects her offended feeling with her racial awareness: "Do I look like I'm carrying cooties in here?" (98). She meaningfully connects this outrage with another

of her mother's reinterpretation of reality—the belief that Black people never get lice because of the grease on their skins. However, her childhood traditions are of no help in the all-too-real world of correctional institutions: "I'm not sure if this was something my mother believed or if she was just saying it to calm me down, but whoever made Quelling part of the York C.I. admission policy apparently didn't buy into the myth of black immunity" (100). Her aesthetic directness expresses again targeting dehumanizing admission policies.

Unable to escape the delousing shower, Rowley then explains how her hair got damaged somehow beyond repair, which led her to feel "angry, bitter and confused" (100). She decides, being "true to a pattern that [she has] since come to recognize and understand", to cut her dreadlock turning them into "a convenient scapegoat" (100). Interestingly, she focuses a critical, mature gaze on her seemingly recurring need to change her appearance. Her remark on a personal cyclical pattern testifies to her craving for understanding, which meaningfully refers back to the benefits of writing as a self-investigating tool. This mature judgment over her decision is nevertheless followed by a return to her initial motif of a naïve, distorted view of reality. She describes her education based on beliefs echoing ancient history and popular wisdom. Her habit is to burn her cut-off hair, "to send it back from whence it had come," (100) thus avoiding the threat of possible voodoo spells.

Rowley's mentioning of these personal and family traditions serves several purposes in her use of the aesthetic of impact. At first, her apparently fervent devotion to superstitious beliefs enhances the authenticity of her self-portrait in adding a sense of local color. These traditions also intensify Rowley's personal voice as well as her position as the stereotypical image of the activist as a probably eccentric person—that is, persons lacking the main features of reasonableness for which Iris Marion Young reproaches official applications of political discourse. However, the most decisive effect of Rowley's superstition—which could be another instance of a well-managed theme of naivety—resides in the paradoxical use she makes of it as a recurring disruptive narrative twist. Her reliance on her previously naïve understanding of reality allows her to craftily construct connections between seemingly inconsequential events and depictions of the judgmental, unfair, too often racist, preconceptions of prison staff and policies.

The passages expressing Rowley's reliance on superstitious beliefs or other examples of her initial naivety are framed between mature comments on matters of inmates' living conditions or racial discrimination. Her initial remark on her offended feeling when faced with what she thinks is a discriminatory delousing shower, leads her to realize that "white, black, yellow, and red [...] were all doused and deloused" (100). All inmates are faced with

the degrading assumption that they might be bringing pest into the institution premises. Similarly, her need to have her hair sent back home so as to be burned, appears perplexing: "until I got to jail, I never imagined there'd be a time when I'd lose control over where my hair went or who got ahold of it" (100). Rowley in this passage points forward to the difficult matter of cell searches and inmates' property. Rowley's main effort is to emphasize dehumanizing policies: as inmates, property no longer exists even the free possession of one's body.

Rowley's panicked reaction leads her to mix her superstitious voodoo fears with the actual dread of seeing officers searching her property, suggesting she may be holding contraband. Interestingly, it is once again in foregrounding her connection with superstitious beliefs that she expresses the strength of the emotional impact of being totally deprived of one's sense of property—not to mention her direct observation of racist preconceptions among corrections officers as her white cellmate's property remains untouched. It is unfortunately common knowledge that racial prejudices still run rampant in correctional facilities and that all too often inmates from minority backgrounds, in spite of the fact that they make up the majority of the prison population, pay its price—a price that can indeed amount to overzealous motiveless cell searches. Inmates typically present cell searches, whether scheduled or unscheduled, as intrusions into the modest privacy they are struggling to preserve. Lamb, indeed, lists these amongst the most daunting and gruesome, albeit necessary, policies of the Institution. Rowley's theatrical oscillation between actual angst and irrational scenarios testifies to the emotional duress these policies put inmates through.

Rowley's reliance on popular voodoo superstitions allow for her depiction of another form of insulting behavior among prison staff. Her irrational fear of having her hair transformed into a sort of magical doll meant to cause her pain seems to have become far too real in the morning following the search. She ends up going to the nurse asking for a remedy for the sharp pains she is feeling in her sides and abdomen. The nurse's diagnosis sounds more realistic than voodoo-like: it must be gas; "either that or you're using muscles you're not used to using" (101). Rowley expresses reserves, which are met with insulting innuendos. "I believe her assumption was that I was one of the junkies that pass daily through her revolving door, dope sick, detoxing and telling her the same old stories", Rowley concludes. Though she accepts that she did suffer of an addiction to alcohol, she wholeheartedly rejects the possibility for such a disdainful behavior: "no one deserves to be talked down and assumed valueless—no matter what their poisons" (101). Rowley is faced with racist preconceptions shared by a certain number of health-staff members in prison. Although the

self-destructing behavior the nurse and Rowley are referring to here is unfortunately statistically true for a major part of the inmate population, it must not be overgeneralized.

The nurse is emphasizing the loose 'you vs. us' view most people outside prisons still hold. While totally endorsing Young's description of social issues as being victims' responsibility, these examples of biased partitions represent meaningful examples of socially accepted depreciating recognition. These "you people" (101) are a good-for-nothing self-destructive crowd running on the streets searching for drugs and somehow profiting from the social system. This stereotypical misconception is exactly what Rowley seeks to denounce through her offended response. Her denunciation is rendered more powerful by the fact that she sincerely acknowledges her own struggling with addiction and shows respect to people sharing her defect (while denouncing further social issues such as prostitution). More importantly, she underlines the meaningful fact that people suffering from addictions must not be considered valueless. In responsibly describing her own position as an addict, Rowley seeks to empower others in advocating respect and solidarity.

Rowley's tribulations with her locks end up with her being given a ticket. Knowing it is a serious penalty—as tickets might indeed amount, should the breach of discipline be serious enough, to time being added to an inmate's sentence—she feels much more concerned than in the case of a possible voodoo curse. The tickets presents her hair as "contraband braids" (100) that could serve to alter her appearance in a potential escape. In a return to her conversational style, Rowley expresses her feeling of injustice in a pictorial way:

> Escape item? Was I going to tie my dreads together and climb less than a foot from the window ledge to the ground, then leap like Wonder Woman over the electric fence? Alter my appearance with *what*? The locks I'd just cut off my head? Did they think that I had smuggled them in the way some women sneak contraband into prison— tucked firmly (or, in some cases, not so firmly) in their vaginas? (101)

In imagining ironical, unrealistic escape scenarios, Rowley manages to beautifully express her rage and fear without literally mentioning them. Rowley's use of irony is not only aimed at expressing her anger and incomprehension. In mentioning the inmates' way of smuggling contraband in the prison premises she is hinting at the further shame induced by strip search policies.

Rowley then describes her meeting with the Disciplinary Reports Board to have her ticket heard. She further depicts her anguish: she fears she is going to be sent to the hole. Since she does not know what to expect from segregation cells, She carries on using her pictorial style in her fearful depiction. Naivety speaks again: "the only thing I knew about the

hole was what I'd seen on television: that it was a dark, damp, cramped place; that you went days without food or water; that you were released days or weeks later, dirty, dehydrated, and emotionally beaten" (102). However, naivety, here, acquires another significant aspect. In the depiction of the meeting, she highlights her naivety about the system as being the best expression of her powerlessness. Upon her explanations, the hearing officer seems all too weary of inmates' defenses and proposes a bargain, "he'd give [her] a break if [she pleads] guilty" (102). Rowley agrees since "at the time, [she] didn't know that a prisoner has the right to challenge a disciplinary ticket, possibly prove her innocence, and have the infraction removed from her record" (102). Misinformation and disillusioned, expeditious officers are here presented as other malfunctions in the criminal justice system. One of the most significant aspects of empowerment concerns education about the agents' rights and responsibilities. It appears obvious from Rowley's testimony that inmates upon entering the Institution are misinformed about some of the rights they—still—enjoy while incarcerated. The issue of inmates' misinformation about their rights appears, indeed, a recurring motif of prison testimonials. In establishing a fearful, repressive atmosphere, prison-staff members enhance inmates' powerlessness in the hope to ease their coercive task.

Rowley's testimony ends on general remarks on the different hairdos she sported in prison. In a meaningful metaphor, her hair remains a symbol of her self-esteem. After the dreadlock episode, Rowley decided to wear her natural color. "I had never realized how beautiful black looks on me," (110) she confesses. This self-accepting comment is offered to the reader as Rowley's climactic understanding of her value as a newly empowered being, as well as her acceptance and recognition of her personal identity. In spite of being locked up, Rowley testifies to the possibility of struggling through the healing journey of rehabilitation:

> Since coming to prison, I have taken advantage of the opportunity to get in tune with who I am, who I was, who I am becoming, and why. Those 'whys' of my journey have become clearer as I have discovered and dug up the roots of my low self-esteem and the self-destructive habits that contributed to my rage and my incarceration. Today, I am a woman with better decision-making skills and control over my actions. Physically, mentally, and spiritually, I am strong. (110)

In this sincere and hopeful comment, Rowley describes her self-empowerment in listing her newly acquired skills. This positive endnote is symptomatic of the rehabilitative efforts the whole volume stands for—an agenda Rowley so emblematically advocates. Significantly, her last comment stands for the plea for hope narrators in testimonials so readily utter: "I sometimes marvel at the contrasts between the confused, miseducated kid I was and the

positive, steady-minded woman I am today" (111). She confesses: "I hope my story will help wake up other misguided young people and prevent them from having to experience the degradation, dehumanization and isolation of prison" (111).

"Hell, and How I Got Here" by Brenda Medina

Among the contributors to *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*, Brenda Medina was the youngest when she entered prison. Incarcerated in 1993, she was only 17 at the time. Convicted for a homicide related to gang violence, she was sentenced to 25 years without parole. Though she might be expected to display one of the bitterest voices in the volume, her testimony proves inspiring and remarkable both in literary and rehabilitative respects. Rehabilitation is all the more crucial to Medina because of the peculiar content she sought to disclose. Caught up in her need to "write about [her] life because it was the only way [she] knew how to keep sanity in this place of confusion" (175), Medina felt a deep urge to talk about her experience and affiliation with a violent street gang. Lamb explains in his introduction how painful Medina's grappling with the most destructive events in her life turned out to be. The institution, indeed, remains "vigilant in its efforts to eliminate gang influence" (6). Incarcerated gang members are enjoined to renege on their affiliation on pain of punitive segregation and loss of privileges including the "'good time' that can shorten their stay on the inside" (6). Lamb concludes: "Medina's very real fear was that if she wrote about her past life, her work might be seized, taken out of context, and misconstrued as gang-friendly" (6). Dale Griffith, Lamb's collaborator for the workshop eventually received permission from prison officials for Medina to disclose her gang experience. Medina's testimony, thus, is peculiarly valuable in the sense that it allows a somehow voyeuristic peek at gang life. Her reliance on a religious *ethos* seems intensified by this troubling sensation of entering a forbidden environment. Like religious testimonies that deal with a calling or a journey to God's Kingdom, Medina speaks of an unhealthy attraction to questionable beliefs and a journey to hell. Nevertheless, the main religious motif of spreading the word remains central. Medina, indeed, wishes to insist on her rejuvenation and hope for future generations.

Medina's essay is organized in three parts entitled, "My Mother's Secret," "Family Values" and "Dancing in Leg Chains." She proposes a linear time structure, describing events from her childhood, adolescence, and eventually the moment of her incarceration and first years in prison. Her writing style significantly relies on religious and pagan symbolism as webs of narratives with which the young woman had to struggle so as to extract her own personal story. Medina's testimony, indeed frames her religious *ethos* as a significant

appropriation of Seyla Benhabib's narrative conception of identity and Bakhtinian dialogism. Through picturesque descriptions she manages to recreate the gothic atmosphere of Puerto Rican spiritual and voodoo-like beliefs, as well as the ominous aura of street gangs, as the primary frame narratives in which she had to establish the interpretation of her budding subjective identity. Her half-mature, sometimes fanciful appraisal of reality is paradoxically meant to contrast with her family's beliefs as well as with the harsh reality of gang violence and imprisonment. In a sort of modern-life masquerade, Medina eventually seeks to describe how to put an end to the cycle because of which "[f]ewer and fewer people understood that there was a frightened kid behind the tough girl mask" (172). Interestingly, in spite of her cool sincerity, it is in the short excerpts of her poetry that she most efficiently strips off of that mask.

Medina's first section "My Mother's Secret" centers on her large family— she was the youngest of nine children. Medina focuses most particularly on the figure of her mother and her psychological disorder. As foreshadowed by the title of the section, Medina presents this disorder in a mysterious, uncanny, depiction. It is this eerie atmosphere that serves as foundation for her development of the aesthetic of impact. The text starts with a narrative *mise-en-bouche* worthy of a horror tale: one of Medina's older brothers decides to play a dubious prank on his sisters and enters their room at night waving a butcher's knife, his head covered in blood. This anecdote serves to efficiently establish the harrowing, mysterious atmosphere Medina develops in this first section. This distressing atmosphere is based on a subtle balance between seemingly healthy family rituals and unexpectedly frightening episodes. Medina's first encounter with her mother's trouble is thus depicted as the loud violent interruption of one her sisterly Friday-night Monopoly games with Mimi and Jeanette. Upon their arrival in the living room, they discover their mother "on the floor, trashing like a fish out of water" (145), assisted by their father and their older sister. Young Medina is six years old at the time and, understandably, unable to make sense of the scene she is witnessing.

After their mother's recovery, Mimi asks their older sister, Madeline, for explanations. Madeline's ominous comment, "[a]ll right[,] I guess you're old enough to know," (146) deepens the already dominant sense of secrecy. She and Mimi leave the bedroom as if for Mimi to privately follow the rite of passage that will let her in on the secret (a motif Medina will go back to when describing her acceptance in the gang). Thanks to young Medina's eavesdropping, readers learn about the "mysterious 'something'" (146) that controls her Mom. It makes her speak in a strange voice, forces her to be violent and instills in its victim suicide ideation. Medina confesses that this episode opened a series of too numerous

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episodes, "each [...] weirder and scarier" (146). "But, if, at times, Mom appeared possessed by bad spirits", Medina adds, "she was also a firm believer in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Trinity's ability to deliver her family to salvation" (146). This passage skillfully balances the family's superstitious beliefs and Medina's already ironical innuendos. To Medina, the hypothesis of a *mysterious something* seems a dubious explanation for her mother's fits. In this first section, Medina's religious *ethos* is based on the powerful contrast her crude understanding of reality provides with her family's beliefs. Medina's position amounts to that of the doubtful skeptic. She indeed goes on to describe her family's attempts at helping her mother with "the chants and potions of Santeria," or Pentecostal "holy voodoo" (147).[117] Symptomatically, the motif of salvation is a recurring one throughout Medina's testimony. Her title based on the word 'Hell' obviously refers to her descent into the abyss of gang violence and imprisonment but is also meant to create an effective contrast with her eventual epiphany in understanding that salvation—that is rehabilitation through empowerment and family love—is, indeed, possible.

This blatant contrast with her family's values is most powerfully exemplified in Medina's *débuts* in school. Her mother, so keen on the possibility of salvation, decides to enroll her younger daughter in Catholic school: "[...] public schools had turned my older siblings into troublemakers, Mom argued; they were always in the principal's office for something or another. It might be too late for them, but there was still time to save me" (147). Medina's irony stands out like a sore thumb. As she recounts this episode, she, indeed, knows that her salvation is unfortunately doomed to failure. This being said, at the time already, her view of the school as a tool for salvation reveals far more sinister than her mother's. As "the skinny little Puerto Rican girl whose family was poor," (147) Medina is unable to fit in this white and wealthy environment. Her mother's idealistic religious hopes, did not, of course, take discrimination into account. Medina's very real predicament when faced with racism stands in sharp contrast with her family's unrealistic relation to the world. It is indeed in observing this strong paradox that Medina manages to impress her feelings of isolation on readers. In the infertile dialogue between the authenticity of the experience of social and racial discrimination and her family's inauthentic belief, Medina is forced to assess the harsh reality of her alienated existence.

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[117] Santeria is a syncretic religion from West African and Caribbean origin merging Yorùba religion with Roman Catholicism. It relies notably on trances meant to ensure communication with ancestors and on traditional healing practices.

In spite of the problems caused by school attendance—Medina's parents can barely afford the tuition—the mother insists on her daughter attending the institute. Medina questions her mother's beliefs in contrasting her obsession with Catholic salvation and her other pagan traditions. The mother expects Jesus Christ to ensure her daughter's salvation but seeks her own in voodoo-like rag dolls, the power of Santeria or even in an Indian Warrior picture hung up in the family's living room. Medina's perplexed irony is clearly noticeable again. Her skepticism towards the school and her mother's stubbornness is eventually expressed in a climactic formula: "I cursed my Catholic school, and cursed my mother too, who had committed herself to locking me up each day in that holy, hellish place" (151). Medina's paradoxical alliteration in her juxtaposition of the terms holy and hellish testifies to the powerful contrast between the narrator's and her family's values. The institute appears as Medina's first step in the abyssal trip she is bound to take during her younger years. Though the school was meant to save her soul, it turns out to be the place that will partly precipitate her spirit's destruction in augmenting her feeling of complete misrecognition—none of the possible identifications her environment spell out for her seem to correspond to her identity.

In one last episode, Medina describes what is arguably one of most traumatic fits of her mother's. One day, as she was brushing her daughter's hair on the porch, the mother tried to strangle young Medina. Freed by her father, Medina sees in him an unexpected ally, who might be sharing her rational understanding. She must, however, soon relinquish that hope. The father seems, indeed, unwilling to discuss his wife's mysterious condition. Yet, "overheard prayers [tell Medina] what Dad believed: that a dark force sometimes took possession of his wife, the mother of his children" (151). Medina understands her complete opposition with these family beliefs. Even her possible ally, her father who saved her from her mother's violent craze seemingly refuses to accept the obvious and sticks to religious beliefs Medina is unable to embrace.

Medina, the skeptic, the realistic girl, is the one who sees reality as it is. "For years, I struggled with the question of what was *really* wrong with Mom," (152; emphasis mine) she confesses. Though she "wanted to believe" that nothing was wrong, she knew "that wasn't one of [her] choices" (152). In identifying her mother's condition as psychological rather than spiritual, she is "the odd girl out" (148). She adds:

> I could never understand […] why everyone in my family but me was on board with the 'evil spirit' thing. That was one boat I refused to step foot on. I don't know why. Maybe I was afraid to consider the possibility that monsters *can* exist—that uncontrollable 'somethings' can enter you and take you over. (152)

Intriguingly, Medina expresses her wish to have been able to follow these family unrealistic beliefs. She would have loved to be able to look away as her father did, unfortunately her crude relationship with reality did not offer that opportunity. In a religious dilemma, she is only given the possibility to embrace her family's belief or to be, in a sense, excommunicated—in the sense of being left out of the community as a "minority of one" (152). Her feeling of being left over seems to be the price to pay for her wish to face reality. She obviously is unable to follow her family's religious path. However, the path she later embarks on as a substitute is equally irrational and indeed much more dangerous.

Medina's last comments at the end of the first section not only summarize her deep-seated opposition to her family, they also foreshadow the events of the two following sections. Her concern with her fear of considering the possible existence of monsters or uncontrollable "somethings" hints at her later extremely violent behavior after she joins her gang. The monster lurching in Medina's italicized *can* refers to her darkest drives as well as her own guilt with regard to her past actions. She indirectly imputes the latter to the devilish influence gangs can have on easily influenced individuals. For, if Medina is unable to identify with the value of her true family, she will nonetheless accept those of a foster one: the Unidad street gang.[118]

Medina's second section, headed "Family Values", describes at length her first acquaintance and eventual affiliation with The Unidad. The second section functions as an ironic reversal of Medina's previous perspective. In joining the gang, Medina is now the one who misconstrues reality through an unrealistic interpretation of events and characters—a worldview distorted by quasi-religious (almost magical) beliefs. Even if, at first, she seems to show a mature understanding of her new situation, her description of the different episodes is recalled through the point of view of a malleable adolescent. In the first sentences however, we hear echoes of her adult voice: "Addiction comes in many forms: drugs, dice, the bottle, the mall. Mine came in the form of a dangerous boy named Manny" (152). The sentence already predicts the angle through which she will describe her relation to the gang and its members. Medina displays perceptiveness with regard to her dysfunctional and abusive relationship with Manny. The fact that she calls Manny a "dangerous boy," to whom she feels

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[118] Because the mention of real gang names are forbidden by York's institutional standards, the term serves as a substitute for the real name of the gang Medina was affiliated with, Las Solidas, the women chapter of Los Solidos. However, the Spanish word conveys almost the exact same meaning as the actual one and is therefore as powerfully connoted.

addicted anticipates the powerful parallel she creates with the dangers of the illusions one can entertain when under the influence of substances, beliefs or persons. Medina indeed presents Manny and his *brotherhood* as akin to a guru figure and his sect. In these passages, the close relation between her aesthetic of impact and her ethics of responsibility unravels. Medina's point in describing her unfortunate experiences with The Unidad is indeed to warn her readers about the powerful psychological manipulation these organizations are capable of.

Medina systematically shrouds her depictions of Manny, as well as the gang's actions and headquarters, in a veil of mystery. As an adolescent, her ill-directed eagerness leads her to enter an addictive relationship with the object this curiosity latches on to. Medina indeed relies heavily on her adolescent point of view in describing the episodes that are compiled in the second section and the beginning of the third section of her narrative—as if to better render her journey into the darkness of ignorance. Her first description of Manny presents him as a sort of priest or wizard-like figure. Brenda, the adolescent feels attracted to this strange boy her friends seem to know so well. It is in a shopping mall that she meets him for the first time: "he was wearing white jeans and a Tommy Hilfiger shirt that fit his powerful physique just right" (153). The young man approaches with a "swaggering limp", as he is "leaning his weight on a carved wooden cane" (153) and gives one of Medina's friends a strange handshake. The whole scene seems imbued with an "air of mystery" (153). In his white outfit, leaning on a wooden cane, the guy she calls "the mystery man" (153) appears an alluring yet potentially alarming character who seems to come straight out of a fantasy novel. Medina's beautiful description of Manny effectively conveys the mixed feelings she must have had at the time.

Medina keeps harping on the motif of overwhelming mystery. Though she does not directly acknowledge the powerful parallel she creates between her mother figure and Manny's, the reader easily senses the ominous aura both characters share. Medina in a sort of self-destructive gesture seeks to draw the attention of those potentially most dangerous for her. Gradually, then, her descriptions of her encounters with Manny deepen the mystery. She first learns that the reason for the boy's limp was an unfortunate exchange of gunshots. Her curiosity is further put to the test. During their conversation, she understands that her friends are Manny's "brothers" whose "sacred" (154) handshake should not be mocked.[119] Manny's

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[119] Medina's description of Manny's fraternity or brotherhood appears particularly significant. *Campaign4Change, Testimonials: The Book of Truth,* is a volume that was first meant to be part of the final corpus for this research—practical issues finally led to its dismissal.

mention of a fraternity of brothers with fixed, indeed sacred, rituals enhances the initial shroud of mystery Medina had already cast upon him. The term sacred is of peculiar significance since Medina seeks to parallel the gang with a religious sect.

This being said, Medina quickly insists on the fact that she is not as naïve as Manny apparently believes:

> Hey, I grew up in the neighborhood, not on Sesame Street. I *knew* what gangs were: their secret handshakes and special colors. I'd been warned to stay away from roughnecks, and done it. But meeting Manny and hearing this talk about my friends' mysterious 'brotherhood' aroused my curiosity. (154)

Though Medina knows about gangs—a fact she recurrently points out—she apparently did not exactly know how to react towards the fascinating curiosity they would trigger in her. She goes on explaining that her growing interest in gang life arouses concerns among some of her friends. Unfortunately, their "warning[s] exited [her] as much as [they] scared [her]" (154). In spite of her knowing that she stands on dangerous grounds, in a very immature reaction, she is drawn to what still remains a mystery, Manny's "'outlaw' aura" (154).

As Medina's encounters with Manny multiply, she manages to extort new elements from the boy. Upon pointing the bead necklace that he seems to be proudly sporting, she learns about the white and mustard colors all members of "the family" (156) wear. Medina carefully handles the suspense in the hope to allow her readers into the inner circle of her past mistakes. The purpose of this gradual unveiling is of course to issue an ominous warning. As an adolescent, she displayed a series of behavioral features that made her particularly sensitive to gang affiliation. In disclosing them she hopes that parents, educators or even youth themselves might recognize themselves or others in such a description and try to break the cycle.[120] These moral concerns are mirrored in Medina's personal feelings. Medina points,

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However, the body of the volume compiles a number of testimonies from the African-American community aimed at denouncing the dangers of the street. The appendixes gather information on gang organization and affiliation. Editor Vegas Don names brotherhood as the primary factor for youth gang affiliation. Other factors include intimidation, protection, identity and significantly *recognition* (153).

[120] *The Book of Truth* brings the project even further. The appendixes propose a list of "youth behavior that may indicate gang affiliation" (152) among these are mentioned such attitudes as a strong disrespect for any form of authority, resenting home rules, the marking of personal

in a very effective way, at her biggest weakness. She is here hinting at the danger of being in contact with a gang when displaying such psychological vulnerability. Manny cuts short their conversation: "that's all I can say because you're not one of us" (156). In doing so, he capitalizes on her lack of sense of belonging, "that same old 'left out' feeling of [hers]" (156). Paradoxically, in spite of her desire to know more, she does not seem to totally embrace the idea of joining the gang at first. However, her remark on her all-too familiar outcast feeling is the first of a series of hints on the insidious might *the family* is starting to exert.

Medina, eventually, engages in a relationship with Manny. Though she describes a primarily idyllic romance, the picture is rapidly darkened by her family's animosity. When her mother learns about Manny's activities, she forbids Medina to meet with him again. In an abrupt turn of events, Medina's and her family's point of views come to be reversed. Medina, who was so keen on abandoning religious beliefs when they seemed ill-fitted in describing her mother psychological duress, now accepts to be similarly blindfolded when speaking about the existence of the gang. Manny and Medina keep seeing each other in spite of the mother's warnings. It is only after she is threatened to be sent away to Florida that Medina agrees to break up. At that very point, Manny' mysterious aura resurfaces:

> *I'll take care of everything*: what had he meant? I imagined him running up the stairs of our building, bursting into the apartment, putting a gun to my mother's head. I shook off the thought. Gang or no gang, Manny wasn't like that. (158)

Unable to know exactly what her boyfriend has in mind, Medina imagines a wild scenario. She quickly shakes off the idea, clutching to her own romanticized version of the world.

Again, Medina relies on her naively adolescent conception, thus seemingly shaking off her previous skeptical point of view. This blunt paradox in the young woman's behavior further emphasizes the gang's manipulative power. Fortunately, Manny's response is not as violent as the one Medina imagines. It nevertheless further intensifies Medina's depiction of the boy as a magician-like figure. Identifying him with a sort of changeling character, Medina describes how Manny swore to Medina's mother that he had forsaken his "group of friends" (160). The story is entirely fabricated: "whenever [Manny] arrived back at my house, he would take off his beads, kiss them, and slip them in his pocket before putting on the false halo he wore for my mother" (160). Manny's ascendancy is thus spreading over the mother.

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items with codes or symbols, anti-social and aggressive behavior and the possible use of a nickname.

As a sort of Trickster figure, he appears able to switch forms hiding his dark affiliation under a pretense of religious piety.

The crescendo of the second section of Medina's testimony approaches its climax in her description of the gangs' headquarters, their "hangout and place of business" (158). The term "place of business" appears unsettling and suggests secrecy. The "pretty pathetic" (158) place is a squalid abandoned building. Boarded-up windows open on rooms without electricity equipped with furniture that "look[s] like it belong[s] to the landfill" (58). Paradoxically the place seems fascinating as it serves as the scene for a miserable ballet: "[t]heir 'patients,' as they liked to call the addicts who bought from them, would come to the window to exchange money for 'medicine'" (158). In spite of the grim environment, the place is appealing to the young adolescent. Again, the gang is presented as a sect-like organization that powerfully distorts reality so as to make it fit its own very questionable ethics—drugs become medicine and addicts patients. Intriguingly, their selling "medicine" to "patients" recalls the voodoo practices of Santeria Medina was previously so keen on rejecting.

Medina confesses feeling "a little wild" in this place "swarming with people of all ages [...] I knew my mother would hate" (158). This feeling of entering the gang's sanctum sanctorum is somehow transmitted to the readers. Medina is also quite surprised when she discovers that Manny has "sisters" (158) too. Her fascination is also enhanced when she witnesses the apparent unity this *family* enjoys: "all afternoon, people came and went, sharing hugs and stories, laughter and beer" (158). As in her depiction of the holy yet hellish school she was sent to, it is through alliteration that Medina enhances the paradoxically alluring aura of the headquarters: "I felt both repulsed by and drawn to his filthy, friendly place" (158). Interestingly, this meaningful reliance on the aura of places—whether positive or negative— reinforces Medina religious *ethos*. Each section of her testimony seems to connect with powerfully connoted buildings, as if places of worship which she revisits in a meaningful pilgrimage, the most important of which being obviously York Institution.

Medina's attraction to the Unidad grows more urgent as she reaches the climactic end of her second section. As the noose is tightening, she comes to see the gang the way it tries to present itself: a family offering her the snug comfort of shared values and protection she never could find in her own. Her distorted understanding of reality is epitomized in her further depiction of her relationship with Manny. Though she has previously insisted on the fact that she would never end up in abusive relationships as her sisters had, abandoning the iron fist of their mother for that of their boyfriend, she comes to realize later that Manny has similarly overpowered her. A painful remark testifies to her gained awareness:

With Manny, I had found my place in the world. I was, of course, in denial. Having vowed I would never allow a man to run my life as my sisters had, I ignored the evidence that I was following in their footsteps. I ignored, too, the fact that Manny and Mom were not that different from each other. Both wanted to be in charge of things—me in particular. Both assumed that I could be molded to their specifications. (160)

In a telling parallel, Medina shows how retrospectively she realized the closeness between Manny's and her mother's unhealthy values. This remark may lead readers to ponder over which other possibility would have been left for the adolescent had she decided not to embrace any of these two choices.[121] The choices life offered her—those she mentions in the first section—seem to be ineluctably self-destructive. Medina is skillfully hinting at the insidious yet apparently inescapable danger minority youngsters suffering from what Renault calls institutional tearing recognition are faced with. Society fails to provide them with proper answers to their predicament, with social identifications that would allow them to develop their self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem.

The abusive episodes in Medina's relationship become ever more frequent and violent: "Manny had a gift for making me feel guilty when I'd done nothing wrong. His accusations kept me off balance and confused" (162). Though it is never obviously mentioned, a connection is here sketched out between Manny's behavior and the mother's 'mysterious something'. In the vicious cycle typical of domestic abuse, Manny enters fits akin to the mother's "so the cycle continued: explosions, promises, sweetness, new explosions" (163). But he also represents the mysterious something that had finally taken over Medina herself, leading her to exhibit a behavior as disruptive as her mother's. Both Manny and Medina's mother are presented as beings exuding ominous auras, yet inescapably essential—they both represent family nuclei.

The obvious climax of this second part stands in her description of the events that lead to her decision to take her final step past the point of no return. Manny has been arrested for drug trafficking. Helpless, Medina goes to the headquarters for help. Encouraged to take the plunge because she "got what it takes" (163), it is the hope to allay her innermost fears that guides her decision. She confesses: "[t]hey really did seem like a family—and not a hostile one like mine. [...] [I]t was suddenly clear to me, I *wanted* their sense of belonging—this

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[121] Vegas Don, indeed, insists that gang members are first and foremost products of their environment, "meaning that their chance of survival and success in life is very slim due to the community that they live in" (150).

family of friends" (163). Medina, with impressive sincerity, describes the feelings of loneliness and isolation that led her to finally join the gang. She seems blinded by the *family values* she distinguishes in the members' behavior yet cannot recognize in her own family. Medina's testimony is precious for the social struggle that must be fought against gang violence. It is through her disclosure of the workings of the psychological hold the Unidad managed to impose on her that Medina indirectly expresses the urge to react she wants to convey to her readers. In quasi-religious logic, Medina seems to say that because she has suffered through the gang, she has seen the truth and must now spread the word.

The section ends on a detailed depiction of the rite of initiation that led her into the Unidad. Just as her sister was initiated into their family's secret, it is now her turn to learn about the gang's. She and another girl are given a choice: they can go through a beat-up or "do something for the family" (164). Both choose the second option. The president of the Unidad girls tells them about a woman who somehow disrespects the family; she asks the girls to teach her that "the Unidad [is] nothing to play with" (164). The girls are then motioned to a pile of two-by-fours. The description of the beating and what happened afterwards resembles a trance-like episode:

> 'Hey' I screamed, jumping up. The woman turned to face me. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail. Her eyes were wide with shock. Sandy took the first swing, a loud whack to the back of the woman's head. For a second, I just stood there, frozen. But when the woman started defending herself against Sandy, I jumped in. Raising my two-by-four above my head, I brought it down on her. She screamed. I pounded her again and again. Even after she fell to the ground, I kept hitting her. Then everything went dark. [...] It was like I was in a weird dream. (165)

Medina's description of the beating displays a connection with trance-like initiation rites. She seems to be in a sort of parallel consciousness, unable to realize what she is exactly doing. The repeated pounding can be paralleled to ritual drums that are used to induce trance. Medina does not mention anything more about her "victim" (165), in spite of the fact that readers are later notified that Medina was not convicted for this specific beating. As violent as the attack must have been, Medina avoids the trap of graphic details. Focusing on her state of mind, she manages to affect readers in presenting the beating as exactly what it was meant to be: a rite of passage, nothing more. It stands as a moment of transition that should seem as puzzling and as difficult to understand as any other tradition for the uninitiated. Once again, her description questions the dangerous hold gangs exert on people in minimizing violence and asking youngsters to *willingly* engage in it.

The second part of her description directly expresses the strong correlation she establishes between gangs and religion. After she ran away from the scene, Medina meets some of her new sisters. They congratulate her, and one of them offers her the gang bead necklace. Medina directly compares the girl's gesture to religious rituals: "she removed her beads, kissed them the way a Catholic kisses the cross on a rosary, and handed them to me" (165). The comparison seems obviously aimed at hinting on the danger of religious beliefs when they are driven to the extremes. Similarly, her final remark foreshadows her following descent into the hell of conviction and incarceration. It also reactivates the recurring motifs of soul and salvation. What should stand as spiritually enriching, becomes destructive: "I slipped the beads over my head and let them drop around my neck. I felt a piece of my soul slip away" (165).

The third and final part of Medina's testimony, "Dancing in Leg Chains", refers to the memories of her arrest and first years in prison. The analysis of the two previous sections demonstrated that Medina's aesthetic of impact is mainly based on her sensually evocative sense of description. Whether capitalizing on the sense of sight, hearing or even smell, each episode is meant to have a tactile resonance as if to oppose the authenticity of her experience with the spiritual sense she wishes to impart to its recount. This effort is obviously echoed in Medina's strong reliance on a physical anchorage in buildings. Her last section is no exception. York Correctional institution becomes the stage on which she dances in leg chains. This sonorous metaphor beautifully serves her aesthetic construction. The leg chains obviously recall stereotypical images of convicts in documentaries, and thus her all-too-real imprisonment. Their sound, however, evokes spiritual and moral implications largely developed in classical literature and religious and cultural images. She is the cursed, ghost-like figure dragging the chains of her previous misdeeds. Her metaphor is further sustained with a generic blend. The section is framed with two short poems. Medina is, indeed, keen on writing poetry, as shown in her numerous contributions to *I'll Fly Away*. Much as psalms, Medina's poems stand as hymns to rejuvenation framing the grim description she makes of her first five years in prison.

The poems' rhythmic additions to the text further enhance its dialogic format. Medina's poetry offers an example of testimonial generic dialogism just as Rowley's drawing did. This phenomenon is actually a recurring one: Barbara Parsons Lane's text closes with letters from her children, and the *Freedom Writer's Diary* shows excerpts from the students' letters, or poems along with newspapers clippings and photographs. In Medina's case, it enhances her previous use of dialogism in the sense of her effort at constructing her personal

identity out of the web of narratives she has been plunged into. Medina's last section is, indeed, not so much based on her description of convicts' living conditions than it is on her internal moral struggle. As if duplicating her voice, Medina as the protagonist of her narrative seems to converse with her lyrical self.

The two introductory quatrains she proposes tell of her feeling of ruin and yet infallible hope:

I might have been a great actress   *Deep down, the real me exists*
With awards up on my shelf.   *When it's safe, she'll show her face.*
I'd have been a big success,   *While she's waiting for that day,*
If I hadn't lost myself.   *I am here to take her place.* (165-166)

The opposition between the person Medina could have been and the one she actually became introduces the contrastive logic her self-portrait is based on in this last section. Her choice of the image of an actress is not innocent. In addition to being a stereotypical motif for success—an idea she enhances with the term *great* and the reference to the awards—the actress is above all, the one who impersonates others. Medina in this last section indeed hints that prison and the criminal justice system seemed a big masquerade at the time of her conviction forcing her to pose as an unnatural character. However, the real her, "the frightened kid" buried deep down behind the safety of "the tough girl mask" gradually came to surface (172).

Medina exploits the motif of acting, or drama, in a further effort to express the contrast between the raw experience of reality and its distorted reconstructions through images, religious values or other misconceptions. The process of unveiling these reconstructions is not only turned towards her own misconceptions but also towards the ones conveyed by the media, the criminal justice system and finally, indirectly, her readers. In the same way as Voice of Witness editors seek to disrupt established narratives or the narratives the media and society concoct for their narrators, Medina plays on double-standards. She opposes the narrative elaborated by the system with her own truth. However, this opposition took some time to unfold, as Medina's first reactions paradoxically did not rebuff these misconceptions.

In a complex reaction due to psychological defense mechanisms, Medina ends up taking the role of the tough girl—the violent gangbanger—society as a whole seeks to impose on her. She describes her arrest, nine years earlier, as a "blur of scary sounds, smells, and sights" (166)—again exploiting sensual evocations. Though this is a point of detail, her

acknowledgment of the limited power of memory enhances the sense of authenticity and points at the interesting discussions about traumatic events as instances of the untellable. Medina is arrested, and eventually convicted, with three of her fellow female gang members. The main two visual memories that seem etched in her memory are her parents' painful desperate faces. Focusing on the sounds upon her arrival in the holding cell, the dramatic motif springs up through the insults—"garbage", "murderers," "spics" (166)—they were welcomed with. The passage resembles a cinematographic depiction. The insults, the stereotypical appearance of an "Humpty Dumpty" (166) egg-shaped officer, the tears and racist comments are all details that enhance the dramatic atmosphere of Medina's description.

As a dutiful actress, she accepts the role in managing appearances. Medina's and her friend's case, as she would learn later, has been abundantly covered in the news. Medina explains that, in spite of her participation to the beating of the victim, she was actually taken by surprise when one of her fellow members stabbed and killed the girl during the fight. She thus considers that she is not a murderer *per se*. In any case, the "comments" they are faced with when entering a place in fact packed with "criminals" (167), as Medina later calls them and with whom she does not identify in the least, seem difficult for her to swallow. Her anger is skillfully expressed through her use of irony. Calling the officer Humpty Dumpty or referring to herself as a Spic enhances the tone of the voice she seeks to make audible to her readers. Medina, the skeptic, resurfaces in this last section.

Through her skepticism and irony, Medina denounces the role of the media in *transforming* reality and molding roles for protagonists of news' stories to fit in. The further comments from the criminals epitomize the misconceptions news-coverage gives rise to: "'Hey, those are the ones did that murder down in Waterbury,' [...] 'Look at 'em. They're babies'" (167). The fact that murderers might be *babies* indeed appears inconceivable. This example widens the gap between newsworthy truth and factual truth, thereby further questioning a blind acceptance of news stories and the undeniable issue of sensationalism. In a poignant way, Medina describes her deep understanding of these social and media discriminatory misconceptions. At the time, however, she responded with a rather childish reaction. In spite of her feeling "like a scared little girl," she decides to exhibit her determination "to show them how hard [she]'d be to break" (166). Her remark is meant at retrospectively analyzing her mistake. It is, indeed, only in disclosing her experience nine years later that she actually manages to debunk these social systemic misconceptions.

Medina's sense of split personality is further enhanced by her "new name—221437" (167). She is, in turn, testifying to the dehumanizing power of incarceration. Being but a

number, she again, is something of a film cliché—and subjected to utter misrecognition. Still, she appears ready to take on the role the scenario of this movie, as obscure as it may be, has laid out for her. Her distorted understanding of the reality of prison, due to her youth as well as her distress, is not expressed exclusively through this uncanny acting metaphor. It is also epitomized through her complete incomprehension of prison lingo. When Medina is given her first breakfast, she notices a note she is totally unable to understand: "Inmate Medina, Brendalis #221437 confined to seg pending investigation" (168). Similarly, when faced with the Deputy Warden, she is introduced to the term "population" and finally understands that "seg" stands for "segregation"—'the prison within a prison' that separates her from the larger population of the other inmates. Because she is a gang member and a "high profile" convict, the warden is afraid she might "cause problems" or "commotion" (169). Medina, at first, seems to understand that in spite of her being *high profile* she should rather lay low if she does not want to be brought back to *seg*—a bad horror movie "psycho ward" (168). Obviously, Medina's aesthetic of impact relies on her sense of irony expressed in her complete bewilderment faced with imprisonment. None of the previous values she had endorsed or failed to hold seem to be of any help in this new environment. Medina thus needs to settle down with a totally new form of conduct.

Medina again questions media exposure and the delusions that all too often ensue from it upon her arrival among prison population. The inmates have been following the girls' case on the news and have apparently "been expecting [them]" (169). Medina struggles with this situation of dubious celebrity. She might have been a great actress but the peculiar success she is here apparently enjoying is definitely not what she had in mind. She recounts her roommate's hurtful confession upon meeting her, Medina is not as mean as the girl had expected. "I didn't tell her I'd been afraid to meet her, too," (170) Medina meekly adds. The frightened kid really is surfacing here. She acknowledges her fear in the face of the premises she will live in for the next 25 years as well as the weakness she so brutally tries to hide.

Tired of the new names she has been assigned since her arrival in Niantic, Medina decides that instead of fighting these labels, she might as well accept one of them and try to live up to them. Here, Medina shows her human side in giving up the struggle. This unexpected and almost disappointing gesture serves her religious *ethos*. This represents the phase of doubt Medina goes through to better embrace her faith in hope and rehabilitation later on. Medina, the actress is, thus, about to accept her dubiously most successful role: her level-five security status. "If they wanted to name me to the troublemakers' all-star team, I'd be happy to play the game," (172) she childishly remarks. Here again, Medina's irony

expresses her actual fear and suffering. Her decision to live up to the orange-card[122] expectations testifies to her immature behavior as well as to the only defense mechanism she seems to be able to think of: a questionably good offence. She impersonates the "badass" so as to protect herself from her biggest weaknesses.

Surrounded with staff members and inmates she so skillfully persuaded of her negative attitude leaves Medina faced with little, if any, hope for rehabilitation. In a moving scene, she nevertheless describes an epiphany-like moment. Faithful to her religious *ethos*, Medina speaks of the salvation she has been struggling for her whole life and that finally is almost within reach. She finds this salvation thanks to her parents who "still [know her]" (173). During one of their weekly visit, her father confronts her. The denial of their previous week visit due to Medina's undisciplined behavior was one too many. Medina is touched by grace:

> I'd been accusing them of not understanding for years. But it was *I* who didn't get it. No matter what I'd done, no matter how much I'd hurt and shamed them, they still loved me. Those two-hour ride every Sunday proved it—proved that their love was unconditional. Suddenly, in the middle of that visit, I understood that. (173)

Medina's reliance on the religious motif of unconditional love marks her entrance in the process of empowerment. This moving description allows for Medina to, once again, contrast the badass appearance she has been sporting with her personal reality. What she needed so as to engage in the road to salvation or rehabilitation was understanding and love in order to secure a feeling of belonging. She finds this feeling in the family environment she had so readily rejected before. This passage, which aims to show a higher level of understanding, resembles a religious revelation and leads Medina back to traditional family values. The moment is particularly symbolic: though seemingly dysfunctional, Medina's family faced with adversity proves much stronger than her foster community. Medina realizes that instead of pursuing her affective needs in joining the gang she should have tried to put greater faith in her closest family, a gesture she enjoins her readers to reproduce.

Medina, however, testifies to the difficult path that still lays ahead of her. Understanding, as she herself explains, is very different from changing (173). Though the picture does not seem completely bright, hope pervades Medina's last comments: "Hope and despair live side by side here at York prison" (174). These contrasted options, as a sort of reminiscence of the ones she was constantly faced with, favor her reliance on the ethics of

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[122] The inmates' security levels are signaled by color-cards in York Institution.

responsibility. Medina's commitment is best expressed through the poem she includes at the end of her testimony:

Beyond the steel door, there's a mourning
Grief for misplaced innocence
Past the mourning, there's a darkness
Filled with fears that make no sense
Beyond the darkness, there's a bright light
Illuminating half the way

Past the bright light, there's a longing
One that will not go away
Beyond the longing, there is silence
Stillness that may save my soul
Beyond the stillness, there's salvation
Grace from God to make me whole (174)

Mourning, darkness, light, longing, silence and salvation are all components of Medina's life prior to and during incarceration and carry the power of religious connotations. In an interesting parallel, one could interpret Medina's piece as a poetic reworking of the stages of empowerment presented in the form of a psalm. From the point of view of her current position as an empowered woman, she can look back on the meaningful stages that shaped her life. She testifies to the mourning for her lost innocence in the face of her judgmental reactions towards her family's beliefs, as well as her misplaced innocent understanding of the values the gang stood for—a mourning that turned into the darkness of her most instinctive weaknesses once she was incarcerated.[123] Her fear and anger when faced with the dehumanizing environment of prison led her to impersonate her darkest role. Through the power of unconditional love, her parents manage to transform this darkness into the bright light the future can actually stand for. This light unfortunately only lights part of the way, a path guided by her longing for freedom and, above all, rehabilitation. In mentioning the stillness, she powerfully reflects on the meditative and curative power of writing.

Symptomatically, Medina's vow for empowerment lies in newly found endorsement of the notion of understanding and education. She, indeed, tutors with Literacy Volunteers of America. Education appears as the proper answer Medina found in hoping to help others envisage salvation or rehabilitation. Her peculiar relationships with the media also led her to serve as a reporter, photographer and editor with a newsletter of the Institution, the *York voice*. Medina is thus actively committed to her own and other inmates' rehabilitation. She

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[123] The motif of lost innocence takes a different meaning when reading her contributions to *I'll Fly Away*. Medina indeed recounts of the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of her mother's cousin when she was six (IFA 42).

also is a militant of the healing power of writing, describing her writing as "a sanctuary in the middle of each day" (175). Medina offers a beautiful formulation of the religious *ethos*. Her testimony resembles a quest for initiation, the journey that took her soul down to hell so as to better bring it back towards the bright light of salvation. The voice her readers can hear through her words is not that of an overoptimistic believer but that of a hopeful person who survived the hellish experience of injustice. Her belief in empowerment is expressed through her raw depiction of street life and the dangers it contains, a depiction she considers as one of the best ways to raise the audience's awareness.

"Puzzle Pieces" by Barbara Parsons Lane

In a different, yet no less poetic way, Barbara Parsons Lane's testimony carries out an in-depth questioning of the criminal justice system in correlation with her own self-investigation. Her work unfolds as a poignant form of the heartrending quest for personal and institutional truth the forensic *ethos* stands for. Her narrative was presented with the PEN/Newman's Own First Amendment Award, which significantly tells of her ethical construction. This prize, indeed, is awarded to a U.S. resident who "fought courageously, despite adversity, to safeguard the First Amendment right to freedom of expression as it applies to the written word" (PEN). Parsons Lane was 48 when she was convicted for the murder of her second husband. The exact wording of her conviction was manslaughter due to emotional duress; she was sentenced to 25 years to be suspended after 10. Parsons Lane, though she does not directly recount the events that led to her imprisonment is one of the inmates who is most brutally and routinely tortured by her conscience. She is undeniably suffering from a heavy post-traumatic stress disorder due to her husband's constant abuse and her eventual extreme reaction. As such, Parsons Lane testifies to what could be termed her guilt history—therefore, a powerful construction of the forensic *ethos*. Throughout her life, she indeed appears to have struggled so as to satisfy other people's needs forgetting herself in the process.

Her title is significantly representative of her text's structure. She likens her life-writing, which involves the painstaking task of collecting memories, to the completion of an old puzzle taken down from a shelf:

> [Y]ou open the box, finger the pieces. But old puzzles can be frustrating. Some pieces that looked like matches refuse to fit. Others are bent or misplaced. Some pieces are lost forever. (216).

Interestingly, Parsons Lane's effort to reconstruct the complete picture of her life runs parallel to investigators' quest for truth. In this sense, Parsons Lane constructs her writing as a sincere confession (in the judicial sense) of what she did or lived through but also as an investigation of the social system she has endured her whole life through. Parsons Lane's forensic *ethos* unveils the closest interweaving of the two subject positions that make up the texts' ethics of responsibility. She is systematically moving from the position of the defendant to that of the judge.

Parsons Lane's agenda throughout her narrative is, on the one hand, to achieve resilience in being at peace with the punishment for her crime and, on the other, to investigate the American criminal justice from her position in the hope of unveiling its malfunctions. Among all the testimonies in *Couldn't Keep it to Myself,* "Puzzle Pieces" is one of the most moving. Indeed, Parsons Lane, in spite of her position as an inmate, feels uncannily normal. Parsons Lane thus constructs her aesthetic of impact on her most often uncritical, indeed naïve, allegiance to the rules American society laid down for citizens to follow. For it is first and foremost from this allegiance that her experience of injustice behind bars develops.

Parsons Lane's testimony comprises seven different parts, most of which dealing with episodes focusing on her stay in prison, except for those labeled 'Puzzle Pieces' and 'The Threat'. Each of these parts indeed represent puzzle pieces she wishes to fit in a broader encompassing picture, that of her life, the one she led in the past and the one she hopes to be able to lead in the future. Readers can indeed share her frustrating effort at fitting those pieces together. In placing herself in the position of the investigator, she, in an unexpected gesture, somehow identifies with her readers, asking for their own interpretation of the truth she discloses. It is in this effort that she decided to include letters from her children at the end of her narrative. As if to be sure to collect testimonies from all the witnesses involved, Parsons Lane asks from her readers the difficult exercise of reconstructing a family that was shattered to puzzle pieces.

Parsons Lane's first piece is entitled 'The Visit'. The episode takes place ten days after her arrival to Niantic during her first moments in the visiting room. She seems particularly aware of her environments—a psychological syndrome due to her emotional duress she later refers to as "hypervigilance" (215). Her feeling of "high alert" (212) and fear for her safety and vital personal space exert a considerable strain she has trouble coping with. The main feeling that she seems willing to express in this first episode is an extreme sense of tiredness, which is most powerfully embodied in her complete denial of her appearance. Symptomatically, her rejection of her own image establishes a meaningful correlation

between her sense of fatigue as well as her sense of guilt. Parsons Lane's overpowering guilt indeed pervades her whole narrative. This fact interestingly ties up to the recurring motif of rules. She knows she broke the rules in a rather spectacular way and so as to face the consequences of her deed. She thus seems to impose on herself the constraint to follow the rules imposed by York Institution even more scrupulously.

This constant interplay of guilt and rules is noticeable in the beginning paragraphs. Her children enter the visiting room but the family reunion is restrained: "there are rules: prisoner on one side of the table, visitors on the other; no lingering embraces or body-to-body hugs" (212). In an abrupt change of tone—she has been lamenting on how she will be able to live without her children, Parsons Lane seems to use rules as the support she needs so as not to collapse emotionally. At the same time, rules are also used to heighten her guilt. Her hypervigilance seems to mirror these two opposite purposes. The isolation and defensiveness it produces, on the one hand, guarantee her safety when faced with the inmates. On the other, they serve as the rod she uses for flagellation. When faced with the institution rules, Parsons Lane's hypervigilance lead her to obey these rules to the extreme. This contrast recurs throughout her text. Parsons Lane's sentimental and psychological rift is powerfully conveyed to the reader through these abrupt changes of tone—a crucial balance between feeling sorry for herself and the strictest adherence to rules.

Relying primarily on a description of rules and similar contrasts in her stylistic inflections, Parsons Lane then leads readers inside the prison premises. She explains how, upon her arrival, she needs to be "coach[ed] [...] through the official rules of prison and the unofficial rules of the twenty-four women on [her] tier" (213). In spite of her insistence on her psychological collapse, expressed through an interesting metaphor, a form of anger seems to quickly get the upper hand:

> I don't know why these girls act like we're at a pajama party. No one seems to understand the seriousness of our situation. *I feel like I've been stranded on a foreign island where the native speech is street talk, Spanish and jail-house slang.* (213; emphasis mine).

The psychological wreck is thus transformed into a metaphorical one, and the prison transformed into a foreign island. It is a secluded society she will have to discover so as to abide by its rules. Parsons Lane seeks to reconstruct within the institution premises the reassuring schematic behavior she has always displayed: an obedient low profile.

Her contrasted reliance on both her guilt and the institution's official and unofficial rules reappears when she is given her work assignment. Because she has been told "that

there's a prison inside the prison called segregation" (214), Parsons Lane seems to tune up her hypervigilance to a form of extreme submissiveness. She knows that her post-traumatic stress disorder, the main symptoms of which are flashbacks and an inability to focus, may be a serious danger to her balanced behavior. Interestingly, she seems to be ready to accept any distortion of rules so as to avoid further punishment. Though the paperwork she is given says that she does not have to work if she is unsentenced, she is afraid to mention this significant argument in refusing the assignment. "If [she] make[s] trouble, [she] might end up in seg no matter what [the paperwork] says" (214). Parsons Lane, here, tackles the sensitive issue of pressures imposed on inmates by the prison staff. She knows she could use rules to protect herself from tasks she does not seem ready to endure yet she prefers to remain silent.

This episode echoes Rowley's remark about the necessity for inmates to know about their rights. The penitentiary system has been constructed in such a way that inmates might still benefit from some basic rights. However, the staff demonstrates depreciating recognition. In a stigmatizing and disqualifying gesture, they use their hierarchical power so as to strip inmates from these basic rights. Though she is aware of these, Parsons Lane is here willingly refusing to exercise them. Again, rules come to signify her overburdening feeling of guilt. This is epitomized in a further comment about her job assignment. She is told that security "cleared" (214) her to work in the kitchens. "What kind of security do they have here?" (214) she ironically wonders, being a murderer she should obviously not be cleared by security. Her question refers back to her need to adapt to the specific organization of the foreign island prison stands for.

Court runs and other institutional procedures probably remain the harshest part of this adaptation. The length of the procedure and the psychological strain provisional hearings represent for convicts stand among the recurring motifs of testimonials about the criminal justice system. Parsons Lane describes her exertion during the nine-month period that separated her offense and the moment of her sentencing. She does, of course, dutifully accept the sentence. However, in a moving confession, she describes what she considers to be her *actual* punishment:

> I know I am in prison because I took a life and must be punished. I take full responsibility for my crime. My greatest punishment is the not the loss of my freedom, or the bleakness of my new 'home', or the fears I face. Far worse than these is the separation from my children's lives—the lost opportunity to watch my grandchildren grow, the inability to make sure my family is safe. (216)

Parsons Lane shifts from her apparent need for rules to support her life to their paradoxically destructive power. In this, she develops a deeply sensitive variant of the ethics of responsibility. She appears to fully accept the consequences of her actions, whether the beautiful gift of becoming a mother or the bleak burden of having taken someone's life. Her position as the seemingly perfect embodiment of responsible behavior—in Young's sense of deliberating about options for action and pondering about how their consequences may affect others—appears peculiar, almost impossible. This sense of almost uncanny perfection is of course balanced by her overt confession of her mistakes.

Parsons Lane's testimony reveals the intimate connection that links the ethics of responsibility to the aesthetic of impact, *logos* to *pathos*, in the narrators' construction of their self-portrait. In her seemingly constant effort to abide by rules, Parsons Lane manages to enhance her peculiar humanity. She seems to imply that even though she always wanted to react in the most appropriate way, she made a number of mistakes. The reader, in a reflexive gesture, ponders over Parsons Lane's all too human heartrending oscillation between remorse for her past actions and regret for the future ones she will never accomplish. In a form of meta-confession, Parsons Lane offers her narrative as the confession of the intimate guilt she could not confess on the day of her arrest, in spite of the fact that she thought "[she] had confessed to whatever [she] could think of—every sin [she]'d committed in a lifetime of forty-eight years" (216). This confession that bears the traces of her wish for a perfectly responsible behavior is aimed at impacting the reader, as if Parsons Lane were saying that this could happen to anyone.

"Puzzle Pieces", the second section of Parsons Lane's testimony, is much shorter than the other ones. In this two-and-a half pages passage, she seems to be willing to deal with the pieces that "refuse to fit" (218). She obviously wants readers themselves to try and create the match. Placing readers in the position of investigators, she hopes they will be able to meaningfully connect with her life story events that escaped her. The two childhood episodes she proposes in this section foreshadow Parsons Lane's relation to rules and the law. The first early childhood memory she discloses tells of her walking alone and without permission from her house to her grandmother's. She was four years old at the time and caused a lot of worries to her mother, grandmother and aunt, who had been babysitting her. Through a shift from her adult voice to a childish one, Parsons Lane expresses her naïve appraisal of danger. However, she knew she was safe because the "Constable" (217) was following her. Indeed, as the little girl is walking alone, she is approached by a police officer, who wants to give her a lift. Faced with the girl's refusal, he chooses to drive at a walking pace so as to see her safely to her

grandmother's. Evidently, Parsons Lane's future allegiance to rules is prefigured in her blind trust in this figure of authority—"Daddy says that's the Constable's job: to make sure everyone's safe" (217). In the same fashion as one would start a puzzle searching for the corner pieces, Parsons Lane tries to recall her earliest memories in the hope to find the cornerstones of her later behavior.

The second memory she discloses also focuses on her compliance with rules but, much more importantly, ironically points forward to her future debacle in the face of the criminal justice system. She develops a scenario that is, unfortunately, recurrent in inmates' lives. One day, during a walk with her grandfather, Barbara is molested by her grandparent. The first apparent impact of this ostensibly traumatic event seems of minor importance to her but again, from a stylistic point of view, Parsons Lane's account of it displays her skillful management of tone. As her grandfather walks her back home, Barbara understands that "[she] doesn't] like him anymore" (218) and expresses her joy at seeing him leave the next morning. Through little Barbara's voice, Parsons Lane actually manages to offer the victim's direct testimony. She is again placing the reader in the position of the investigator, the person who has to take statements from the victim. When she decides to tell the incident to her mother, the little girl is faced with a new rule: "Don't ever mention this to anyone" (218). As the obedient girl she has always been, Parsons Lane remains silent. Once again, faithful to her forensic *ethos*, Parsons Lane mentions rules as the safeguard to her sanity. However, this recurring gesture always seem condemned to failure: rules are too much of a burden. Instead of providing safety, they enhance psychological distress.

Parsons Lane mentions two more puzzle pieces that help plug some of the gaps of her broader life-picture. In 1990, Parsons Lane's mother committed suicide by throwing herself from a window. In an effort to cope with her loss, Parsons Lane "broke [her] promise of silence" (218) and told her aunt about what happened with her grandfather. Another secret is revealed as an answer: Parsons Lane's mother had also been molested by her father as a child. Parsons Lane appears devastated at "the puzzle piece that's lost for good" (218). As her mother had been a victim of the same perverted man, Parsons Lane wonders how she could entrust her daughter to him. This piece is indeed "buried with [her] mother" (218). Parsons Lane is unable to understand why her mother did not shoulder the responsibilities of motherhood in keeping her daughter safe.

Parsons Lane, however, endorsed these responsibilities as a mother. In an unexpected revelation, Parsons Lane unveils the ugly truth:

I am tired now, sick of puzzle and memories. My grandfather is long dead, and my mother now, too. And I'm in prison for having taken the life of my husband, the man who molested my granddaughter, the child of my child. (219)

This confession closes Parsons Lane second part. Readers, as investigators, can here recreate the connection between Parsons Lane's mother's decision to turn a blind eye as opposed to her own extreme reaction. Parsons Lane is also indirectly taking a judgmental position facing her readers with the dreadful question: what would *you* have done in such a situation? She indeed acknowledges her guilt and at the same time questions the difficult position of judges in the criminal justice system. Faced with such traumatic cycles, is it possible to attribute blame to one individual? Does it demand a re-evaluation of murder or sentencing?

These questions obviously stand at the heart of testimonials' effort. Criminal Justice, as evolved as it may appear in a country like America, still displays flaws, some of which correlated with larger social issues or values that might demand thorough reassessment. The forensic paradigm significantly relies on the strict structure established for social institutions, be it the ones associated with psychological (the family), freedom (the polity and the criminal justice system), or working values (the market). In this sense, it is the paradigm which probably proposes the most obvious relation to justice as recognition. Once recognized as a proper interaction partner, the witness can propose their amendments. As opposed to the activist paradigm for example where complete revolution is at hand, with the forensic *ethos*, it is from the inside of the institution, using its ropes, that the narrator acquires empowerment.

Though she does not directly express her reproaches, Parsons Lane also alludes to the fact that she shouldered the responsibility of motherhood while her mother apparently could not. However, the puzzle piece that Parsons Lane considers to be lost with her mother suicide does tell of her mother's eventual inability at coping with guilt and post-traumatic stress disorder. The cycle of abuse repeated in mother and daughter a similar destructive behavior. Both suicide and murder are uncannily close extreme sort of coping mechanisms. Parsons Lane reached the same conclusion her mother had, except that instead of taking her own life, she took another's. Once again, responsibility and emotional impact seem to be virtually one in Parsons Lane's narrative.

"Cell Door Window" further explores the connections between Parsons Lane and her mother. In observing her cellmate looking through the cell door window at what is happening in the pier. Parsons Lane's angry reaction brings her back to memories of her mother:

Do you know what you look like from the other side of that door? A caged animal, that's what! Suddenly, I'm seventeen again, walking the corridor of Fairfield Hills

Psychiatric Hospital to my mother's room and ignoring, as best I can, the stares of her
peers, the other caged mental patients. (219)

Both her mother's and her own guilt at their inability to protect their children led them to become caged as animals. Further exploring these correlations, she explains how her sense of responsibility was aroused at the time: "Mom believed it was the responsibility of the eldest daughter to assist with household chores" (220). In her mother's absence, Barbara is in charge as a surrogate. The motif of motherhood (whether biological or surrogate) appears tremendously important in Parsons Lane's testimony. Though it confers an intimate dimension to her otherwise courageous disclosure, it also reinforces her belief in the traditional system of norms and justice, and reinforces her forensic *ethos*. Parsons Lane obviously understands her family as a matriarchal structure. If the mother is absent, the eldest is in charge. As a mother, I must protect my kin: "It was up to me to stay strong and do what needed to be done, for Mom and for the rest of them" (222).

However, Parsons Lane's belief in the system comes to be shattered by the end of the section. In a sharp change of tone, again, Parsons Lane rebels against her condition. She refuses to join her cellmate at the cell window, as she would then truly let "this place swallow [her] up" (222). She would wish to warn her younger cellmate but remains silent. In a self-preserving gesture, "[she] no longer ha[s] the strength to carry the others, too" (222). Parsons Lane, in spite of her refusal to be a caged animal, is caging herself in silence. Her refusal to carry the others tells of her complete desperation. It is through her expression of anger and utter rejection of the roles and rules society imposed on her that Parsons Lane more beautifully and affectingly conveys her feeling of despair towards the numerous injustices life threw in her path.

Parsons Lane's fourth section, entitled "The Threat," evokes in a more or less detailed depiction her abusive relationship with Mark, her second husband, the man she eventually shot. Through a number of examples, Parsons Lane concludes that "in [her] life, pain has always accompanied love" (225). She tells of the first happy times of their marriage in spite of her husband's age difference (she is twenty years older than he is) and Mark's diagnosed paranoid schizophrenia (the same illness her mother suffered from, a connection she mentions later). The deterioration of their happiness is soon precipitated by the motorcycle accident Mark only just survived. Mark's self-medication with alcohol, practicing sessions of target shooting at birds in the garden and a questionable adultery relationship with a fifteen-year-old, eventually leads Parsons Lane to file a petition for divorce.

In a climactic symbolic scene, she foreshadows Mark's dangerous behavior. The couple watches *Natural Born Killers*, Mark's favorite movie. Mark, identifying with Mickey Knox, the protagonist, tells his wife that if he is a natural born killer, she is "just a *Thelma and Louise*" (227). "This is an insult; he means I'm weak," (227) Parsons Lane explains. Since his accident, Mark's violent behavior has escalated. Any people who "inconvenience him,"—that is, any person exhibiting virtually any type of behavior that might interfere with his pleasure—he warns, should "watch their back" (224). As Mickey Knox, Mark seems ready to "terminate" (227) any inconveniences. While his wife, he contends, would as Thelma and Louise, when reaching the point of no return "take [her] *own* life" (227). Parsons Lane agrees: "I probably *would* take my own life instead of someone else's" (227).

This symbolic scene is particularly meaningful. The typical role of the dutiful submissive wife refers back to Parsons Lane powerful bond with tradition; in spite of the fact that the couple knows that these traditions have become, in their case, only appearances. Mark seems to hint at his possible ability to emulate fictional figure Mickey Knox, who rules his own world oblivious of the Manichean moral opposition between good and evil. According to his point of view, he *is* ready to disregard any responsibility so long as his pleasure remains untouched. By comparison, Parsons Lane would be the weakling unable to face the consequences of her actions and choosing the comfort of death as opposed to the discomfort of facing her guilt or responsibilities—as her own mother did. Parsons Lane's denunciation of Mark's crooked conception of reality addresses two particularly meaningful issues. First, it serves as a powerful example of the emotional duress she was indeed faced with when married to Mark. Second, and more importantly, it questions the role society imposed on her. Because she always was what people expected her to be, Mark feels he can see right through her. Parsons Lane's last comment rings of a crucially ironical tone. While she is not a natural born killer, she turns out to be more ready to kill than Mark and herself seem to believe at the time.

Parsons Lane's reference to *Natural Born Killers* and *Thelma and Louise*, is obviously symptomatic and indeed consistent with her forensic *ethos*. Both movies, indeed, enact questionable reassessments of the notion of justice and punishment towards sexual abuse. All four characters, the Knoxes and Thelma and Louise, question numerous rules of the traditional system while denouncing a number of issues that are reflected in Parsons Lane's testimony. In an uncanny correlation, fiction seems to merge with reality in her personal experience of life. Though she obviously does not endorse the Knoxes' or Thelma and Louise's reappraisal of justice and morality, her eventual gesture bears echoes of these

fictional stories. Through these allegorical figures and her own true story, Parsons Lane considers the necessity to question systemic flaws that let so many suffer silent injustices.

Though Parsons Lane has not yet reached the point of no return Mark referred to, the section ends on the actual threat Mark targeted at her. During a road trip, Mark stops in a forest supposedly to practice target shooting. When she asks why he had to take her with him, Mark makes an ominous remark: "I came all this way to show you how easy it would be to make you disappear" (230). Parsons Lane then understands that divorce is not a possible escape from this dangerous man. However, it is not before Mark's violent episode with Parsons Lane's granddaughter that she finally acts in total opposition with the stereotypical role of the weakling figure. Her role as a mother overtakes her fear faced with the figure of past and present molesters.

Section five in Parsons Lane's testimony is significantly centered on her particular connection with motherhood. Entitled "Adam", the section centers on the death of her second son in a car accident while she was incarcerated. This section is undeniably among the most moving ones, yet also turns out to be one of the bitterest in her narrative. Among the puzzle pieces that refuse to fit, this one probably stands as the most hurtful one; a piece she would have most probably preferred to lose altogether. The section starts with images centered on Parsons Lane's peculiar relation to motherhood since she was incarcerated. Parsons Lane explains that younger inmates often seek to establish mother-daughter surrogate connections, a need she is happy to fill for her cellmate (231). Parsons Lane is here referring back to her matriarchal understanding of institutions, a structure she seems to apply to women prisons as well. Similarly during the night of the storm that caused her son's accident, Parsons Lane dreams of her mother's body when she last laid eyes upon it—that is after her mother's suicide. In an uncanny motif, she manages to ominously prepare the readers for the events to come.

Upon the news of her son's death, Parsons Lane is obviously devastated. This crushing wave of emotions allows her to refer back to her peculiar connection with rules but this time in the hope to denounce their dehumanizing consequences. Parsons Lane was at Food Prep when notified of the news and is thus walked back to her unit. She explains how the counselor notifies the CO of the fact that she had a death in her family: "this information is shared not for the purpose of eliciting sympathy, but so that the officer can be alert for signs of suicide" (233). Her recourse to rules here strengthens the cold indifference embodied by the staff, which is here enhanced by the unresponsive factuality of her own tone. Parsons Lane is here faced with the loss of motherhood, the sole role social structure imposed on her that she

seemed ready to shoulder. In such a crushing situation, her lifelong reliance on the reassuring aspect of rules and structure seems meaningless as neither the rules spelled out by her social role nor the ones offered by the correctional institution seem to offer a proper course of action.

The description of her attendance to the wake further exemplifies her denouncing gesture. Though her counselor had promised a compassionate staff person, she is disappointed to see one of the most insensitive officers on staff arrive to take her to the funeral parlor. The officer keeps joking with other members of the staff stops to grab sodas for the two-hour car trip, clearly oblivious to the painful situation Parsons Lane is faced with. Family and friends are forbidden in the parlor while Parsons Lane "shackled, handcuffed and wrapped in belly chains" (234) kneels in front of the casket. She has to ask the officer to loosen the chains for her to touch her son's body. Parsons Lane, intriguingly, proposes a rather detached description of the moment. She does not rely on emotive language, but beautifully engages metaphors:

> Later, I walk around the room. It's been so long since I've seen flowers, and they're beautiful: a heart covered with roses, to Adam from me; a spray of sunflowers from my lawyers. (234)

Rather than entering the stereotype of the tearful mother, Parsons Lane relies on the connotations of flowers so as to describe her distress. If she refers to motherly love, she nevertheless does not forget her status as a convict. Flowers also represent her denied freedom as the sunflowers ominously recall.

The scene ends with a return to the cold uncaring officers. It had been agreed that Parsons Lane would be allowed to stay a full hour at the parlor. But after thirty minutes, she is told that they are heading back to the penitentiary. Parsons Lane knows better than to argue with them: "it would be my word against theirs, and an inmate's word is never as good as an officer's" (234). Back to the penitentiary, she is escorted to the Mental Health pier and interviewed by a social worker. "Once again, this is not compassion; it's procedure," (235). Parsons Lane's aesthetic of impact relies on the striking opposition between what rules and the system stand for—that is, protect society from the possible escape of a prisoner as well as paradoxically protect the mental health of that prisoner—and, on the other hand, the highly emotional episode she is going through. Her personal disclosure, a very human gesture, is opposed with the dehumanized practical, even materialistic, description of the officers who impersonate the institutional system. Their complete lack of compassion seems uncanny. However, it is through the unrealistic nature of her experience that injustice is most

powerfully expressed. The dehumanizing power of prison other inmates testified to is, in this case, expressed through the hierarchical opposition between the officers' and the inmate's words—Renault's slighting recognition expressed through complete disqualification. In this trial of strength for the power of truth, inmates stand a poor chance. However, in disclosing her experience, in making her words available to the public, Parsons Lane and her imprisoned fellows managed to reverse the trend, to express through writing their newly gained empowerment.

Parsons Lane's sixth part entitled "Rehabilitation" describes her slow adjustment to the home of "the sisterhood of society's misfits" (237). The term refers on the one hand to her resentment against some of the women she is now living with, and on the other to society's improper management of these people considered as misfits. Parsons Lane questions a number of important issues correlated with the observance or non-observance of rules in prison. Besides mentioning most inmates' poor understanding of personal property, she explains how people abiding by the rules seem in fact paradoxically disadvantaged. Knowing that breaking the rules means "loss of institutional privileges—school and therapy group attendance, family visits, access to the telephone and [their] mail," "the lifelines to [their] sanity," (237) women like Parsons Lane obey. However, as she remarks, "respectful obedience exacts a cost" (237). Obedient inmates are neglected, their requests discarded as the staff knows they will not cause trouble. On the other hand, when troublesome inmates start to abide by the rules, the staff swells with pride: "a public relation sweetheart, she is touted as a model citizen of the prison community—a woman whose soul they've saved" (237).

Once again, Parsons Lane is being bitterly ironical. Model citizens of the prison community do not abide by the same rules as model citizens from the outside. Though she still considers rules to support the lifelines to her sanity, Parsons Lane seems to doubt their actual implementation. Respectful obedience should mean respect for one's rights, as society has always seemed to imply in the outside world, however, in prison it means negligence. Similarly her final sarcastic remark on rehabilitation proves her doubts about the system's capabilities in indeed transforming misfits in "public relation sweethearts". The issue of rehabilitation is, needless to say, a complicated one. However, the misfits' testimonies collected in the volume suggest that rehabilitation is conceivable with efforts emanating as much from the inmates as from the institution itself.

Parsons Lane indeed questions the system in place in prisons because of its hypocritical appropriation of issues that, outside, led these women to become misfits. She

remarks that "changing [...] for the better" (237) reveals too hard for many women, as seventy-five percent of the women in the institution do not profit from schooling and counseling programs. She confesses that "instead of changing self-destructive habits, [inmates] adapt them to their new environment" (237). Her point in denouncing such troubles is to raise awareness of the lack of seriousness and commitment on the part of the institution. More importantly, Parsons Lane's denunciation takes further significance since it emanates from someone who abides by and believes in the rules that should facilitate rehabilitation. Destructive behavior, should society implement an appropriate environment for imprisonment, would be inconceivable.

Parsons Lane's bid for empowerment appears grimmer than her fellow narrators'. However, her point of view remains significant. In her developing of a forensic *ethos*, her purpose is to have readers draw proper conclusions themselves so as to decide on the possible solutions to be implemented. Though she contends that "[her] eyes are wide open and [that she] doesn't like much of what [she] see[s] around [her]" (238), her comment sounds like a call to order. In a self-questioning comment she endorses the ethics of responsibility:

> Who am I, then? I'm Barbara Lane, who *was* a health-care worker, business manager, wife, mother, homemaker, gardener, and killer—and who *is* an inmate. Good-bye to the trusting daughter, sister, wife, and mother I once was. (238-239)

She seems to be insisting on her lifelong acceptance of norms and social roles as parts she was right to accept but which also require critical appraisal. Responsibilities do not only mean trust and acceptance, they also imply criticism.

Parsons Lane's last section, "Six Years and Counting", closes her testimony with puzzle pieces she considers the most precious. Though she insists that she cannot reach these pieces, she tried to unveil part of them in including in her testimony letters from her surviving children. Letters are, indeed, just like poetry, a recurrent material for testimonials of social empowerment.[124] Being in close connection with the polyphonic format of volumes, they also enhance the sense of authenticity the narratives seek to convey. The three excerpts she included are deeply moving as well as unsettling. Whether they decided to testify to their fears, feeling of powerlessness or disagreeable encounter with the criminal justice system, the children's voices serve to enhance the authenticity of their mother's. Arthur's, Parsons Lane's

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[124] *The Freedom Writers' Diary* includes letters from Zlata and Miep Gies and Voice of Witness's volumes often refer back to letter content. Besides, it is not unusual for narrators to construct their testimony in the form of a letter.

surviving son, final comments uncannily echo her mother's bid for responsibility in advocating a critical stand towards the system: *"She is not the same and wonderful, caring, and giving person she was before her ordeal. She never will be. The 'system' has seen to that"* (242).

III.2 The Voice of Witness Series

III.2.1 The Intimate Paradigm

As could already be observed from Carolyn Ann Adams's narrative, the intimate paradigm of testimonial *ethos* significantly relies on the witness's willing exposure of her most private world. This sincere disclosure of personal lived experience and profound emotions serves to secure a bond of empathy between the narrator and her readers. Significantly, this empathic connection relies on a dialogical construction of the text in which readers stand in a position close to that of a bosom friend to the narrator. The intimate paradigm essentially capitalizes on the communication or knowledge axis of Greimas's actantial model. The narrator, here understood as the action sender and subject, seeks to disclose the object—*i.e.* her experience of injustice, to the receiver. The narrator in communicating her experience of injustice to her readers hopes to share her authentic knowledge of her social environment. The helpers and opponents remain generally covert as the narrator emphasizes her privileged relation to her receivers. However, some examples may present these receivers as significant helpers, thus intensifying the intimate aspect of the testimony.

Family stands as the most significant motif the *pathos* of the intimate paradigm is established on. Readers are, in each case, directly introduced into the narrator's most private circle. Family, it appears, constitutes the most prominent institution society has laid its foundations on. The motif of family obviously sustains the narrator's effort at installing intimacy. In their strong reliance on family, narrators who adopt the intimate paradigm mainly turn to Honneth's justice of needs, which he directly correlates with self-confidence. It is indeed in their self-confidence that narrators seem to have been most seriously injured. The emotional relevance of self-confidence enhances the narrators' position as concrete other figures. As Benhabib explains, it is indeed the moral values of love, care, sympathy and solidarity that the narrators try to capitalize on in creating a significant bond with their readers. Interestingly though, the construction of the testimonies' final vow generally appeals to the figure of the generalized other. It is indeed, the narrators all seem to say, in abstracting

general features from their concrete stories that the empowerment of their community could be achieved.

John Stoll's testimony serves as a first example of this effort. The intimacy of his narrative mainly relies on the sensitive content of his story, though he manages a beautiful development of the aesthetic of impact through a double understanding of compassion as a responsibilizing sentiment. Anthony Letcher's text proposes a different appropriation of the paradigm. His rhetoric intimacy is primarily based on his pictorial oral language. Through a significant reliance on direct addresses, Letcher expresses an unexpected form of respect to his readers whose attention he wishes to compel. As far as content is concerned, Letcher's testimony inaugurates another significant motif of the intimate paradigm: the paradox of sincere self-disclosure. As if oscillating between Trilling's French and English models for sincerity, the narrator confronts her basest flaws while disclosing the determination she showed in adversity.

El Mojado's story further exploits that same motif. As an illegal immigrant, he seems to struggle between his guilty legal status and his otherwise particularly diligent character. His defeatist testimony sheds light on the intimacy of a situation: that of illegal immigrants emigrating in the hope to find the American dream but who are eventually faced with a dreadful reality. Rima Qamri's story brings back the motif of family as an effective basis for *pathos*. Her particularly emotive testimony stands as a beautiful expression of motherly love and helplessness faced with the lack of understanding and cultural open-mindedness of the educational system. Finally Anna Jacobs's testimony closes this section with a deranging example. Her treatment of her most intimate weaknesses in a matter-of-fact tone proposes to her readers an almost voyeuristic peek at the darkest sides of middle-class suburban America.

Surviving Justice – John Stoll

John Stoll's testimony ranks among the most disturbing ones in Voice of Witness's first volume: *Surviving Justice*. *Surviving Justice* centers on one of the most blatant human rights injustices in the United States in offering stories of "America's wrongfully convicted and exonerated" as the volume's subtitle indicates. All narrators in *Surviving Justice* evoke their appalling confrontation with the American justice system as they were convicted for dreadful alleged crimes. Stoll candidly evokes the darkest episode of his life as a mature man: his conviction for child molestation, based upon his own son's accusations. His account is a telling example of the testimonial intimate paradigm. Stoll served 1? years of his 40-year-sentence in California and was eventually released in 2004, a year before the publication of

the volume. Calling Stoll's a candid testimony is almost an understatement. As is recurrent for the bosom-friend paradigm, his story is punctuated with powerful depictions of his emotional state of mind as well as features of orature typical of this conversational narrative construct.

John Stoll's story begins with family memories. As is typical of the construction of testimonies in the Voice of Witness series, the first part of the narrators' story centers on their life previous to their experience of injustice. Stoll's memories are that of a happy family. Though he divorced the child's mother, Stoll recalls touching scenes with his son Jed. These "little stuff [...] that you remember" (162), such as a water wings episode in the family swimming pool or warm hugs in passing, paint Stoll's relationship with his son as a loving and respectful one. For, as a responsible father, Stoll makes a point in maturely educating his son: "for a five-year-old he had a heck of a vocabulary because I talked to him like a little man" (162). Stoll and his "'Little Man'" (162) appear as the perfect example of a peaceful middle-class family. As can be already observed from the previous quotes, Stoll's vocabulary is that of a colloquial conversation between relatives. As from the first paragraphs of his testimony, the reader notices his reliance on an intimate development of the aesthetic of impact. Although he prepares to tell readers about the most distressing events of his life, Stoll's voice remains steady and vivid in expressing his innermost feelings.

Voice of Witness editors' skillful ability to arrange the outward appearance of their narrators' testimonies is probably best expressed through their management of subtitles and cliff-hanger-like transitions. The first part of Stoll's testimony, indeed, ends on a cartoon-like comment: "there was nothing but good times and love between me and my son. And then boom" (162). This onomatopoeia, the first of a series that will mark the way of Stoll's stressful journey through the justice system, opens the second part of the narrative entitled "Witch-Hunt Time". Stoll's reliance on onomatopoeias appears as one of the defining features of his personal management of the aesthetic of impact. Onomatopoeias are distributed along his narrative in the form of emotionally-oiled hinges. Just as the "boom" slams open the episode of his witch-hunt-like interrogations, Stoll recalls his entrance in the police station with the "bam and slam" of the doors (163), and his arrival in San Quentin state prison with a "Whew" (169) supporting the "real scary" (169) atmosphere of the place. These cartoon-like references to sounds not only quicken the text's conversational pace, they also vividly support the intimate relationship Stoll overtly seeks to create with his readers.

Stoll's reliance on the aesthetic of impact appears also firmly based on his delineation of scenes through which he hopes to trigger and to exemplify a very specific sense of

compassion. Compassion is presented as Stoll's trump card both in his coping with the inhumanity of his situation and in his construction of his private relationship to his readers. This sense of compassion, however, does not necessarily express in its softer mode. Compassion, in Stoll's construction of the aesthetic of impact, signifies an awareness of the suffering of others as well as the wish to respond to that suffering by an eye-opening gesture. According to this conception, the person making the eye-opening gesture realizes that the possible alleviation of the other's suffering might very well not happen as a direct result. Compassionate episodes seem to have marked Stoll's experience with prison and the justice system in a decisive way.

When Stoll was arrested and charged, in 1984, the United States were surfing on an unfortunate wave of child molestation trials.[125] It is his encounter with a man who faced similar accusations that first led Stoll to understand the seriousness of his situation. It is, indeed, not before being charged by no less than five other children that Stoll understands the other inmate's remark that "they are now scouring the neighborhoods for kids" (165). It is through a similar, however more graphic, compassionate remark that a lawyer informs Stoll of the unequivocal injustice of the American justice system. Stoll's wondering about the District Attorney's jurisprudence is met with the lawyer's pictorial metaphor: "'Do you know why a dog licks his nuts?' I said, 'No.' 'Because he can!' And that shut me up. Point well taken" (168). These episodes strengthen Stoll's rendering of his intimate sense of hope- and helplessness. Stoll himself adopts a similar behavior at the beginning of his story in the hope of warning his readers: "Please let me pass this along to anyone who reads this: shut up when you get arrested" (164). Stoll made the mistake of answering the officers' questions. Compassion, far from being this usually soothing impulse, serves the brutal eye-opening purpose of the sincerity-based aesthetic of impact.

Compassion, however, also appears in its more usual mode. Stoll's distorted compassion is juxtaposed to examples of its genuine understanding, that of "sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortune of others" (OED). Stoll's exoneration is actually based on a compassionate gesture on the part of the Northern California Innocence Project. Stoll's immense relief is presented as the direct offshoot of the Project's compassionate understanding of truth in the sense of the authenticity of Stoll's innocence. He recounts his genuine relief:

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[125] The editors mention at least eight multiple-offender cases between 1983 and 1986 (165).

> When they told me they believed me, that was enough. Nobody had ever said that in twenty years. "We believe you". I wrote to hundreds of people, saying I was innocent. But nobody ever said, "We looked into it and we believe you". When they said that, I knew I was okay. (173)

Belief in the authentic word thus appears as the ultimate form of compassion. It is of course this compassion that Stoll, himself, wishes to inspire to his readers. Stoll is here relying on Ricoeur's understanding of trustworthiness as based on the speaker's trustworthiness history or reputation. Through his "we believe you," Stoll not only refers to the people from the innocence project as well as the editors who published—and thus authenticated—his testimony, he also refers to his readers, whom he enjoins to take similar action against injustice. Compassion appears as Stoll's key feature in his skillful interweaving of the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility. Compassion compels to empathy but most importantly to solidarity in spreading awareness.

Stoll ends his testimony on comments that somehow wrap up these paradoxically positive and violent effects compassion is meant to produce. Stoll's vow presents all the conversational features his testimony flourishes with as if to further amplify this final moment of authenticity. If truth saved him, it nonetheless remains hurtful and some parts of it still have to be unraveled:

> The hardest thing for me to do is to continue to talk about it, day in and day out. […] It still makes me mad that they could get away with something like that […]. Nobody has ever acknowledged that there was a mistake made there. I mean, come on. Good lord, something went wrong. (179)

Recalling his powerful reliance on intimacy Stoll's vow aims for future hopeful prospects—"[he's] got some life left and […] want[s] to enjoy it—and the eventual (possibly utopian) recognition of systemic aberrations.

Voices from the Storm – Anthony Letcher

Voices from the Storm appears as the most experimental volume of the Voice of Witness series. The editors' decision to organize the testimonies along temporal landmarks rather than according to their narrators offers a very interesting approach to the polyphonic aspect of the collection. In the same way as Norton Cru creates an assembly from the separate voices of Great War soldiers, the volume appears as a collage of voices Mother Nature's untamed elements have brought together. The testimonies can, thus, with difficulty be referred to as outwardly coherent wholes, as is exemplified by the numerous repetitions in the separate bits

and pieces scattered along the pages. Consequently, my approach to the narrator's ethos, in this specific volume, has first been based on a painstaking reconstructing task. If the narrators' *ethos* could to some extent be derived from the primary short parts united under the subtitle "Life Before the Storm," it is not before all the separate parts of their testimonies were reunited that their ethical construction could fully be expressed. This being said, the editors' attempt at recreating a bundle of voices reminiscent of a film documentary confirmed the already interesting findings that could be obtained from both *The Freedom Writers' Diary* and *Teaching Hope*; the narrators' *ethos* is powerfully woven in the first few paragraphs of their testimony; the remainder of the texts further develops their literary or oratory craftsmanship.

Anthony Letcher's testimony stands as the most ardent example of the intimate paradigm in this second volume. The intimacy of his testimony is best served by a complex connection between structural and content elements. Indeed, *Voices from the Storm* appears as an interesting editorial endeavor not only in its organization of the narratives but also in the great care given to the preservation of the texts' authentic linguistic features in carefully reproducing dialects. Letcher's story strikes one as the most colorful example of this effort. His narrative relies on an aesthetic of impact triggered by the sense of intimacy his discourse acquires through African American Vernacular English vocabulary and syntax. These syntactic construction include non-standard features such as "I kinda like paddled over to the kids" (85); "I knew we was gonna have to get a boat to go try to get the rest of the people" (86); "we know we had to get a boat outta there" (86); "It brung out the past" (87). The vocabulary heavily relies on terms such as "fuck up", "shit" or "motherfucker" but with a noticeable defusion of the negative connotations of the terms, so much so that they might become synonyms to terms like *stuff* and *guy*. His overpowering use of this local-color dialect, as from the first sentences, plunges the readers in this man's everyday life offering a privileged access to his innermost introspective stances. The text's ethics of responsibility also indirectly relies on this unsettling confrontation with a dialect one rarely expects to find in literary nonfiction. Letcher's language seems, before even mentioning these issues overtly, to question the disparaging racial stereotypes and social injustices hurricane Katrina so blatantly uncovered in the summer of 2005.

Letcher's first few paragraphs on pages 34 and 35 epitomize his significant reliance on colloquial interjections as a means to connect with his readers. His narrative is indeed punctuated by countless instances of "man", "brother", "bro", "brother man", and "you dig". Apart from these interjections' undeniable impact on the pace of the text as well as on its

colloquial nature, they also leave no opportunity for readers to escape a sort of embarrassing intimacy that Letcher readily activates with the content of his story. In the same way as the issues that were related to the aftermath of the hurricane brought up embarrassing questions of social-class and economic privileges, Letcher's testimony seems to casually unveil the embarrassing question of the readers' own possible reactions faced with such situations. These interjections assume to role Iris Marion Young assigns to greetings, not only do they "lubricate discussion" (*Inclusion* 98) they are also significant gestures of respect. Man, brother, bro or brotherman in Letcher's vocabulary stand as equivalent of polite forms of address. Letcher's text overtly *is* a dialogue. This is typically realized in his colloquial speech but also, and more readily, in his opening comment. Letcher significantly capitalizes on his acknowledgment of the presence of his readers. As he goes through introductions, he also reassures about his trustworthiness: "My name is Anthony Letcher. My word's real. What I speak is real" (34). As if to secure the bond that is coming into being, Letcher insists on the authenticity of his words and of what he is about to divulge about himself and about society.

Letcher's intimate uncovering of the aesthetic of impact mainly functions through his attempt at understanding how the hurricane and its aftermath led him to take a radical new direction in his life and behavior. A self-proclaimed "family-oriented person" (34)—thereby referring to a recurrent motif of the intimate paradigm—Letcher presents the harsh episodes he lived through during the hurricane and the flood as the catalyst that led "a lot of stuff to change" (35). Indeed, Letcher's development of the intimate paradigm varies from others in that he purposely leaves shadow zones in his past history, the "other chapter in [his] life" (104). Letcher seems to rely on double standards when engaging in self-disclosure. Though he insists on his word being real, some elements of the truth will remain unspoken. These shadow zones become even more meaningful as he contrasts these with a frank delineation of the darkest sides of his personality. Letcher's intimacy amounts to the cultural paradigm Trilling assigns to French sincerity: this intimacy shares a close boundary with a form of voyeurism and might upset self-righteous people. Letcher's development of the intimate paradigm because of his reliance on a sense of reality and of his readily concealed past recalls concerns that have been oftentimes raised against reality-TV shows. Up to some point, his colorful use of African American Vernacular English further enhances this unsettling feeling of being thrown into the everyday life of the all-too-ordinary individual.

Letcher's self-portrait seems indeed far from that of the reasonable self-righteous middle-aged man. Though he begins his testimony with his wish to become a model father to his younger son so as to responsibly assume a role his own father quickly abandoned, he also

rapidly foregrounds the acquisitive side of his personality. A good father is primarily concerned with keeping his family out of need: "I want to try to make sure he's financially secure, [...] [j]ust have a little something-something in his pocket" (35). This considerable worry for money leads Letcher to refer to himself as an "opportunist" (87). Upon the arrival of the storm, his primary resolve purpose to stay in the neighborhood is rooted in his habit to think "about [his] pocket," (87), as base an intention as it may appear. Letcher's references to looting confirm that this behavior is in accordance with his instinctive nature.

However, this apparently negative self-depiction evolves as Letcher switches to the ethics of responsibility. And, here again, it is intimacy that serves as its basis. Letcher's behavior upon the day when the water started steadily rising in the streets leads him to discover another side of his personality which he did not seem to be conscious of. As he is staying on the porch with his aunt, Letcher spots two children being washed away. Following what he later calls a "reaction" (85), Letcher jumps into the water. Upon later reflection, Letcher realizes how reckless his action was. Letcher seems dumbfounded by his instinctive gesture. Though he is "not the one to say reaction," (85) this must have been a reaction. "That's probably what it was, man, 'cause I thought nothing for myself whatsoever" (85).

In these moments of introspection, readers are faced with a middle-aged man's newly gained awareness of his unexpectedly generous solidarity. After having rescued the children from the water, they tell Letcher about the other members of their family who happen to be trapped in their flooded house. Letcher and a friend manage to get a boat and start roaming the streets, rescuing people from their rooftops, bringing them to his aunt's house, which serves as a shelter. Letcher is faced with a similar ethical conflict when referring to his experience with looting. The opportunist, though he might have resurfaced, is quickly gagged:

> We did a little lootin' too, but we was doing it for a good thing. We went down to get food and fed all the people that we had got. I ain't gonna say I wasn't thinking about my money, 'cause that's what I was trying to get. [...] Something else got in the way. Guess it was a little bit more important than money. After I started getting them people, man, I forgot all about money. That was insignificant. It was something bigger than that, and brother, it felt good in me, you heard me? (87)

Letcher's kind of finger-wagging lesson in ethics appears incredibly effective when it is expressed through the very intimate mode of his colloquial vernacular. His own introspection indirectly puts him in the position of the role-model one hopes other citizens would follow.

In one of the final episodes of the volume, entitled, "Weeks after the Storm", Letcher further develops his ethics of responsibility in explaining how his acquisitive behavior is,

unfortunately shared by local authorities. However, if *he* "know[s] what life is now" (213), the lesson did not seem to benefit all his fellow citizens. Letcher seems positive that reconstruction will not happen as quickly as it was promised and reasonably advises: "Man, y'all better sit your ass down" (214). His concern is mainly based on the knowledge that the first district to become the focus of reconstruction programs is the Central Business District and its numerous casinos. His point of view over the situation is that leaders should abandon their "fucked-up-ass mentality" (214):

> It's all about the Benjamins. It's just so strange. People focusing so much on the casinos. I can understand about the economy, and tryin' to get some money generating because that's what it's about. But people just hate to hear that. People want you to be concerned about them and about their well-being. (214).

Letcher's lesson in morality seems unfortunately not to have been learned by the authorities. If his anger is widely shared among the other victims of the hurricane, he still seems to be among the ones who most actively participated in the reconstruction effort. The opportunist turned into a model citizen.

Underground America – El Mojado

Underground America is Voice of Witness's most successful volume: it ran through numerous reprints since its publication in 2008. The book addresses the controversial legal and political issues that immigration raised in modern societies. Racism, modern-day slavery, separated families as well as the "permanent anxiety" (Orner 5) of undocumented immigrants are among the most disturbing questions broached by the narrators' stories in the volume. Because of its specific content, *Underground America* also raised editorial concerns that were not to be found in the previous volumes. All narrators are, of course, referred to with pseudonyms and most of the interviews had to be carried out with the help of translators. This crossing of language boundaries helps explaining the significant lack of direct, emotion-laden language in the testimonies.[126] As opposed to the instances of colorful language that may be

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[126] This is especially true of the vignettes the editors decided to include in-between the larger narratives. These vignettes propose short excerpts of testimonies that generally develop over one single page. The editors' decision to include such vignettes probably refers back to the series wish to propose experimental, that is artfully constructed, volumes. The vignettes appear to serve the purpose of building a more complex bundle of voices so as to propose a more accurate understanding of the matter at hand.

found in the previous volumes, the narratives appear overwhelmingly linear on the linguistic level. This apparent formal uniformity does not mean a complete absence of emotionally effective content, quite the contrary. This apparent lack of *pathos* in the format of the texts might seem to lead to a more complex development of the intimate paradigm. However, its construction remains powerfully effective. Intimacy, in this specific volume, appears to be constructed through the narrators' attempt at overcoming basic survival obstacles. The narrators' strains are painted against the pessimist background of the unattainable American Dream.

El Mojado's story serves as a telling example of this defeatist confessional format. His pseudonym evokes his enduring link with his illegal status in the U.S. All the other narrators in the volume are presented with a first name or a possible nickname (e.g. El Curita, see below) but the 29-year-old Mexican father disclosing his story, here, decided to go by the name of "Wetback" (205). This man, whose testimony is entitled "I Know I'm Nobody Important," (205) prefers to be referred to by the derogatory term that is used for immigrants who cross the Rio Grande to enter the U.S. This demeaning nickname has stuck with him since the moment he crossed the border. El Mojado's story testifies to stigmatization in its worst expression, it is immigrants' depreciating recognition that is addressed here. El Mojado's depiction of intimacy both in the lines of the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility is in line with the many disparaging connotations this nickname conveys. As he himself concludes in the first pages of his testimony, he realizes that "you come here with a dream [...] [b]ut the bad thing is that your dream never comes true" (207). El Mojado, in spite of his youth, his good will and devotion to any kind of work he may be offered, clearly must face up to his inability, after eight years on the American soil, to even touch with his finger the blessings of the American Dream.

El Mojado's testimony develops around the numerous jobs he has accepted to live through. He has been working on a feedlot, a meat packing plant, as a fruit picker, in a dairy products factory, in a body shop, as a chicken-seller, and practiced countless other jobs. He also suffered numerous health problems due to working conditions—from severe sinusitis to a bad cut on his hand that was badly treated. From a butcher on the lines of a slaughterhouse to carpet installation, the young man has obviously been accepting any job that could help him meet the needs of his large family. El Mojado describes several cases of inhumane working conditions, which he has no outward possibility to fight against:

> And that's how it is in the United States, working as a wetback is very difficult. I'm
> working illegally and things are getting more difficult for me. And I can't fight for my

rights. I have no rights here in the United States. I don't have a right to anything. I
can't fight anything. (210)

Paradoxically, the previous quote indicates, in spite of his being in the U.S., El Mojado
cannot expect any rights. Yet even more striking and discouraging is his forlorn acceptance of
the situation. El Mojado's remarks about this crushing determinism not only touches the
readers, it also unsettles them in their deepest beliefs. Upon reading "[t]hat's the world,
[t]hat's the life of the immigrant" (214), a deep sense of indignation is aroused in readers.
Entering this man's dreary, even squalid everyday life environment leads to the possibly
deepest sense of intimacy imaginable, the intimacy that leads to solidarity and to question the
distributive aspect of social justice.

El Mojado's defeatism is nonetheless coupled with an acute sense of morality and
legality, which probably enhances this apparent resignation. The narrative in which he
describes his crossing of the Mexican-American border allows him to first express to what
extent he "feel[s] like a thief" (207). His acute awareness of his illegal status serves his self-
berating recurrent gestures: because "you live a crime" (215), you somehow deserve to be
deprived of your rights. Again, this move seems to be aimed at prompting a contrary empathic
reaction on the part of the reader. Along the pages of his narrative, readers follow El Mojado
in his struggling against not only inhumane working conditions but also a sordid living
environment: "the trailer we live in is okay enough, but it's missing lots of details" (214). He
further explains that the roof is leaking which led to a complete destruction of the insulation.
The euphemistic formulation according to which *details* are missing seems to further
emphasize El Mojado's acceptance of inequality; as a family of wetbacks, what more could
they expect? The aesthetic of impact is thus here constructed on a paradoxical self-
presentation, which seems to take a step further the possible contrary aspect of self-
disclosure—telling of the speaker' qualities and basest flaws—exemplified in Letcher's text.
El Mojado is telling a dreary story, yet this story is his and because of his illegal status, he has
no choice but to accept it.

These negative overtones are, towards the end of El Mojado's testimony transformed
into a direct challenge of the Americans' management of the social issues raised by
immigration. In these last bitter remarks, El Mojado unleashes his development of the ethics
of responsibility. He fully realizes America's double standards towards immigration.
Undocumented immigrants are tracked down, arrested, often deported. Yet at the same time,
their presence is encouraged by a series of economic concerns. El Mojado tells of documents
traffic at the border where U.S. citizens are too happy to find people ready to pay for copies of

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their ID. The economic advantage offered by illegal immigrants' working force is all too obvious: "the Americans want us to do the job harder, faster, but for less money" (215). Above all, immigrants are ready to shoulder jobs no one else would be ready to accept. El Mojado's report is a sarcastic one:

> We come here to find a different life. We work hard here; if we worked this hard in our land, things would be better for us in our land. At least in our land, we're not discriminated against like we are here. My dream is to own a home, a land, for my children. But the truth is, it can't be done. (215)

The hopeful dream that led him into a foreign country made him face racism, and a more extreme poverty than the one he was already suffering from in his homeland.

El Mojado does not seem to be put off by the hard work he is faced with; it is rather the lack of tangible outcomes that triggers his experience of injustice:

> Americans with papers can go to Mexico and drive. They are able to work there, too. [...] And here, nobody wants us here; but over there, they are really living off of us. We do things an American wouldn't do. The wetbacks. Instead of helping us, they seem to kick us to the curb, want to throw us away like trash. (215-216)

In an interesting turn of events, El Mojado ends his testimony on this angry note, which reveals a deep sense of dignity that could easily evolve into activism, if he were not plagued by his apparent defeatism. His anger has been triggered by his enduring experience of unjust treatments and leads him to re-appraise the actual connotations his nickname refers to, in his opinion and that of his whole community. The wetbacks are no longer these criminals who cross the river in the hope to make money but courageous people who are ready to face any adversities in the hope to access their small piece of the American Dream: a respectable home for one's family.

Patriot Acts – **Rima Qamri**

In the direct aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government issued a series of policies meant at protecting the U.S. territory and securing the U.S. citizens' safety and political rights and privileges. The USA PATRIOT[127] bill was among the most controversial ones. The act,

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[127] Unite and Secure America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism—the Congress bill was signed into law by President Georg W. Bush on October 26 2001 and significantly expanded the definition of terrorism so as to include instances of domestic terrorism.

as a response to the terrorist attacks, significantly reduced restrictions in law enforcement agencies' gathering of intelligence within the United States; it expanded authority to regulate financial transactions, particularly those involving foreign individuals and entities; and it broadened the discretion of law enforcement and immigration authorities in detaining and deporting immigrants suspected of terrorism-related activities. *Patriot Acts*, on a playful pun on the name of the incriminating bill, functions as a mosaic of testimonials mainly emanating from members of the AMEMSA (Arab, Middle-Eastern, Muslim and South-Asian) communities. Through the telling of their everyday life in post 9/11 America, the narrators seek to publicize the "darker side of the War on Terror" (Malek 18) by testifying to the continuing singling-out of ethnic and religious communities, whether their members are officially named citizens or aliens.

Rima Qamri's narrative presents a number of the defining features of the intimate paradigm. Her text unfolds in the form of a highly intimate emotional conversation through which she literally opens her heart to a reader positioned as a bosom friend. Her reliance on the family motif as well as her acute sense of sensitivity in her linguistic expression make her text one of the most typical instances of the paradigm. This clichéd construction, however, cleverly debunks the socially disparaging stereotypes that are at the heart of Qamri's harrowing experience of injustice. Qamri testifies about her daughters' experience of racism and bullying in school after 9/11, and her family's descent into hell as her husband's helplessness towards their children's distress finally led him to travel back to Palestine, leaving Qamri a single unemployed mother of four. In order to ensure that her message will properly reach her audience, Qamri plays with the discursive expectations shaped by her position as a young mother.

In the same way as Stoll, Letcher and El Mojado insist on their *pater familias* position in the pattern of a healthy family, Qamri's use of the aesthetic of impact relies essentially on her depictions of her motherly feelings. Her perceptive use of vocabulary as well as her reliance on emotionally loaded exclamatory noun phrases seek to trigger empathy by playing on the sensitive string of motherhood. For Qamri's main emotional lever is the depiction of the injustice that was primarily imposed on her children by youngsters as well as incompetent and misinformed teachers. Faced with her daughter's attempt at apprehending this seemingly senseless situation, it is the mother's inability at protecting her child that is expressed:

> I have her nine-year-old handwriting, just scribbling stuff, trying to sort it out for herself. [...] She was so thoroughly confused and traumatized. [...] It hurts as a mom to know that she suffered so much, especially because, Oh my god, it was just so

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needless. [...] It's a terrible helplessness, in the face of so much that your kid is going through. (82)

Terms like *traumatized, suffered,* or *terrible helplessness* emphasize the tragedy as if to render empathy inescapable on the part of the reader. The insertion of the dramatic "oh my god" further intensifies Qamri's reliance on conversational phrases so as to tighten the bosom-friend bond with her readers. Faced with the expression of her sincere *terrible helplessness* she so readily confesses, Qamri strikes the parental chord.

Symptomatically, Qamri's resort to the ethics of responsibility develops in accordance with the intimate paradigm. If the twofold development of testimonials' ethics implies a certain degree of introspection, it is also aimed at denouncing social agents' naivety in conveying disparaging stereotypes and discriminatory behavior. In Qamri's narrative, social agents are not the only targets of the author's blame: the educational system appears equally involved in spreading "propagandizing" (91) discourse in the classroom. Qamri tells how her daughter, Sana, suffered offensive comments from her fellow fourth-grade pupils after the children were taught about a district-ordered book about 9/11, which described the attacks as the evil scheme from Muslims against Christians, the enemy of old. Qamri's first reaction is to fight and react against the nonsense she has been reading in the short paperback volume. Unfortunately her vigorous reaction, notably through "heartfelt letters" (81), ends up enhancing the teachers' and pupils' aggressive reactions. After all, Qamri and her family are the enemy; "it's common knowledge that the religious hatred goes way back" (91), as Sana's teacher informs her. Her attempts at reaching understanding through conversation are hardly successful. In spite of Habermas's carefully developed model, it seems that in the lifeworld, the proposal embodied in speech acts' illocutionary force is often met with negative answers: "My understanding is that your prophet is a killer and a marauder [...] [but] I am very open to hearing what you have to say. If you want to attack Jesus, you can do it right now" (91). Qamri's hope for sensible dialogue seems doomed. Yet her report of such exchanges makes it possible to anticipate the response her testimony seeks to trigger. Much in the way of a one-to-one conversation, Qamri seeks to prompt her readers' indignant response faced with such insensitive and heedless—even bigoted—comments on the part of a teacher. Qamri's testimony is also aimed at fulfilling the educational role these teachers should much more responsibly assume.

Qamri's reliance on introspection as part of the ethics of responsibility connects to her adequately intimate aesthetic. If she knows that her pugnacious behavior will serve as an eye-

opener, she also retrospectively realizes her personal role in her daughters' extreme distress. Helplessness is not her only motherly fault:

> When you have children, you want the best for them [...]. The worst thing is when nothing you do, nothing you say, no amount of comforting, no amount of hugs that you can give, no amount of your love can help them. You're just powerless. And when you send them to school, you expect adults to take care of them, and when it doesn't happen, it's just so unbelievably crushing. In retrospect, I feel really guilty because I shouldn't have kept subjecting Sana to it. (84)

Qamri's sense of guilt over her helplessness, gullibility and social idealism points to the negative aspect of self-disclosure induced by the intimate paradigm. However, here again, this self-blaming gesture actually fosters an ethics of responsibility.

Qamri's final vow embodies the very message the intimate paradigm seeks to convey. As a concrete other —in Benhabib's sense of the term, the narrator shared her story with her readers completely, without any pretense, thereby affecting their sensitivity. The feelings of empathy and solidarity resulting therefrom highlight the narrator's and readers' commonalities as generalized others, thereby aiming for humanism and universalization. As she obviously refuses to play what Young calls the blame game, Qamri's words communicate a discrete yet highly significant message of hope.

> I just think things happened and I'm trying my best for the kids' sake to be positive and to move on. [...] I'm increasingly tired of labels. I'm tired of divisions. I'm tired of the "us and them". [...] I know I have deep faith in God and I identify as Muslim, but the only label I'd put on myself is "human being." That's what I wrote on the census form under "race." I refuse to be boxed in anywhere. (93)

The 'and we should all do the same', remains for the readers to interpret.

Inside this Place not of It – Anna Jacobs

Inside this Place not of It, published in 2011, shows a number of similarities with *Couldn't Keep it to Myself* and *I'll Fly away* as these volumes share a common central topic. However, this Voice of Witness volume on women's prisons, true to its mission statement, more overtly addresses issues in outward correlation with human rights abuse such as forced surgery, sexual harassment, racial or gender discrimination and questionable, if existent, medical procedures. The texts unveil the Kafkaesque living conditions these women had to endure, further challenging the American incarceration system. If these testimonies emanate from women originating from any possible social and racial background, and consequently address

a number of other social injustices, the best example of the intimate paradigm here unexpectedly emerges from an upper-middle-class seemingly successful mother.

Anna Jacobs's intimate account of her testimony appears to be based, on the one hand, on the recurring motifs of family and social roles symptomatic of the other instances of the same paradigm. On the other hand, it develops in a matter-of-fact mode of expression, which appears to soften the potential drama enclosed in its content. Kimberly Nance links this matter-of-fact mode of discourse to the successful development of persuasive testimonial rhetoric. According to her, an overt reliance on *pathos* renders the text's social potential ineffective, a remark that, as the aforementioned examples show, appears deceptively limited. *Pathos* can and does indeed function as an essential feature of the text's rhetoric. In this specific case, however, matter-of-factness triggers a stronger sense of authenticity; Jacobs's story echoes Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and other forms of group therapy based on shared self-disclosure. Invited in Jabobs's "large suburban house" (119), the readers witness her silent descent into the hell of addiction that could have led her to an untimely death in prison.

The impact of the dreadful episodes Jacobs somehow impassively shares with her readers is that of a warning. "You can make an addiction out of anything," (119) she says in her opening statements. This upper-middle-class college trained mother of two presents her "functioning alcoholic" (124) story as an unfortunately common one.[128] Social pressures and psychological distress do not spare anybody, and Jacobs candidly confesses: "I fought it. I wanted to be a good mom, but I didn't feel worthy of certain things, so it was a struggle" (120). The first part of Jacobs's testimony unfolds as a description of the series of momentous events that eventually led her to incarceration after an umpteenth apprehension for Driving Under the Influence. In spite of her numerous stays in rehab and pleas for help, Jacobs's struggle appeared to be a losing battle. This painful combat, as she cleverly realizes, drew her to fight her most faithful allies:

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[128] Alcoholism.about.com defines functioning alcoholics as people who in spite of their alcohol dependence are highly functional in society and at home: "they rarely miss work and other obligations because of their drinking, although it does happen occasionally, and they usually excel at their jobs and careers. Typically, they are clever and witty individuals who are successful in many areas of their lives. To all but those who are closest to them, they give the outward appearance of being perfectly normal".

> The second or third time I got a DUI, they gave me six months at [...] a correctional
> and drug treatment program. It was a goofy program, I'll be honest. And you would've
> thought that after going someplace, and being away from your family on your son's
> sixteenth birthday, that I would have changed. (122)

In spite of her passing remark on the apparent malfunction of rehabilitation programs,
Jacobs's statement sincerely recognizes her inability to fight her addiction and to save
appearances. Her alcoholism, which she had developed as a way to deal with her motherly
responsibilities, even before her incarceration, "put a humongous strain on [her] family"
(122), the only people who were "willing to give [her] any kind of help she wanted" (123).

The most poignant part of her testimony is symptomatically devoted to the one-year
stay she spent behind bars. In this second part, Jacobs's construction of intimacy primarily
relies on the traumatic effect this experience had on her self-image. It is the institutional
potentiality at erasing the inmates' self-confidence that Jacobs targets: their concreteness is
dissolved in the figure of the generalized criminal. Her misdiagnosed and ill-treated diabetes
and cirrhosis force her to go through serious health crises which she, at first, misinterpreted as
behavioral changes due to her psychological condition. The "real Texas-type girl" (127), the
one who cannot be beaten down, feels depressed as her prison experience seems to uproot her
from reality: "the whole time I was thinking, *this is too bizarre,* [...] *[t]his is too dramatic for
me*" (126; emphasis in the original). Faced with squalid living conditions, in a place where
even paper-cone cups and toilet paper seem an unattainable luxury, Jacobs's health quickly
deteriorates. When given a job on the premises, she realizes that she could actually regain her
true identity: "I was in prison under my own doing, and as long as I could keep it up, I'd keep
working" (130). Unfortunately, her cirrhosis precipitates hepatic encephalopathy: the toxins in
her blood impair her movements and more seriously her thought patterns. As she is
administered a powerful laxative, Jacobs decides to cut down her dosage after two shameful
"accidents" (131). This decision, she explains as her remaining "little bit of pride" (131),
drives her to eventually faint in the showers. When flown to the hospital, Jacobs's heart stops
beating, yet she is fortunately resuscitated.

This series of gruesome, indeed preposterous, events serve as trigger for Jacobs's
ethics of responsibility. As a real Texas girl, mother, and wife, she develops a form of moral
behavior that leads her to shoulder her own responsibilities so as to, ironically, function in a
world of appearances. Though she seems to be "trying to figure things out in [her] own head"
(125) she repetitively ends up making wrong decisions, which lead her to play a dangerous
game with the Grim Reaper. This being said, Jacobs is also well aware of the part society

played in her predicament in the form of the numerous gross malfunctions she was faced with. The "goofy [rehabilitation] program" (122) is indeed the first in a series of mistakes from the social and judicial systems that punctuate Jacobs's course.

Among these, the most blatant ones concern the complete lack of adequate health care on the penitentiary premises. In spite of being tested for her blood sugar, Jacobs is only informed of numbers, without any proper diagnosis. While normal blood sugar should stay around 100 or 120, Jacobs sees figures sometimes move up to 500. Yet, the medical staff seems to think that showing a number is enough: "I don't even know if anyone in there ever used the word 'diabetes'" (129). Health care in prison thus also seems to be confined to appearances. The flagrant severity of Jacobs's results and the staff's obvious lack of care leads the readers to dreadfully doubt the extent of the medical staff's concern about the inmates' actual health.

Jacobs's final vow expresses, with her personal matter-of-factness, the absurdity of her experience while incarcerated:

> I was released early for medical reasons, because of the diabetes, and because I was in the last stages of cirrhosis when I was at Plane State. In three months, I had gone from 300 pounds to 185. [...] *It wasn't right*. I don't think anybody knows how demoralizing and humiliating it can be to be in prison. [...] I understand that what I did before was wrong, but I damn nearly died in prison, and truly I don't think anybody deserves that. (134; emphasis mine)

The oversimplified formula *it wasn't right* summarizes the utter drama malfunctions of the criminal justice system actually represent. Jacobs's testimony indeed warns against a great danger, which is not only that of addiction.

III.2.2 The Forensic Paradigm

The forensic paradigm of testimonial *ethos* appears significantly more complex than the other ones. If the intimate paradigm was primarily based on a treatment of Greimas's axis of communication so as to support the narrator's effort at creating a privileged bond with their readers, its legal counterpart relies on both the axes of quest and power. If here again, the narrator stands as the hero, the object of the narration corresponds to justice itself, and the empowerment that can be derived from its complete and fair application. The forensic narrator symptomatically embarks on a quest through which she evolves from the position of the defendant—the disempowered subject, to that of the judge, the expert, or the socially educated. Though their story remain as personal as the ones disclosed in testimonies

pertaining to the other paradigmatic *ethe*, the narrators more essentially seek to analyze other agents' behavior and the structure of their environment in developing a significant social *logos*. In this sense, this paradigm mainly relies on justice in the sense of deliberative equality that which Honneth connects with self-respect. The forensic *ethos* thus mainly capitalizes on the figure of the generalized other and the responsibilities entailed by the different social roles agents have to occupy. Therefore, the narrators place helpers and opponents on the power or ability axis of the institution(s) that serve(s) as a setting for their personal disclosure. These institutions and their complex cogs symptomatically correspond to both opponents and helpers in the narrator's quest for empowerment. As was already demonstrated in Barbara Parsons Lane's narrative, the forensic narrator stands in a paradoxical position towards social structure. Though they all seem to agree that empowerment can only be achieved in abiding by social laws, the narrators nevertheless testify to the characteristically impeding nature of social rules. Rather than capitalizing only on their personal story, they seek to directly inscribe it in the web of narratives society stands for. The forensic *ethos* presents the most telling examples of what Renault calls the transformative and creative potential of the experience of injustice through which agents manage to find emancipation within the already existing institutions through an extension or transformation of their normative framework. Testimonial forensic *ethos* describes concrete other testimonies in the criticizing stance they adopt but also emphasizes the rights and obligations citizens should all adopt.

James Newsome's testimony is probably one of the most beautiful examples of this paradoxical relation to institutions. Newsome tells of his naïveté upon his side-door entrance in the criminal justice system as a wrongfully convicted. It is his genuine belief in the system's adaptability that will allow him to acquire the necessary expertise so as to become his own representative and counter his opponents' appropriation of laws and rules. Dan Bright's story capitalizes upon his quest for an access to the democratic deliberative apparatus. His main opponent takes the form of social determinism, which he presents as the equivalent of tragic fate. As a skillful dramatist, the simplistic expertise Bright derives from his personal experience is meant to lead to valid conclusions upon the changes that still need to be implemented in everyday life society. Jose Garcia offers a beautiful appropriation of a *logos* of solidarity. This illegal immigrant who lived through a violent past among a Californian gang proposes his quest in acquiring knowledge and education as the expertise he wishes to share. The institution he so meaningfully exploits is described along the lines of the American Dream in its participative application. If his text's aesthetic primarily relies on a

sense of belonging he is woefully lacking, it is in his complete acceptance of his responsibilities as a citizen that Garcia found empowerment.

Raed Jarrar's story shows significant similarities in its treatment of political representation. Jarrar's quest is that for his political voice, a voice he significantly needs to put down within the frame of identity politics and cultural values. Jarrar's faith in institutions expresses through his own appropriation of the American Dream; that is, the rights it ensures and the possibility to fight for them. Irma Rodriquez's narrative, finally, offers a bitter understanding of social order. As in the other examples, social order can be both helper and opponent. In an interesting echo of the issues developed by Parsons Lane, Rodriquez seems to present her testimony as the conclusions a consultant could divulge in court. Though these conclusions might not have a significant impact on the narrator's life, they remain incredibly invaluable information for the judge's—that is, the reader's—final understanding.

Surviving Justice – James Newsome

Among the different instances of the forensic paradigm, James Newsome's testimony stands as a textbook case. Newsome's personal evolution, as he discloses it in describing his traumatic dealings with the justice system, symptomatically presents the narrator's switching position through the process of empowerment. From the—here very literal—position of the defendant, Newsome evolves to the empowered status of a judge in the face of society's abuses. Newsome's testimony appears articulate, indeed well-crafted and it shows its narrator's great ability as an orator. Entitled "I am the expert," (107) Newsome's account of wrongful conviction offers invaluable insights in society's current harms in all implementations of distributive, procedural, interactional, and criminal justice.

From the opening lines of Newsome's testimony, the readers seem to have been projected into a court of law where the defendant rises and discloses his identity:

> I'm James Newsome from Chicago, Illinois. All my life I've lived there, with the exception of fifteen years, two months and four days, when I was an enforced transplant of the Illinois Department of Corrections for the murder and armed robbery of someone that I didn't know. (107)

This matter-of-fact presentation appears rather impressive. Newsome seems, indeed, to equal the truest nature of his identity to these fifteen years during which he was forced to endorse a criminal charge for which he had no liability. Newsome's aesthetic of impact appears primarily based on this unexpected acceptance of his long-standing status as a murderer. Newsome's case presented inconsistencies as from the first steps of investigation. All three

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witnesses of the crime had, at first, cleared Newsome but were later (as was proven during Newsome's second trial) forced into identifying him as the attacker during a lineup. As from the first stages of his questioning, the police threatened Newsome with fingerprints, which were, already according to the first examiner, impossible to match with Newsome's. He, however, seems to shoulder a number of responsibilities for his wrongful conviction. He bases his self-portrait mainly on his "naiveté" (112); academic and technical knowledge would indeed have ensured him a fairer struggle against the criminal justice system.

Newsome's naiveté, his blind "hope that the system will work" (112) and his lack of academic expertise appear to have sealed his doom, as he considers to have "made a contribution to [his] own wrongful incarceration" (114). Had he had "the intellectual prowess," he would have been able to "deal with the situation" and countered the officers from "fabricating" his case (114). The term is not innocent: Newsome significantly puts officers of the Chicago Police Department in the position of his strongest opponents. "When you work from the disadvantage of being intellectually powerless, people do what they will with you," (114) Newsome confesses. The forensic paradigm thus, surprisingly, leads the narrator to understand his own position as a key actor in his own predicament.

Newsome's aesthetic of impact is actually directly grounded in this seemingly pliant behavior, which he will quickly enough contrast with the emotional stance that actually fuelled his powerful "overc[oming of] the shock" (115). As if to directly implement Emmanuel Renault's understanding of the dynamics that make it possible to transform the experience of injustice into social struggle, Newsome presents anger as the key feeling to be led by. Graphically comparing anger to "a fuel that ignites you" or a "springboard into action," (122) he considers that this feeling allowed him to transform the negative aspects of his situation into empowerment. Anger corresponds to what Renault's calls euphemistically perturbation as well as to disappointment of normative expectations—the two steps without which social action cannot be implemented. This transforming power of anger, "as a positive emotional energy," (122) is significantly common to the other developments of the paradigm. Newsome's anger is what leads him to turn towards knowledge and academics, the educational empowerment that will guide his personal successful combat for his freedom.

It is, in effect, "[his] intellectual empowerment that got [Newsome] out" (118). His transformation effected through his academic achievements puts him in the strong position of the legally informed convict. His newly found job as a jailhouse lawyer offers him the opportunity to work on his case, but also to perfect his writing and rhetorical skills by "help[ing] other prisoners with their legal concerns" (116). Newsome's certainty is that he

"[is] going to be [his] best representative" (117). This praiseworthy comportment in achieving a legal education in the prison law library leads Newsome to acquire the empowered position of the expert, the one who knows "all the Latin terms and the nuances about the law, and all the procedural tricks [...] better than them" (117). From the defendant, Newsome has now acquired the necessary knowledge to become the judge, the one whose valuable opinion needs to be formulated and heard.

It is thus in the second moment of the forensic paradigm that the ethics of responsibility can be best unfolded. Though the ethical primary aspect could readily be deduced from Newsome's insightful understanding of the effect of his lack of education, it is nonetheless his decision to fend for himself that led him to "take responsibility for [his] own actions" (114). This responsibility, as Newsome skillfully demonstrates, should not remain self-centered. Newsome, indeed, seems to have had a long-lasting fondness for a sense of "social consciousness" (108) he says to have inherited from his acquaintance with the Civil Rights Movements in his youth. Having faced segregation, Newsome has a strong sense of what justice should be, which he bases on his long-enduring experience of injustice.

His mistrust in the system is grounded in a genuine belief in its basic cogs: "people and systems and bureaucracies, things like that" (121). "I'm the kind of person who believes that the benefit of the doubt should be given to a person, [...] I'm just really more grounded, more humble in my approach," (121) he explains. This sort of double-standard comportments towards the system recalls Parsons Lane's paradoxical reliance on, and rejection of rules. Newsome, from his expert position, understands the technicalities of the system, which permits him to judge it from an informed point of view. He, however, does not seem to confer this knowledge to all his fellow-citizens as he knows that his case could be tried by an all-white jury. Because he "understood what that meant for [him]," he realizes that some people might indeed not "grasp the significance of the concept 'innocent until proven guilty'" (112). His naiveté seems to be widespread; most people in seeing a person sitting at the defense table will assume that person's guilt. Newsome is here hinting at a crucial issue of the criminal justice system. If lay juries are supposed to represent impartiality, all citizens should then be properly educated in the actual workings of the procedures.

In the face of injustice, Newsome's only resource is education: the latter is the very substance of his vow. He "wants to be a contributor" (124) in educating his community, whether that of African-Americans or of convicts. This indeed led him to enroll with the Center on Wrongful Conviction at Northwestern University. His hope is to create and implement a system that would help convicts be restored to the community of free citizens by

providing support whether on a financial or psychological basis. His greater struggle still seems to be that of cultural miscommunication between the white and the African-American community:

> [I]t's important to understand the phenomenon from that perspective. If we just look at wrongful incarceration as being just some guys that somebody made a mistake about, that's wrong. (125)

His participation in the center appears "therapeutic" (128) on his part but also and more significantly on the part of society itself. Newsome knows that the criminal justice system is not perfect and that mistakes are going to be made (129). He concludes that these mistakes are similar to cracks in the system in which some people can fall, thus "[w]e need people who can resurrect those who have fallen" (129).

Voices from the Storm – Dan Bright

Dan Bright's testimony presents a very different form of the forensic paradigm. If Newsome's *ethos* was based on his steady acquisition of "intellectual equipment" (116), Bright's text displays a lesser degree of highbrow expertise. Nevertheless, this more colloquial outlook somehow corresponds to the asset Bright's forensic *ethos* capitalizes on. Bright seems well acquainted with the criminal justice system; he was wrongfully convicted and spent several years on death row, consequently his form of expertise is that of personal experience. The malfunctions he seeks to denounce and the truths he wants to unveil are all based on the authenticity of the fact he discloses in recounting his first-hand exposure to the racism and brutality displayed by New Orleans and Angola—Louisiana State Penitentiary—police officers in their treatment of inmates during the hurricane. If Bright is indeed presented as a defendant at the beginning of his testimony, readers soon realize that, building on his lived experience, he in fact assumes a role akin to that of a district attorney proving the guilt of the real defendant: the authoritarian social system. Bright's story seems a plea for any form of institutional recognition questioning the position of the seemingly powerless individual faced with bureaucrat determinism.

Bright's self-presentation as the defendant already tells a lot about his management of the aesthetic of impact and of the ethics of responsibility. Social determinism, in the form of fate, always turns against him or, at least, this is what he seems to be saying. His past legal troubles have led him to be "screwed all around" (20) even after his exoneration. In spite of his attempts to "look at the bright side of everything" (20), his efforts at finding jobs are unfortunate and force him to live with his mother. Throughout his testimony, this atmosphere

of doom and paranoia prevails, as he himself realizes: "so yeah, I'm always figuring that I'm singled out" (53). One cannot completely disagree with this: bad luck dogs him down. Right before the storm, Bright is arrested by an overzealous policeman for a (apparently unfounded) misdemeanor, and finds that he will have to remain in prison because the bail bondsman has already left the disaster scene. This recurrence of fateful events helps Bright enhance the dramatic aspect of his testimony. He describes the dormitory where he has been locked up, "there's an upper and a bottom level (54). "Fortunately," (54) Bright is placed at the top level. In the manner of a master novelist or dramatist, Bright closes his recount of the events of Saturday August 27 on a cliff-hanger: "But now I'm stuck in here, and the storm is coming" (54).

Bright also skillfully introduces direct addresses to the readers as a sort of hammering effect for his pleading. These direct addresses correspond to the textual feature that interlaces both narrative threads of his testimonial. On the one hand, they enhance the authentic aspect of the text. Bright's repeated "you gotta remember" (88, 89, 135, 137, 175, 206) or "you have to remember" (53, 108, 136—twice, 174) anchor his story in factuality. In the manner of asides, these formulas introduce meaningful facts that help contextualizing Bright's traumatic experience. When, on the second day of Bright's incarceration the convicts realize that the guards have deserted the premises because of the mandatory evacuation, he describes the panic and chaos that reigns in the building:

> [I]t was early. You can see the water is constantly rising. You gotta remember, we're stuck in these cells. Guys on the first level, on the bottom level, man they hollerin' and screamin'. [...] Begging, pleading (88).

Bright is here effectively disrupting the possibly uncanny aspect of trauma with the most factual remarks: if these adult males seem to display shockingly desperate behaviors it is because they are locked in cells which are soon to become their watery grave. This testifies to his willingness to make his story as authentic and thus as convincing as possible. As a skillful orator, Bright senses the necessity to secure his disclosure of appalling events with plain facts.

On the other hand, these direct addresses serve Bright's development of the ethics of responsibility in the sense that they strengthen his pleading effort. As his main point is to pin the blame on officials and their mismanagement of the events—thus presenting them as the true opponents to his agency, his asides also allow him to rely on truths he considers to be common knowledge within his community. His predicament is due to a severe form of incompetence: "you have to remember, this is New Orleans, even the cops is corrupted and envious" (53). This example not only enhances Bright's impressive disclosure, it also fuels

the case he is trying to make in pointing at malfunctions in institutional authority. Bright is putting his readers in the position of judges in the courts of law, where he hopes to disclose the ugly truth. His revelations grow by way of a crescendo. Seeing that the guards had deserted, the inmates managed to break out of their cells by kicking for hours on the hinges of the cell doors and chiseling the concrete walls with a mop wringer. They thus managed to save some of the inmates on the bottom floor where the water had attained chin level. After telling of his and his fellow-prisoners' necessary break out, Bright explains how they were retrieved by guards on boats and stranded on a highway bridge for two days and three nights without food or water.

New Orleans police receive reinforcements from the state penitentiary (Angola), whose officers aggravate the abuse. Bright seems convinced he is going to die on the bridge. Starvation, dehydration or a possible "killing spree" (108) on the part of the officers—these "backwoods hillbillies" (108) from Angola and other parish jails—each stand as sufficient motives. Bright's colorful language testifies to his unsophisticated form of expertise out of which he hopes his readers will draw valid conclusions on the outward incompetence and brutality of the authorities. As simplistic as Bright's deductions may appear from the previous example, he nonetheless hits on important points that help readers understand the broader context of the helter-skelter management of the hurricane and its aftermath.

Bright presents the state of Louisiana as a corrupted and discriminating setting in which incompetent and dishonest actors play a destructive masquerade. His understanding of the officers' unspeakable behavior is a telling example:

> Majority of'em were white, and some of'em were black. I'm not a racist person. I don't look at color. I look at financial status. If you poor, it don't matter if you white or black, you gon' get mistreated in Louisiana. You might get some favoritism if you're white from another white guard or somethin', but if you don't have nothin' we in the same boat. (106)

Louisiana is presented as a place where equality is hard to find. According to Bright's story, the most efficient helper in society is money whichever the situation. Bright further emphasizes his ironical resort to the phrase "everybody's equal" (136) when he describes the prisoners' transfer to Hunt Correction Institution: all of them (all charges together, from misdemeanors to murder or rape charges) are literally parked as cattle on the football yard. Bright is no kind judge and enjoins his readers to adopt the same stance.

Bright's vow is an interesting, and quite surprising, call for debate. Bright's final remark uncannily refers to Ricoeur's understanding of testimonies and Habermas's

understanding of communicative action as open to criticism. Indeed, his bitterest remarks go to the sheriff who, in the media, came to confront Bright's and other inmates' testimonies with his official set of lies. His anger targets the fact that the necessary evacuation did not take place. Anger he acrimoniously expresses through direct address: "I'm surprised that y'all would let this happen on a larger scale. Everybody's watching and y'all still doing the same nonsense that y'all been doing" (238). On first inspection, the reason why nothing seems to have been handled professionally is because "it's just New Orleans" (208). Yet the rest of the country is nonetheless responsible for letting it all happen. This understanding recalls Young's concept of a socially connected sense of responsibility. If the officers were Bright's direct opponents, society as a whole is responsible for not having acted as a safeguard of its members' most basic rights. Bright's last words confront the sheriff and indirectly his readers: "So he's lying, and I would love to see him, debate with him" (238). This debate is exactly what the volume is meant to open—the kind of argumentative debate Bright's and the other witnesses' testimonial instances of communicative action propose to society.

Underground America – Jose Garcia

In a number of ways, Jose Garcia's testimony addresses the features that are found in James Newsome's account. This thirty-seven-year old Salvadoran talks about his difficult early life in El Salvador and his early illegal entrance in the United States. Because he was young and therefore the subject of bad influences, Garcia was quickly swallowed by the gang-governed drug trafficking world of Los Angeles. Garcia's saving grace takes the form of education. Like Newsome, it is while incarcerated that he manages to acquire the necessary knowledge and strength for him to leave the gang and become a leader in community work. Garcia's story shows how undocumented immigrants can turn into real assets for American society. If his arrival in the U.S. was not exactly motivated by the American Dream, his current experience remains that of a responsibly committed citizen. Though he resents his own position as an illegal member of society, Garcia does not hesitate to offer insightful remarks on the government's implication in this complex social issue.

From the very first stages of his testimony, Garcia provides an extremely matter-of-fact account of his arduous youth in the Usulutàn province of El Salvador. Born an orphan, his early adolescence is marked by the beginning of the civil war.[129] This ten-year-old boy

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[129] The civil war ran from 1980 to 1992 and opposed the Salvadoran government with communist guerilla organizations.

seems hugely traumatized by the guerillas' propaganda and the terribly violent raids from the government. Garcia tells of his deep lack of belonging, in spite of his aunt's loving care. The boy knows he lives in a house he does not belong in and feels not only threatened but also deeply unsettled by a conflict that seems, to him, unimaginable in the Salvadoran context. It is his lack of belonging that somehow places Garcia in the position of the defendant in the first episodes of his testimony. The aesthetic of his narrative achieves its goal through content rather than through form. Garcia's matter-of-fact tone appears to stoically address the most traumatic instances of human rights abuses he suffered as a young boy; from the discovery of headless bodies and mass murders in El Salvador to the immigrants' two-day hiding and eight-hour-walk to the American border. Garcia's entrance in the United States ends up uprooting him physically and psychologically from his already estranged environment: "At first, I didn't like L.A., because I didn't speak English. For me leaving my family, my town and everything, living with my sisters, it was awful" (227). The thirteen-year-old's future appears quite grim in this new country in which his aunt had placed so many hopes.

Because Garcia's sisters suffer from alcohol addiction, they soon consider their younger brother as an easy means to feed their expensive needs. Garcia starts working with a fake social security number. Though he is only fifteen, he shows an acute understanding of the "frustrating" (228) system of jobs in the United-States:

> If you don't like it too bad. You don't have papers, you don't get overtime. And they make you work more than if you had the papers. And another thing was that in most of the restaurants in my area, only the manager had papers. Hiring people without papers is a great way to increase your profits. (228)

The corrupted market indirectly feeds Garcia's uprootedness and somehow leads him to drug addiction, and finally prison. Garcia's series of misfortunes—to use a euphemism—becomes even longer. Sexually abused by his manager, Garcia ends up without a job and is forced to steal from a restaurant. Arrested, brought before the judge, he is treated with leniency and is nearly released. Yet, a mistake in the paperwork takes him to juvenile hall for five months. Garcia's deep distress and post-traumatic stress disorder, self-medicated with cocaine and heroine, leads him to get involved with a Californian gang.

Surprisingly, Garcia's numerous stays in prison never earned him any threats of deportation. Because of a lie upon his first incarceration in juvenile hall, Garcia seems not to exist in any official records. This ironical development and the break up with his first wife are the causes of his salvation. Determined to abandon violence and drugs, Garcia is well aware that "all [he] need[s] is one chance" (233). At thirty, while incarcerated, he finds his

"opportunity to help the community" (233) in education. Garcia's responsible transformation into an educated and socially committed man opens the way toward the ethics of responsibility. From an account of violent traumatic events, Garcia's text veers to the description of socially constructive action. Garcia creates a halfway house, and opens a rehab program for undocumented and poor people. This spectacular behavioral change helps him reveal the social dedication undocumented immigrants are capable of. This dedication, he feels, has to be shared. Though he does not like to talk about his past mistakes he seems to understand the significance his testimony may assume: "I believe God works in mysterious ways, and maybe if somebody reads something in a book, if they hear a story about somebody like me, maybe it can help them" (232). Garcia is well aware of his role as a community leader, which he does not hesitate to openly take up every day in Mount Vernon public library in Washington. In spite of his numerous positive achievements, Garcia is, nonetheless, not oblivious of his past as a "*cholo* [Mexican-American gangbanger]" (236) and of his still current status as an illegal immigrant.

Education, as for Newsome, appears to be the key word of Garcia's vow. His personal struggle is to obtain legal status by educating the government and Immigration on his position as a "positive part of the community" (235). Garcia has also initiated a program for schools devoted to the cultural and political stigma stereotypes about the Latino and Chicano communities convey. The expert position he has achieved allows him to point at malfunctions in the American ideological and institutional system. Indeed, his most significant educative struggle remains that of taking the burden of blame from illegal immigrants:

> I respect the law. Now I do. And I believe that we should come to the United States the legal way. Even though most of the people that come here, they don't do it for bad reasons. [...] But I would like the government to understand that if they don't give these people a chance, if they don't give them the opportunity, these people can choose to go on the wrong way. [...] And if something happens with this immigration thing that's going on now, we're just going to do more to help the United States. (237)

Granting the possibility of a legal status and true opportunities to hard-working committed people who wish to be active members in the empowerment of their community and society seems the most positive lesson to be learned from Garcia's appalling testimony.[130]

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[130] Legal status is also indirectly at the heart of Garcia's recount. One might be surprised that from his description of the violence in El Salvador, Garcia could not be granted war or

Patriot Acts – **Raed Jarrar**

Raed Jarrar, who refers to himself as a "political advocate," (296) is an Iraqi immigrant in his thirties. His youth in Iraq and his experience of the first and second Gulf war led him to found a NGO for humanitarian and reconstruction work in his home country. His position in the U.S. serves his wish to reduce the stigma over the Muslim community. In a dialectic process, Jarrar proposes his own experience of discrimination as well as his recently gained awareness over the possible strength of his political voice as his best allies to confront American society with its basest prejudices. Jarrar's acute sense of the hatred his community has been faced with since 9/11 offers him the possibility to denounce wrongdoings, but also and more importantly to question long-lasting received ideas induced by fear and stupidity. Jarrar's striking experience of injustice after 9/11, culminates in an improbable airport episode in which he was summoned to take off or cover his t-shirt because it displayed an Arabic-language motto. Jarrar's story stands as a textbook case of issues pertaining to the recognition paradigm for social justice, his deep sense of the significance of cultural values and identity politics in contemporary democratic debates undeniably deserves to find echoes in the public sphere.

Jarrar's opening comment sets the scene of his forensic *ethos*: "I always apologize to people when they ask me, 'Where are you from?' because I have a long paragraph to answer that" (298). This apologetic positioning tells of his unease at disclosing his multicultural, yet mainly Arab background. His blunt rejection of identifying labels serves both his development of the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility based on justice as recognition. The first part of Jarrar's testimony is mainly based on his life history in Iraq and Palestine. The first instance of his encounter with racial hatred is developed through his account of the 9/11 attacks. When one of his American friends decides to stop any further chatroom conversations, Jarrar is struck dumb: "it was the first instance where I was paying the price for what some crazy loon-boon did in New-York" (299). Jarrar insists that the "racist tone" (300) of the comments he could read on the Internet, initiated his sense of guilt towards his identity. The insults directed at his community make him quickly realize the danger of propagandizing discourse: "It was the first time in my life that I had seen such hatred toward all Muslims, rather than a political group or an armed group" (300). Jarrar feels somehow personally attacked, he can understand the alienating nature of this hatred towards the Muslim

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political asylum. This issue, which is of deep concern in our modern-day world, is discussed several times over the complete volume.

world. This individual realization of the conflict strikes a significant alarm bell. By exposing, his own feeling of guilt Jarrar is questioning his readership's possible participation to similar unacceptable stereotypical ways of pressing charges without any proof. It is, here, on the socially connected understanding of responsibility that Jarrar is capitalizing.

Jarrar's immigration to the United States his due to his relationship with his girlfriend, at the time when Jarrar finishes his studies, she is still a PhD student in California. Anxious to see Nikki finish her PhD, Jarrar decides to join her there. His decision to immigrate further enhances his malaise:

> I didn't have very high expectations, unlike many of my friends who come to the United States and think the streets are made out of gold. I did not have any of those illusions. I knew there were good things and bad things about the United States. I knew I had rights that I could fight for. (306)

But, in spite of the "many 'buzz words' on [his] paperwork, like *Iraq* and *Iran* and *Palestine* and *Muslim*" (306), Jarrar enters America without significant trouble. The political aspect of this remark serves to further enhance the impact of his uneasiness over his identity. This uneasiness will nevertheless serve his personal empowerment in "finding [his] new political voice" (306). In such an environment, Jarrar's identity ironically stands as his most powerful opponent, while his citizen's voice would be his most influential helper. Faced with constant questioning about his origins, Jarrar decides to accept the representative position people are all-to-ready to impose on him. Because he knows that terrorists are but a minute percentage of the Muslim world, he realizes that "[his] actual voice is needed here" (307). He proudly advertises this decision through his doings and by wearing a T-shirt sporting the 'we will not be silent' (308) motto in Arabic and English on his fateful encounter with JetBlue security agents on August 12, 2006.

The T-shirt episode beautifully connects Jarrar's aesthetic of impact and ethics of responsibility. Both narrative weaving threads are correlated with issues of identity politics and prejudice, the same concerns that led Jarrar to feel responsible for his community's current position in American society. It is the issue of justice that Jarrar questions as he challenges the apparent legitimacy of the long-lasting received idea that people from different backgrounds should be suspected and treated accordingly. After a stormy discussion leading Jarrar to cover his T-shirt, humiliation takes over:

> So I was the first to board the airplane. [...] All of the flight attendants were whispering and looking at me. [...] Of course it is not the same historic equivalent of

putting African Americans on the back of the bus, but I had just been reading about it. I didn't want to sit at the back of the airplane, I didn't want to cover my t-shirt because it was in Arabic and I looked like an Arab. (312)

Jarrar is obviously well aware that the apparent evolution of identity politics—namely the progress that the Civil Rights and Feminist movements could achieve—remains a masquerade. This realization has an expensive cost. Until that moment, Jarrar had been "all invested" in becoming American but unfortunately realized "it was not an option for [him]" (313). Jarrar "understood [his] identity the hard way," (313) upon the very moment when he was forced to cover his t-shirt with a more neutral one. Historical precedents of stigmatized apparel need not be recalled here, though they inform human rights issues that are still to be eradicated.

Fortunately, Jarrar's eventual response is a responsible one. His decision to file a lawsuit against JetBlue for the incident tells of his dedication to fight political malfunctions and to expose them to the public for the greater good by using the rights he has been granted by institutions. Knowing that what happened was wrong, Jarrar wants to ensure that it will never happen again and decides to "fight[...] racial profiling" (315). In a well-informed manner, this issue, he contends, is based on ignorance grounded in malfunction in implementing an authoritative system of values: "the thing that I wanted to get out of my case was to prove that these people acted because they felt this was how their institution wanted them to act" (315). Jarrar understands that the problem resides in the "system" (315) procedures rather than in individuals' opinions. As responsible citizens, Americans should not only be informed about these malfunctions but also organize so as to challenge them.

Jarrar's vow outspokenly presents reason as the answer, past events, other people's experience of the injustices the complete social system produces should lead citizens to widen their sympathies so as to act responsibly:

I started to realize that it's not responsible to try to dismiss identity politics in the United States. It's irresponsible of me as a new immigrant to say, 'Let's all live in a place that has no identity politics, let's say we're all equal and not look back at our history,' because that will be harmful to some other Americans' struggle. [...] And there are many of us who will be discriminated against, and who will have hard lives. But the bright side is that this is still a country where many of us can fight back. (316-317)

Inside this Place, Not of It – **Irma Rodriquez**

Irma Rodriquez's construction of the forensic paradigm presents a somehow unexpected ethical development. Rodriquez, all along her testimony, adopts the position of the expert consultant who presents her conclusions to the court. Her sometimes harsh deductions are directed at all the protagonists of her sad life story and seek to denounce the inescapability of social determinism. This forty-five-year-old Latina discloses her childhood when shunted between Child Protective services, her heroin-addicted mother and her grandparents. In a retrospective glance, Rodriquez manages to effectively wrap up the destructive cycle in which society has condemned her to enter. Her similar disclosure of the numerous failures of the criminal justice system posits her sad record of the incompetence and corruption symptomatic of present-day American prisons.

From the very beginning of her testimony, Rodriquez's mistrust in the American welfare is blatantly expressed. In the manner of an investigator pointing at the numerous flaws of the social machinery, her tacit assumption is that her distressful childhood memories already point toward the doomed fate she was to accept as her inescapable horizon. The judge's outright refusal to place her in the custody of any members of her direct family sealed her fate. Rodriquez candidly recalls her mother's vain devotion: "but all her efforts made no difference to the court, and they wouldn't give me back to her" (204). She indirectly rejects the justice system's rigidity and lack of actual concern for defendants. Her eventual custody is given to her grandparents and Rodriquez recalls the two different kinds of nurturing she was to grow with, "good and bad" (205). If her grandmother "tried to teach [her] that to be the best person you can be in society, you just have to do what's right" (205), her grandfather who feared and disrespected social workers because he saw them as the rude representatives of government recommends a lesser form of education. If her grandmother sees helpers in social rules, for her grandfather they are one's most potent opponents. Rodriquez's final moving in with her mother transforms her initial mistrust in social order into contempt:

> [B]y that time, the courts were already out of our lives, and the only person we had to worry about was the welfare social worker. That was nothing; we just had to go in, dress nice, and show that I was in school. That was it, and we got our checks. (205)

Rodriquez's grim reflections unfortunately appear to reflect an all-too-real situation. This outward mistrust and contempt of the social system is widely denounced by the most deprived members of society. Rodriquez's remarks insightfully point at the urgency of the situation. Some people do indeed display a lack of social responsibility in the sense which Young so

adamantly criticizes, and openly benefit from a support that paradoxically plunges them further in destitution.

This grim environment, Rodriquez realizes, is not only shared by a number of her fellow inmates, it is also the one she bequeaths to her daughter. Though she managed to avoid foster care for her daughter, she could not completely save her, for "of course, in the end, she had a baby at fifteen too" (207). Her mother, her daughter and herself were not married and had their baby young, "it's like the cycle was never broken" (207). Rodriquez's *of course*, further enhances the sense of confinement she experienced. Confinement is not solely a characteristic of the criminal justice system but also refers to social determinism. Her hope for empowerment could, nevertheless, not be silenced by her ominous reflections; the future generation might actually thrive and put into practice the lessons their forebears' past should teach them. "I only hope my granddaughter will break the cycle," (207) she confesses. Revolution could indeed find its seeds in social order itself, in future generations.

Rodriquez does not judge herself more kindly than the criminal justice system. She realizes her own contribution to her predicament: "[she] wrecked [her] teenage life" (206) because of drugs, gangs and prostitution. Her addiction, particularly, seems unforgivable: "'God! What the hell was I thinking?' I look at my harm, and the scars and tattoos [...]. I just had no sense of worth" (209). Thrown into the prison "pit," (208) she, at first, even refuses the help social institutions force on her. This refusal makes this help obviously inoperative: "A lot of the help I got was court-ordered; it was nothing that I ever chose to get. I wasn't ready for it, and I was scared" (210). This salutary, yet ill-accepted, help from the institutions seems to have the contrary effect of enhancing social determinism as Rodriquez's resentment caused her to use drugs even more. Rodriquez's testimony shows a number of similar features with Barbara Parsons Lane's. Their common sense of confinement and inescapability on their aesthetic treatment is most striking. Justice acts as a crushing system that imposes solutions the individual cannot possibly escape even if they seem inappropriate. This negative attitude nevertheless seems to lead to a common ethical wish to denounce problematic issues in the hope that this will help others, since for both Parsons Lane and Rodriquez it appears to be too late.

Apart from the generally gloomy depictions of social determinism, Rodriquez's most meaningful revelations have to do with the criminal justice system. Her stoically detached description of it leads to the assurance that "you can get accustomed to the loss of dignity" (207). Her repeated stays behind bars on drug-related convictions led Rodriquez to get used to the inhuman world she is now forced to live in. If, as Parsons Lane, she had to be taught about

"the dos and the don'ts of surviving in prison" (207), she now has the necessary expertise to publicize issues that can no longer be silenced. Her main conclusions concern the lack of psychological and physical health care, which leaves dozens of inmates irremediably maimed: "there are some really hurt individuals in here, and I'm not talking just mentally, but physically—scarred and damaged so they can't have kids" (207). These women deserve to be put on the map, not simply hidden from the eyes of the members of "the free world" (212) because they have been removed from it. Inmates' struggle for justice represents the most telling example of what Emmanuel Renault's considers to be the struggle of the deprived. Because inmates are deprived of their liberty, of their identity and of their status as human beings, their social struggle is the most unequal one.

These issues however have been silenced for so long, that they can often be minimized. Even an expert, like Rodriquez, has to be careful of her responses:

There's a lot of heartache, a lot of crime, and a lot of violence, and chaos. [...] You can get so accustomed to [these] that your standards just disappear. [...] I have to remind myself to have compassion. Just because I'm used to it doesn't mean someone else is. It's so sad to see women coming here who really don't know how to deal with prison. [...] They're in here for ridiculous stuff: making bad decisions, helping someone out. They were just so naïve and gullible that another person was able to reel them in. And they're incarcerated with people who've committed murder. It's like one pit. Everyone's thrown in one pit. (208)

Rodriquez, here, hints at the desensitization human rights issues are subjected to on the part of people who have been part of the institution for too long. These can include inmates and their family but more meaningfully members of the staff. Desensitized inmates fail to pick up a necessary fight for their rights, while desensitized staff contributes to inmates' dehumanization and depreciating recognition. Much in the sense in which Jarrar denounces the lack of political involvement on the part of the justice institution, Rodriquez questions habits, which inevitably lead to the lack of empathic involvement that would lead to truly humane treatment and living conditions.

Rodriquez's greater strife against the criminal justice system, nevertheless, appears to be a personal one. During one of her previous incarcerations, in 1990, one of her blood tests came back HIV positive. She went through heavy treatment and consistent harassment and discrimination on the part of the staff, only to discover, in 2007, that this result had been a false positive. With her negative result confirmed in 2008, Rodriquez petitioned for a hearing with the Chief Medical Officer, determined to understand whether this erroneous result was

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due to falsification or incompetence. Her struggle, of course, revealed (again) to be an unequal one. Faced with an institution determined to play the blame game, Rodriquez's final account is a bitter one. The prison refuses to accept responsibility and blames the mistaken diagnosis on the lab. Rodriquez is advises to "take it up with them" (213). Unfortunately, the lab has been closed, "it turns out it had been shut down by the government because it was falsifying tests" (213). Needless to underline the irony of the situation, Rodriquez's contempt seems even more legitimate.

Rodriquez's final vow seems to be an individualized one she discloses in the form of advice that somehow places social salvation in the person of the individual citizen: "My advice, even to people in the free world, is to be your own best advocate. [...] Try to find out as much as you can" (212). She proposes for all to adopt her investigative stance. If in prison one is placed in a box with "little slips of paper [...] with pieces of information" (214), one cannot verify anything. As citizens of the free world, then, our job is to take advantage of our chance to engage in the general effort to know the truth about our environment. This effort is actually what may help us see how society could be bettered as its flaws could well contain its promise for progress.

III.2.3 The Religious Paradigm

There exists an undeniable link between American culture and religion, dating back to the founding pilgrims of the Mayflower. The same intimate link was forged through the enduring history of religious testimony within American culture. If religious testimonies are mainly present in Christian religion and refer there to the story a person will tell of how one became a Christian, its re-appropriation in testimonials shows many variants. Religion is overwhelmingly present in all possible volumes of testimonials, its mention, however, does not necessarily hint at the narrator's *ethos*. Volumes about prison are, as may be expected, particularly representative of this tendency. Testimonies of conversions to all religions are, indeed, common among inmates. Brenda Medina's reunion with her family beliefs was already a telling example. Some testimonial volumes may also entirely be centered on religious testimonies; a tendency for which *The Voices of the Oppressed* stands as a leading representative. The volume collects poems by incarcerated African-American men who disclose their finding of God through personal events.

If my first assumptions about the religious paradigm was an understanding based on the didactic moral aspect of homilies as a parallel to the admonishing potential of testimonials, textual analyses rapidly proved that the religious paradigm is probably the one

that displays the largest range of creative appropriation. As could already be observed from Medina's testimony, the religious construction of the testimonial *ethos* most significantly relies on symbolism and imagery. This symbolism is overtly expressed through a purposeful development of Greimas's axis of quest or desire. Typically, the narrator in religious testimonies, the hero, seeks to access an essential object—a higher form of truth. If in Christian testimonies, this higher truth is that of God, in testimonials this truth is more open to interpretation. Following a similar conception of the spiritual, the quest for empowerment in such a rhetorical construction is often likened to a quest for salvation, as Medina's text, indeed, already showed. If the notion of quest remains most potent in these texts, they also propose hints at the axis of power in presenting a Manichean understanding of the human race. Figures of the helper and the opponent unquestionably also abound in these narratives but these actants' first and foremost significance lies in their allegorical nature.

The religious *ethos* as an interesting counterpart of the intimate paradigm emphasizes sincerity in its English application. In this conceptualization, individuals express their inner nature through their actions. As such, the helpers and opponents presented in the narratives stand as allegorical representation of the good or evil nature of human beings—good versus evil *logos*. Faced with such archetypal figures, the most meaningful understanding of the witnesses' institutional normative expectations—either scoffed or rejuvenated—takes the form of faith in all its possible senses. As significant as faith appears in this paradigm, it seems predictable that self-confidence, as an expression of justice of needs, stands as the main recognition frame the religious *ethos* develops. Interestingly, the needs these concrete other figures seek to secure are the ones all citizens should be able to satisfy. The religious *ethos* stands as the paradigmatic relation that society should create between the concrete and generalized other figure. In sharing their personal stories, narrators here seek to emphasize their worthiness as members of society who, as such, deserve dignity.

Christopher Ochoa's testimony opens this section of case studies. Ochoa's story appears beautifully woven on a series of religious images. Faced with evil police officers, his legal troubles are presented as an ominous pact with the devil. Ochoa relies on his literal religious faith as well as on his faith that truth will eventually be disclosed so as to gain empowerment and literal freedom. Father The Nguyen probably appears as a typical witness who would disclose a religious *ethos*. The Nguyen's quest is that of disclosing the truth of his community's experience of Hurricane Katrina. Presented as a sort of messiah figure, he capitalizes on his unshakeable faith in a typically American ethics based on hard work and responsibilities. The Nguyen's text also openly addresses the recurring motif of news and the

media's unreliability. In the religious paradigm, the higher truth the narrators seek to disclose is often opposed to official and authoritative reports. This position appears significantly meaningful in the sense that truth might not correspond to what the public is consistently fed with.

Similarly, El Curita's story appears as a modern reworking of Christian slave narratives. His aesthetic is mainly based on his Manichean understanding of the world. In this context, his sister, brother-in-law and himself stand as the embodiment of good Christians as opposed to the evil slave owner, La Americana. Though the press likes to present illegal immigrants as pest, their true story is incredibly different. Farid Rodriguez's narrative is probably to count among the most delicate and fascinating examples of the religious *ethos*. Rodriguez's higher truth is that of human wisdom acquired through life experience. Rodriguez's allegorical status as a patriarch is already significantly epitomized by his portrait (see fig.16) yet it is further revealed through his appropriation of the motif of faith in humanity. He would, indeed, not imagine discovering salvation anywhere else. Charlie Morningstar's story is the last example in this section. Morningstar essentially stands as the allegory of the misunderstood. A transgender Native American, Morningstar embarks on a quest for a truth other than the physical and judicial one nature and society imposed on him. Through allegorical figures, readers are here invited to question their innermost beliefs.

Surviving Justice – Christopher Ochoa

Christopher Ochoa's text offers a good example of how religion may be subtly instilled in the textual weave of testimonials, presenting the narrator as a privileged being who knows about a greater truth that deserves to be shared with the larger public. Ochoa's text appears symptomatic of how the religious *ethos* can be realized through hints at religious traditions. His aesthetic of impact is particularly representative of this meaningful reliance on religious imagery. Ochoa's text is beautifully woven through the use of poignant icons. His opening paragraphs, indeed, represent a sort of modern parable:

> Let's say you sit at a bus stop, and an hour earlier somebody just robbed a bank and left a big bag of money there. A bad guy. It's under the bench at the bus stop. Somebody else found it—it's gone. He goes back to get his money. He says, 'where's my money?' What is he talking about, You don't know. He's got a gun, and he puts it to your head, but what you don't know is that this gun has no bullets. 'Tell me where the money is or you're dead.' […] 'I don't know,'[…] you're thinking, 'I don't want to die; I got to think of something.' And then you're like, 'Okay, somebody took it

from here. I saw somebody running away from here. He went that way.' Knowing darn well you didn't ever see anything. Then the guy pulls away his gun and for some reason you see that it doesn't have any bullets, and you feel like such an idiot. (17)

Ochoa's parable, this "simple story used to illustrate a moral or religious lesson" (OED), is meant to broaden readers' sympathies. Rather than starting his testimony with hard facts, Ochoa prefers the empathy story-telling alone can trigger: "And that's how I felt. They were saying I was going to die" (18). The stage is set.

In 1988, then aged twenty-two, Ochoa, after a two-day interrogation, is persuaded by police officers to confess to a rape and murder he did not commit; he also implicates a co-worker. The traumatic way in which police officers wring this purported confession from Ochoa is presented as a re-appropriation of religious scenes in which the devil seeks to induce temptation and to have the subject sign an ominous pact. Kimberly Nance, in her analysis of testimonial rhetoric explains how the description of the agents responsible for the protagonist's suffering should be presented as evil, while the witness generally displays naivety (72-79). In the same way as which Eve was enticed to eat the apple by the serpent, Ochoa is faced with demons assuming a reassuringly common form: that of the cop. As the first subtitle to his testimony indicates, Ochoa's education led him to show a blind trust in these authoritarian representatives of the law: "if there's anybody you can trust, it's a cop" (18). Upon the day that followed the murder, Ochoa is taken to the police station as a would-be witness in an unrelated burglary; he is consequently never told about the fact that he already was a suspect in the murder and was never red his Miranda rights. "I was naïve. I didn't know nothing about the system" (22), Ochoa confesses. In spite of this blatant contempt of legal procedures, Ochoa does not see that a trap is closing on him.

The evil representation of the cops mainly resides in the psychological violence they inflict on the suspect. Ochoa is consistently threatened with death: "this is where the needle's gonna go if you don't cooperate, […] you know, if you know something about it, you can still get charged with capital murder and get the death penalty" (22). Much as Mephistopheles proposes eternal life to Dr. Faust, Ochoa is faced with a somehow stark yet inescapable choice: "It's like you don't have a choice. Life sentence, death penalty. […] It was no choice. You're twenty-two years old" (27). Ochoa's point of no return, of course, is symbolized by his signature: "I just went along with what the detective was saying [and] [s]igned the statement" (23). Surprisingly, the signature does not mean the disappearance of the demon as Ochoa was secretly hoping: "confession, alleged confession, was pretty easy, but then all of a sudden they wanted more" (24). Ochoa's pact, his confession—which also indirectly points to

the religious motif—is but the beginning; he is then directed through his tape-recorded statement. Since Ochoa is innocent he keeps making mistakes in describing the details of the crime scene during the tape-recording, which significantly annoys police officers. The most absurd example of their proceedings resides in the fact that they actually had Ochoa guessing for the colors of the different items on the scene (24). He is also eventually "coached" (26) to testify against his co-worker.

Ochoa's ethics of responsibility similarly relies on religious motifs. Its first and most significant instance resides in his description of a salutary return to his beliefs when faced with utter despair. After ten years in prison, on Christmas Eve, Ochoa is on the verge of committing suicide: "but, somehow before I did the deed, my morals, everything came flashing back. [...] I didn't have the right to take anybody's life, not even my own" (28). There is little need here to recall the symbolism of Christmas so as to understand that Ochoa somehow becomes a *born–again*, responsible individual. As he "found peace" (29), Ochoa goes back to school so as to secure an education. Salvation is brought through a similar rebirth (namely, a religious conversion) that leads the already incarcerated actual murderer to write a number of letters so as to exonerate the two men who have been up to then paying his debt to society. Responsibilities are uncovered and the criminal justice system apparently seeks to right its wrongs.

However, this is but a superficial effort. If Ochoa proudly "took responsibility for what [he] did wrong" (41) in seeking forgiveness from the co-worker he implicated in his own downfall, the demonized cops—one in particular—never did. Ochoa bitterly regrets this, which shows that financial compensation does not permit to heal all wounds. With the beautiful puzzle metaphor Ochoa explains that more than having stolen years from him, this Mephistopheles figure stole pieces from his life. Though he survived, Ochoa feels he has "to put those pieces of that part of the puzzle together" (40). Ochoa's vow is finally a simple one, what happened to him embodies the dangers of evil, in the face of which, at the end of the day, we are all equal: "I want people to know that everybody's human whether they're in prison or not" (43).

Voices from the Storm – Father Vien The Nguyen

Within the description of examples connected with the religious paradigm, it may not seem surprising to find a testimony emanating from a priest. My first assumptions in the primary conception of the religious paradigm as a testimonial *ethos* was based on the idea that the narrator would, through his testimony, propose a form of homily so as to educate others on

the issue of injustice at hand. Father The Nguyen's text partly fits this format. The last episodes of his text seek, indeed, to present the moral implications of Mayor Nagin's and FEMA's (Federal Emergency Management Agency) irresponsible management of the reconstruction effort after Hurricane Katrina. The passages of The Nguyen's text dealing with discursive form proper devise a very different variety of the religious *ethos*, a discursive form deeply relying on the priest's personal sense of responsibility. The Nguyen humbly presents himself as the figure of a community leader close to that of the religious prophet leading his flock.

The Nguyen's story, in spite of his influential position in his community, remains indeed a humble one. Born in Vietnam, he immigrated with his family in 1975 as boat people fleeing the war. He then followed his religious calling. The Nguyen's testimony is that of a community, as appears from his use of vocabulary. The Nguyen is a priest in a "personal parish" (38), a parish devoted exclusively to people from South Asia. It is also a community-focused parish. "New Orleans is home" (38), where traditions are greatly respected. "Vietnamese [...] are agricultural people," The Nguyen writes, "meaning we tie ourselves to the land, [...] [w]e have buried our people here, [w]e are tied to it, [t]hat's how it becomes home" (38). In this closely-knit parish, The Nguyen and his assistants have settled as ministers "committed" (39) to help people with their everyday life and with their "ultimate goal" (39) of salvation. This absolute commitment is "where [The Nguyen] find[s] satisfaction" (39). The Nguyen depicts a typically American communitarian parish of hard-working people who lead a peaceful "life before the storm" (subtitle).

The storm arouses in The Nguyen his most instinctive leadership qualities. At first, his position is presented through the allegorical image of an angel of annunciation or indeed that of a prophet. Commonly considered as the intermediary between God's will and his parishioners, he is now flung in the position of intermediary between the Hurricane and his community. His eyes riveted on TV news, and his ears later riveted on radio news, The Nguyen is positioned as the community leader, the one who knows and who guides: "'those who can, get out as quick as possible. Don't wait until tomorrow'" (55). The leader is not only the one who warns, he is also the one who protects: "'All of you are to leave, but those of you who cannot leave, I will open up the school building'" (62). As shown from the previous quotes, The Nguyen's testimony to a large extent relies on speech and dialogues. Animated by the Word, of nature's wrath in this specific case, it is through direct speech that The Nguyen cares for his community.

As the storm evolves, The Nguyen's position as the prophet evolves into that of the Messiah, the Savior. It seems, nonetheless, important to insist on the fact that throughout the text The Nguyen remains outwardly humble and conveys a strict sense of duty. His management of the evacuees within the school as well as his courageous journeys in the flooded streets meet the demands of his charge:

> I've been a Boy Scout all my life. [...] So experience is one thing. An also, I was placed here to be the leader of this community, and so the situation required that I have to step up and take care of my people. Simple as that. And so we continue with the rescue, with the boats going out. (108)

As *simple*, as The Nguyen's task may appear to be, he nevertheless is asked to accomplish significant actions that could be paralleled with Jesus' miracles in the gospels—if one takes the messiah metaphor further. After having been advised of a woman's desperate attempts to have her husband leave their flooded house, The Nguyen manages to "coax" (161) the newly unemployed depressive into leaving. The Nguyen's aesthetic of impact, is beautifully woven into these crucial events. In an interesting fusion between effective traumatic descriptions and his own powerful observance of the ethics of responsibility, The Nguyen develops a meaningful *ethos* based on solidarity and an almost perfect observance of Trilling's English paradigm for sincerity.

A further example of these *miracles* enhances The Nguyen's unexpected humility. The refugees who were safely accommodated in the school are told to go to a cleared and easily accessible highway for evacuation from the city. Upon learning that these two hundred men, women and children who had to wait on the highway overnight for transportation to arrive are fighting to get on military trucks, The Nguyen decides to take on his responsibility. Like the preacher on Lake Tiberias, he leaves on a boat and decides to talk to them: "At the end, I told my people to go, but protect each other" (133). Ironically, and unexpectedly, this religiously loaded event is immediately followed by The Nguyen's description of his inability to steer the boat he has been left with. With caustic humor, he confesses his all-too-real sacrifice: "it was kind of funny because I don't know how to swim" (134). As if to dispense with his mythical aura, The Nguyen presents his flaws, with the effect of further enhancing his courage.

The Nguyen's humility and commitment to his community does not prevent him from turning a critical lens towards the mayor's and federal administration mismanagements and obvious lack of responsibility. Throughout his testimony, his dissatisfaction with newscasts is rampant. At some point, their reliability becomes more and more dubious. The

Nguyen heard that the water in the streets would be pumped out after a few days. Moreover, the mayor said the power was going to be restored. But then, The Nguyen "heard that the water just swept the sandbags away" (109). The position of the news as the provider of a form of divine Word is here directly questioned. The testimonial ethics of responsibility is, once against, expressed through this direct challenge of official discourses. As often, the official account does not fit the witnesses' experience.

It is in such a challenge that The Nguyen's vow, his final fight, resides. Upon their return to East New Orleans, the South Asian community directly tackles the reconstruction task. This effort would have proven successful if it had not been undermined by mayor Nagin. FEMA proposed two hundred trailers to help the community's return. The Nguyen is, unfortunately, told that the mayor refuses to sign the papers:

> We are asking for the permits so that FEMA can put trailers on our land. We are not asking for permission. This is our homes. We have the right to live in our homes where we choose. That's the beauty of it, isn't it? Other countries—dictatorial, Communist—they tell people where to live and not to live. We are different from that.
>
> At our own peril we are here. At our own joy we are here. (211)

Sickened by such a revelation, The Nguyen's final vow denounces the violation of democratic rights America has always so readily boasted of.

Underground America – El Curita

Underground America contains a number of instances of what could be termed modern-day slave narratives. El Curita's testimony is one of the symptomatic examples of this device. El Curita, whose nickname means "The Little Priest" (158), tells of his lost illusions about this "grand nation" (177) which turned out to be so traumatically disappointing that he, today, hopes to go back to his home country, Guatemala. His testimony, besides its consistent reliance on traditional Christian ideas, presents a number of the recurring plot twists and motifs James Olney sees as characteristic of slave narratives (whose connection with Christian ethics is patent). El Curita exposes the physical and psychological abuse he, his sister and brother-in-law, had to undergo on the whims of the disturbed people smuggler they call "La Americana" (157). The text is punctuated by key events that structure the aesthetic of impact: a sketchy account of parentage, the account of a slave auction, and of a family being separated, the description of failed attempts to escape, and the eventually successful flight (Olney, 153). Tingeing these features with his personal religious *ethos*, El Curita tells of his

traumatic abuse at the hands of La Americana in the hope to educate the American society and justice system about unfortunately common instances of modern-day slavery.

El Curita, at the beginning, adopts a cheerful and good-natured tone as if his religious nature was aimed at brightening the gloomy atmosphere reality seems to be necessarily plunged into. The very sketchy account he offers of his childhood in Guatemala tells of his family's poverty and his fateful decision to leave for the United States in the hope "to take some of the burden from [his] parents' shoulders and try to give them a better life" (158). The first instance of what resembles a slave auction corresponds to his description of the necessary contacts to be made with the smugglers:

> It's done through a telephone call. That's how the contact starts. And then there's another contact, and another, and then another. Some of them call themselves 'Lobo', others 'Aguila.' [...] You pay the amount that reserves your ticket; the rest is paid later. That's how the journey starts. Or the adventure. I don't know which is the better word for it. (157-158)

The *adventure* sounds as an ironic understatement, which somehow suspends the oppressive atmosphere of the narrative. The terms Lobo [wolf] and Aguila [eagle] interestingly recall mythical figures, especially in the imaginary of the Roman Empire, thus recalling the authoritative merciless position of the human smuggler.

This suspension is further enhanced by a parable-like episode El Curita proposes so as to express his unshakeable conviction that "God willed [them] to be where [they are]" (159). During their journey in the desert—a religious motif in itself—the group of illegal immigrants comes unexpectedly across a creek, which leads their guides to give each of them a gallon to fill in and carry around. The next day, they cross the path of another group of immigrants, all children so thirsty that they are "walking like zombies" (160). El Curita's conclusion further emphasizes his religious sentiment: "That incident made me wonder if the creek was real or if God put it there just so we could fill up our jugs for those thirsty kids" (160). The reliance on the religious motif appears, indeed, also symptomatic of slave narratives, the purpose of which is a didactic one. El Curita initially both for himself and for his readers, seeks to provide meaning to the seemingly senseless events of life-story.

A second instance of the slave auction episodes allows El Curita to explain his encounter with the evil La Americana, the modern slave owner. El Curita and his brother-in-law were working for a painting company whose boss comes into contact with the woman and they set up a "contract" (163): the crew would work for the woman a few days a week while still doing painting jobs for their boss. "We were sort of 'lent' to her," (163) he concludes. El

Curita's vocabulary is well chosen and already points at the inconvenient truth: as illegal immigrants, human beings are disposable goods. La Americana later manages to smuggle El Curita, his sister and brother-in-law into Mississippi in order to join the reconstructive effort in the aftermath of Katrina. Their rushed departure appears to be the point of no-return—both literally and figuratively. The three of them end up being detained in La Americana's trailer; any contact with outsiders is prohibited: "little by little, she went from being our boss to being the owner of our lives" (165).

Like any slave owner, La Americana is depicted as a thoroughly evil woman. She is physically and psychologically abusive, refuses to pay her dues, is violent and owns firearms, rummages through the belonging of these people she calls her employees, punishes the slightest rebellious sign by not feeding them. La Americana's greatest power seems to be her manipulative skills: "she manipulated things to suit her own truth[:] [t]hat's where a lot of our fear came from, [...] our fear gave her power over us" (167). Her malevolence seems to attain summits upon the news of El Curita's sister's pregnancy. On the pretext that her dog likes children and that the baby would then be good company for the German shepherd, La Americana insists that the baby should be born in America. In spite of the family wreck that this will cause, El Curita and his brother-in-law pugnaciously campaign for the mother-to-be to go back to Guatemala. The preparations for this heartbreaking departure seem to open a first possibility for escape. It is unfortunately doomed to fail, La Americana forbids the brother-in-law to leave with El Curita and his sister to the Guatemalan consulate in Texas and constantly monitors her two other so-called employees' movements.

As La Americana's abuse grows even worse—she adds soporific drug to their food— El Curita and his brother-in-law resolve to run away: "we decided we had to escape[,] I say 'escape' because that's exactly what it was, an escape[,] [w]e were prisoners" (170). This remark seems to seal their consciousness of their precarious situation. A modern-like association of abolitionists, their most ardent helper, brings them salvation: "the people at the office made us feel that we were human beings, that we mattered" (171). Vicky Cintra, the head of a human rights office for illegal immigrants helps them to come up with a plan. On an afternoon when La Americana left for a walk, El Curita calls Vicky: "it was the moment of truth: whether to continue to stay chained up or to try to gain our freedom" (172). Unfortunately, their torturer returns too soon. The previous quotes show the rhythm El Curita manages to inspire to his readers—a means by which urgency can be easily expressed.

An absurd struggle then takes place between La Americana's and the sheriff's doubtful sense of justice, on the one hand, and, on the other, Cintra's pugnacious' reliance on

the law. The two immigrants' freedom depends on the long-lasting struggle that has been opposing racial prejudices and justice. El Curita appears deeply moved by what he witnesses:

> We waited for the sheriff to come and resolve the standoff, thinking that he would bring peace and justice to the situation—do his job. [...] I thought I had seen racist people before, but that day I believe I saw in the sheriff a true racist. [...] I suppose that color matters more than real justice. If you're not white with blue eyes you don't count in the U.S. [...] The office coordinator [Cintra] just dominated the situation. She was very strong with the law at her side. (173-174)

El Curita's challenge of the authoritative police officer's status of representative of the law shows his deep sense of justice and the disappointment the racist outcome of his predicament brought to him.

El Curita's eventual comments tell of this considerable disappointment in his further delineation of the criminal justice system's dismissal of his case. The aftermath of the traumatic events he went through still torture him but there is no help to expect from the law: "the law didn't help us because the law requires proof. What proof was there that we were being abused? There weren't any physical marks on us" (176). This sad and bitter conclusion seems to point to Raed Jarrar's reflections in *Patriot Acts*. El Curita's testimony serves as further evidence that the United States fail to learn from their past. This "place where justice exists[...], where there [is] respect for human rights," this "grand nation", might actually be "only a delusion in the mind of a little Guatemalan kid" (177).

Patriot Acts – Farid Rodriguez

Farid Rodriguez is a seventy-two-year-old Colombian who immigrated to the United States in his early thirties. Rodriguez's testimony tells of the unbridgeable cultural gap that the 9/11 attacks imposed on American society. As the editors explain, "after 9/11 he found that his Arabic name had changed from oddity to liability" (255). Rodriguez's story falls under the religious paradigm because of its allegorical status. The most distinctive characteristic of religious testimonies resides in their ability to weave personal experience into allegorical narratives representative of human life in its broadest sense. Rodriguez's age-long experience on the American soil leads him to construct his testimony along the lines of what he considers to be human wisdom. It is this higher truth that Rodriguez wishes to disclose through his lived experience. For, even if he seems to be a religious man, Rodriguez does not seem to place humanity's salvation in the hands of God, but rather in the hands of human agents themselves.

Rodriguez recalls his first years in America as a time during which he assimilated with a culture he considered open-minded: it welcomed a "tremendous ethnic and religious diversity" (257-258). South Asian, Latino, Italian, Irish, Arab and Muslim immigrants "are all American to [him]" (258). This idealized situation appears to have been shattered by the 9/11 attacks. If in the past White Americans were delighted to meet the Colombian, because they knew he was from a "hard-working people" (258). The attacks led people to wonder about his status as "one of [them]," "because he looks illegal" (258). Rodriguez's aesthetic of impact is fueled by this overwhelmingly suspicious atmosphere. Just as has been demonstrated from other examples of the religious paradigm, it is the human potentiality for evil—often based on a lack of education—that underlies the injustice the narrators disclose.

Historical precedents are often mentioned in testimonials so as to further enhance the impact of specific descriptions. If Jarrar and El Curita referred to slavery and segregation in the American past, Rodriguez refers to an equally dark episode of European history. His description of the suspicious and frightful atmosphere *foreigners* had to undergo recalls the period of the Holocaust:

> There were new, stricter laws, and a lot of discrimination. Suddenly the police in other cities were stopping people just for looking foreign. [...] Although up to that point I hadn't known anyone personally who had disappeared or been deported, I was reading in the Spanish language press about sudden raids on factories where undocumented people had been openly working for many years. [...] People were being deported and it was happening quickly. [...] I remember reading that the government asked Muslims and Arabs to report themselves, and to be unafraid of deportation. (260)

Rodriguez's use of vocabulary points to a number of the dreadful events mentioned in Holocaust testimonies: disappearances, deportations, obligatory ethnic or religious census. Only the yellow star appears to be missing from the picture, a detail which seems all-to-readily replaced by external appearance, or, indeed, names.

Rodriguez's resort to the aesthetic of impact relies on depictions that closely resemble instances of evil in its worst expression. Yet, more significantly, it also questions this understanding of the figure of the other, or the foreigner, by praising the religious value of tolerance. Americans, out of fear, separate their neighbors into a series of us vs. them communities. Rodriguez realizes that he fits in all the categories of people that are no longer wanted in the country. Because he is part of *them* he has to be removed: "in the eyes of certain Americans, I was less than human[,] [t]o them, I was disposable" (267). In focusing on

specific features of concrete others so as to demonize them, prejudices erase the single category that should lead us to foster solidarity, that of the human.

Shortly after his arrival in the United States in the eighties, Rodriguez was arrested. He was wrongfully accused of possessing narcotics, which led to a deportation sentence; the latter was never implemented. His narrative mainly centers on his second stay in prison in 2004, after he was arrested on grounds of immigration politics. Through his sometimes graphic description of his experience, Rodriguez insists on the deteriorating living conditions of convicts. According to him, such degradation is to blame on the dehumanization of the institution and on the deterioration of human interactions between staff and inmates. If in the eighties, his detention conditions were not ideal, "there was a structure in place" (265), a courteous and administratively efficient structure. In 2004, this structure had disappeared; convicts have become "non-human[s]" (265). Through these strong terms, Rodriguez endeavors to trigger the ethics of responsibility in denouncing institutional failure through the complete disqualification of convicts and secrecy.

Thanks to his wisdom gained through experience, Rodriguez's narrative denounces the alleged truth the system seeks to propagate. In a similar reliance on the motif of humanity, Rodriguez explains the degradation of the system: "I blame it on the many negative things elected officials around the country had said about immigrants and Arabs" (265). "Their comments," he argues, "made the public forget that we belonged and that we were human" (265). In a crooked sense of misplaced responsibility induced by fear, officials seek to motivate their actions with the catch-all term *security*. As Rodriguez cleverly remarks: "I was fairly sure the motivation behind the government's quick deportations was to be able to say to the American public that they were ridding the streets of terrorists and criminals" (268). Questionably, "[i]t was the best way to reassure a frightened public of their safety (268). Rodriguez's conclusion indirectly refers to the USA PATRIOT Act according to which the aliens' liberties may be endangered as long as it serves the citizens' security (Cole 347).

Rodriguez's vow fully expresses his role as a patriarchal figure of wisdom. He dispenses the knowledge he acquired through his experience and offers an admonition that will benefit all humans:

> As a nation, we are going through an ethical crisis [...]. It's important that we, especially those of us who come from 'other' cultures, listen to each other's stories. It may inspire someone to ask for justice. [...] In the years I have left, I hope to see the system working fairly for the majority again. (269)

Rodriguez's message is that sketched out in Benhabib's theoretical reflections: the best way for us to respect our rights as generalized others is to listen to our individualized concrete stories.

Inside this Place, Not of It – Charlie Morningstar

Like Rodriguez, Charlie Morningstar approaches the religious paradigm, as a means to develop a form of ex-centered wisdom based on the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility. A sixty-six-year-old transgender Native-American, Morningstar questions society's restricted perception of gender and sexuality and its resulting discriminatory treatment of supposedly deviant individuals. Morningstar describes his particular feeling of injustice faced with a sort of double wrongful imprisonment: as a male imprisoned in a female body, and as a convict for a murder he did not commit.[131] Sentenced to twenty-seven years to life, Morningstar describes the social and institutional pressures he has been faced with so as to conform to conventional gender identities. His testimony does more than disclose institutional malfunctions based on prejudicial behaviors: it questions the dogmas and values that inherently structure our perception of the world and conception of social reality. Being biologically female, Morningstar is imprisoned in a women's prison, but his demand to be legally recognized as a male might raise a number of structural questions society seems currently unable to address. These questions, Morningstar contends, might find answers in viewpoints peripheral to Western rationality.

Morningstar begins his testimony with the spirit motif that recurs throughout the text: "I always knew my spirit was masculine, that it wasn't simply homosexuality" (188). His presentation of homosexuality as 'simple' already reveals Morningstar's unusual open-mindedness. As a representative of a minority vantage point, he is nevertheless quickly faced with "worry" (188) in the person of his mother. Morningstar's mother stands as the first representative of the prejudiced, limited, posture that Western society dictates."[C]onsidering the world and the human beings in it," (188) the mother fears that her daughter's spirit could put her in danger. "She tried to prepare me for the world the way it was," (188) Morningstar explains. This initial opposition within the haven the family should represent reminds one of Medina's similar handling of the religious paradigm. Both narrators uncover a different truth, which puts them in an outcast position condemning them to contempt. Morningstar's spiritual

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[131] Just as the editors of the volumes decided to respect Morningstar's wish to be referred to with masculine pronouns, I will refer to the narrator here as a 'he'.

understanding articulates his poignant description of discrimination with his responsibilizing gesture in informing of another possible attitude.

Morningstar's life previous to incarceration is punctuated with his frustrating encounters with society's limited understanding of rationality. From I.Q. tests leading his mother to "discourage [his] masculinity" (189) and to make him wear overtly feminine apparel, to his discovery of verbal violence in bars, he is trained in the limited assignment of roles that serves as the *external* world's epistemological currency. Morningstar, indeed, depicts the reservation as a privileged enclave where native wisdom managed to repel Western discriminatory reason:

> [G]rowing up, people on the reservation and at boarding school would talk about males being more-girl like, or females being boyish. There wasn't really stigma. Mostly, the reservation kids just accepted that I was once a little girl who became a little boy—without any surgery or anything, but just because of the way I was (190).

His quick realization that this positive atmosphere is impossible to recreate on the outside leads Morningstar to hide his biological nature.

Assuming a position that would approach that of the legendary trickster, changeling or doppelgänger, he is forced to impersonate his real self. As he is "passing as male" (129) and cleverly hides his physical attributes, Morningstar managed to escape overt discrimination. He argues that unable to know "who [he] could trust" (192), his only solution was secrecy. "I felt that people would not accept me for myself," (192) he confesses.[132] Surprisingly, this impersonating masquerade actually allows Morningstar to pass for who he really is; a male. This necessary dissimulation nevertheless leaves him embittered, a state of mind that exacerbated by his conviction for the alleged first-degree murder of his girlfriend.

Morningstar's aesthetic of impact is based on this contradictory movement between the prejudiced understanding of gender being essentially double and the magical/spiritual atmosphere he creates around his character. Morningstar's protective decision to pass as a male backfires on him. The trickster, the changeling, the doppelgänger, assumes its gothic, frightening aura—the press will see to it—and the criminal justice system arranges things so

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[132] Morningstar is rather contradictory in his account of this specific period. His first comment presents a relative liberty from discrimination yet earned at the great cost of dissimulation. Later on in his testimony however, he refers to the period that extended from the moment he left High School to his arrest as the stage of his life when "[he] was able to be [him], and to be accepted as [such]" (193).

as to rid society of this dangerous figure. Morningstar candidly expresses his anger: "while the charge and the sentence impact my life, I feel that the discrimination I received during arrest, trial and commitment to prison is the greatest injustice I have experienced" (193). "It was like my gender was what I was really on trial for," (193) he remarks. Sensationalistic headlines represent the most hurtful of these public attacks: "Woman who lives as a man murders girlfriend" (193). Charles Morningstar, whom the judge eventually orders to be called Charlene, is hit full force by the narrow point of view he had up to then tried to circumvent. According to this slender norm, the jury should infer dishonesty from Morningstar's attempts at "masquerading as male" (195). Perceived as a "butch[...], [a] dyke" (194), a "sexual deviant" (195), " a freak" (196), Morningstar's arrival at the penitentiary resembles that of a legendary animal at the zoo. Derogatory labels are a recurring motif in the traumatic experience witnesses disclose in testimonials of social empowerment. As Cyrulnik explains, the trauma of injustice leads them to construct rather fearful chimeras, and as he argues, this exposure to prejudice—in the sense of misplaced recognition—is often worse than concealment.

Morningstar's ethics of responsibility, on the other hand, relies significantly on Western rationality and its resulting social system. Being in an overt "fight mode" (195), that is ready to face an imminent attack, Morningstar rapidly comes to realize that his most invaluable asset are his legal rights. Faced with a wrongful log for "homosecting"[133] (196) and with another for possession of boxer shorts, he "start[s] writing [officers up]" (197). His ability to fend for himself through his rights gives him "fortitude" (197). This newly gained empowerment is further heightened by the realization that other human beings—understand white rationalists—are actually capable of understanding and do sometimes shoulder their responsibilities. Morningstar comes in contact with Barb—the true helper in his story, a woman who ends up in possession of some of his personal property, which had been stolen by his lawyer's secretary. Imbued with a strong feeling of justice, Barb wishes to right the wrong in returning his possessions to Morningstar but also in shouldering a responsibility she had been forgetful of:

> [F]rom everything that I've read, I don't believe you did this crime, and I think the conviction occurred because of discrimination and prejudice. I'm one of the people of the state of California who should have been watching, and I wasn't. (198)

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[133] Prison lingo "which means engaging in homosexual activity, as in sexual activity" (196).

Barb, a beautiful impersonation of the religious figure of the Good Samaritan, further supports Morningstar's rational understanding of responsible ethics. Moreover, Morningstar's double reliance on Native and Christian spirituality is also expressed through his several reference to other symbols, such as stigma.

As positive as this encounter appears to be, Morningstar cannot completely endorse this imposed rationality: at the end of the day, it remains at odds with his spiritual nature. Having realized his own responsibilities through his exposure to limited social values, he chooses to devise a structure that would allow figures similar to his own to fully bloom, because "as long as you feel inadequate, you will not become all you can be" (200). Morningstar's vow finds its fulfillment in his creation of the "Two Spirits Wellness Group" (201). With a return to the spirit motif, Morningstar reunites with his tradition:

> [I]n Native American culture, there aren't just two genders, [...] people who are gay/lesbian/transgender are actually two spirit people, in their psychological self, spiritual self. And that maybe the one spirit – male or female – is more dominant than the other, but always recognizing the other. (201).

Recognition, acceptance, open-mindedness, everything that he was actually denied are Morningstar's final vow for society: "My whole thing is to let people have a space to be themselves" (202).

III.2.4 The Activist Paradigm

If the intimate narrator wishes to bond with her readers so as to trigger empathy, if the forensic narrator wishes to sensitize readers to society's malfunctions while proving that citizens' rights do matter, if the religious narrator proposes a privileged access to the higher truth of actual justice, the activist narrator wants to shock and outrage so as to motivate to actions that will open new possibilities. The activist paradigm of testimonial *ethos* indeed is the one that most significantly capitalizes on the aesthetic of impact. As a sort of cynical pendant to the intimate paradigm, the militant narrator makes use primarily of the communication axis of Greimas's actantial model. In these cases, however, the narrator does not seek to create an empathic intimate bond with her readers. She rather hopes to exert the impact necessary to trigger indignant feelings—a parallel to Renault's perturbation—that may transform the experience of injustice into a struggle for justice. Communication takes an even more significant sense in this specific paradigm as it is the institution of the public sphere that is particularly targeted. As legitimate heir to the 1960s social movements, the activist narrator lays emphasis on her sense of duty or mission. Significantly, advocacy relies on a complete

access to the deliberative procedures and fora offered by society as well as on plain talk—a recurring motif of the paradigm. Yet it also demands transparency in the publicity of governmental policies.

These issues hint at the importance attached to Greimas's power axis. The activist narrator, more often than not, is presented as both a helper and opponent for their readers. The texts' significant reliance on shock can be achieved only at this expense: it partitions the readership and may very well lose some of its portions altogether. The activist paradigm, as opposed to the previous examples, mainly capitalizes on the moral value of self-esteem. As true activists, the narrators are fighting for the recognition of their position as valued contributors to society's functioning—thus emphasizing their position as individuals with concrete values. This fight can, of course, adopt a number of different modes of expression. The format of disclosure aimed at awareness-raising obviously capitalizes on the figure of the concrete other. However, it is these stories resonance in the generalized public that is primarily aimed for. The bond created here is that of pure solidarity, a duty that all should shoulder.

Gary Gauger's sarcastic rhetoric opens the section. His deadpan humor represents his personal appropriation of plain talk. Though he does not really want to shock, the impact his story proposes is that of his own bewilderment at having been violently thrown in the seemingly alternate reality of police interrogations. Patricia Thompson's story stands as a textbook case of the activist *ethos*. She does, indeed, overtly propose plain talk. The aggressiveness of her tone denounces the dismissive doings of police officers and authorities. The impact she creates is that of direct contact with the harsh reality of racism and discrimination in a situation of utter chaos. Lorena's story goes along a milder, yet as persuasive, line. As if in a short bildungsroman, the young illegal immigrant tells of her training in the world of militancy. Lorena's story introduces a recurrent motif of the paradigm in the form of the narrator's quest for identity—a motif that was already developed in Tabatha Rowley's story. If Gauger and Thompson, as mature adults, propose full-blown examples of the activist's powerful persona, Lorena informs of its birth in the form of youth's political ideals.

Amir Sulaiman adopts an undeniably rebellious posture, which most powerfully expresses through his poetry. His text presents an aesthetic potency that approaches that of a blow. His hostility is however mitigated by significant moments of doubt. These again seem recurring features of the paradigm. As activists, the narrators seem rather belligerent but also humanly fallible. Francesca Salavieri's text offers a beautiful example of this fallibility. Her

construction of a childish ethics and *logos* of denunciation nevertheless allows her to describe her evolution to maturity. As Rowley, it is through her education in the criminal justice system that Salavieri gained empowerment and now militates for its expansion in her community.

Surviving Justice – Gary Gauger

Gauger's testimony offers a smooth introduction to the activist paradigm. The account of his traumatic encounter with the criminal justice system provides a sarcastic denunciation of police investigation and overzealous interrogation procedures. Featured in numerous articles, documentary films and even a play, Gauger courageously overcomes the panic that his speaking engagements trigger so as to assume his self-proclaimed position as an activist. On the one hand, his narrative ends on a description of the heavy emotional aftermath of his wrongful conviction for his parents' murders, yet, on the other, he insists on the necessity of his story to be disclosed so as for active social evolution to take place. His story, entitled "I stepped into a dream," (77) hurls the readers into a surreally distorted reality where "police do lie" (93) and lawyers fail to address crucial issues that could help save a man's life from death row.

Gauger's aesthetic of impact manifests itself through a reliance on a language that describes trauma through repetitions and sarcastic images disrupting realistic depictions. Gauger's story begins with memories of his past life explaining how this thirty-nine-year-old man ended up moving back to his parents' farm. Gauger describes a peaceful life organized around family dinners and the daily work in the glasshouse over his organic crops. On 8 April 1993, Gauger wakes up late to discover a fatefully quiet house. It is not before the next day that he steps upon his father's body in his workshop. "It was a shock" (81), Gauger guilelessly remarks. This discovery marks the beginning of his trauma and leads him to start to repeatedly refer to his emotional state: "that was a shock […] it was all just all shock at this point" (83). This repetitive pattern exerts a hammering effect that serves Gauger's persuasive rhetoric. Gauger hammers down series of short sentences—"I was numb[;] I was trying to help" (83); "I was upset" (84); "I was being honest[;] I mostly just felt exhausted" (86). This telegraphic style is aimed at conveying utter bewilderment. This confusion, nevertheless, supports Gauger's militant purpose by mimicking the institutional pandemonium.

Brought to the police station after the discovery of his mother's body by the police, Gauger uses a particularly apt metaphor to describe his first step in the perverted reality of disingenuous interrogation tactics:

> It felt like I was dreaming. Everything looked real, felt real. It just lacked all depth.
> There was no emotion. I wasn't acting like a character in a made-for-TV movie, which
> is not how real people act. There's no telling how anyone's going to act. I was just
> going through the motions. (83)

Caught in-between the eerie atmosphere of reality and his seemingly unreal lack of emotion, Gauger is unable to draw a clear boundary between fact and fiction. As if he had become the protagonist of a B picture thriller, Gauger seems unable to adapt the scenario the police would love to see him impersonate.

Gauger appears nonetheless well aware of some of the usual twists the plot of such a detective story may present. This discernment supports the second aspect of his aesthetic of impact: a caustic form of deadpan humor. His all-night interrogation happened after the discovery of his parents' bodies. Gauger is brought to the station but is not notified that he is under arrest. On top of these two elements, which are already telling examples of abuse of authority, Gauger's account discloses further illicit police techniques he was unable to defend himself against mainly because of his naivety and blind trust in the criminal justice system. The officers, when "[Gauger] ran out of things to say about [his] folks and the last couple days" (85), started posing hypothetical questions hinting at his presumed guilt, thus capitalizing on his overtly cooperative behavior. It is through sarcastic remarks that Gauger presents the officers' "bizarre" (86) tactics aimed at drawing out his confession. Faced with a male and a female officer, Gauger quickly realizes that behavior pathetically mimics cinematographic stereotypes. Calling the male officer a "blusterous buffoon," Gauger is well aware of the officers little game, "playing good cop, bad cop" (87). As typical at this motif appears to be in popular fiction, it seems ill fitted in this real life situation. It is this exact shock at having been hurled in an unreal situation that Gauger wants to convey.

Gauger's interrogation has indeed become "too bizarre" (87). The officers now conjure up pieces of evidence: a bloody knife, bloody clothes from his bedroom. Gauger is on the defensive. Gauger cannot believe what the officers are telling him:

> I asked them, 'Can you lie?' They said, 'No, we can't lie. If we lied, we would lose
> our jobs.' I asked them, 'How do you like your jobs?' They said, 'We love our jobs'.
> They seemed so believable. I couldn't understand why they would lie. I was still
> looking at these people to help me solve the murder of my parents. (88)

Gauger's sarcastic question and even grotesque remark about the officers' wish to keep their jobs tells of his effective management of rhetorical effects. He skillfully conveys his own

confusion while supporting it with a pronounced ironical undertone. Gauger's sarcastic intervention exposes the officers' deceit.

Gauger's aesthetic of impact in order to convey his inability at understanding the situation he is faced with relies on fictional features and thus serves his depiction of the ethics of responsibility. In a recuperation of the recurrent motif of the gullible narrator and the evil representative of justice, Gauger militantly speaks in favor of the necessity to educate social agents. "People don't understand how false confession can take place" (96) and it is Gauger's role to denounce the institutional tactics that can lead to this extreme type of mistake. The responsibility of the evil officers lies in the traumatic factual and emotional consequences of having "brainwashed"(95) Gauger into believing that he had indeed killed his parents during an alcoholic blackout. Gauger's and the jury's mistake lies in their gullibility and complacency about police officers. The criminal justice system's responsibility lies in its staging of a trial "where no motive is established, no confession is written down or signed, no physical evidence ties [the defendant] to the crime" (96). Gauger never confessed to the crime and never accepted to sign any form approaching a confession. He thus, unlike Ochoa's skillful metaphor hints at, refused the devil's pact. During the trial, the officers actually used responses Gauger had uttered during the hypothetical reenactment that led them to postulate that Gauger's violent attack had been overshadowed by an alcoholic blackout. They, of course, deliberately omitted the details of the interrogation tactics. As inconceivable as these events may appear, it is Gauger's responsibility to expose them so as to avoid their possible recurrence.

The activist's role is that of bettering society by triggering the necessary impulse for change in his fellow citizens. "My case is an excellent example of why we need transparency in the police department and interrogation rooms," (102) Gauger advocates. In spite of his "vivid memories of the injustice" (103), his vow is clear:

> Every time I think about getting out of a speaking engagement, all I have to do is remember what it was like waking up one day behind bars [...]. And if I can prevent this from happening to one person, I'll speak out for the rest of my life. [...] [W]e [...] felt we were fairly street-smart and yet we were really naïve and ignorant about what goes on in the court rooms, the interrogation room, and the criminal justice system in general. So it's a campaign to just educate people and wizen them up to what's going on. Hopefully to stir some people to want to change things, and if not to change them, at least to say, 'Hey, look out! Bridge out up ahead.' (102)

Voices from the Storm – **Patricia Thompson**

The activist paradigm, as I had first devised it, was aimed at proposing an overarching description for these texts that most resolutely expressed their narrators' wish to actively engage in social change. These testimonies embody the cultural aspect of social movements textually activating Renault's practical and normative dynamics through a militant, often aggressive language. Gauger's account offered a sort of lukewarm endorsement of the paradigm, insisting on the primary traumatic aspect of his experience of injustice. Patricia Thompson's testimony, on the other hand, offers a telling example of the cantankerous tone symptomatic of the paradigm. Anger fuels her discourse while she presents Hurricane Katrina as the culminating event that exposed to America and to the rest of the world Louisiana's most shameful forms of racial and social discrimination.

Thompson, sets the tone from the very beginning, indeed from the few pages that describe her life before the storm. Being a woman from the projects she "had a chance to see that racism is alive and well" (8). This fifty-year-old African American woman has seen and lived it all: "anything that you can imagine that might happen to a poor community my kids and I have seen" (8). As she grew "tired of the abuse" (8), Thompson turned to social movements for help. Through the "big learning experience" (8) she was offered with *Undo Racism* workshops organized by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, Thompson turns into an informed and responsible activist committed to her community's empowerment. Educated about the long-lasting history of racial discrimination, Thompson understands that "the problems that [they] had in New Orleans did not start with the hurricane" (8). Thompson engages in the community consortium and unsurprisingly steps into a job that unexpectedly anticipates the tenor of her testimony: "the job I was on at that time was called Plain Talk, and that's just what it was, plain talk" (9). Thompson's catchphrase has been uttered: what she proposes in the volume is plain talk, a speech that will debunk "you know, all of this [official] good stuff, which of course c[omes] out to be anything but the truth" (9).

This last quote somehow summarizes Thompson's aesthetic of impact and ethics of responsibility. Through direct addresses, she signals her imminent disclosure of what really happened as opposed to the "bald-faced lies" (70) the news and authorities fed to the public. Thompson's testimony functions as a cycle of denunciatory gestures she attaches to the most traumatic events she and her family went through while trying to be rescued from New Orleans' noxious flooded streets. Thompson seeks to indict the agents and institutions she considers liable for the blatant negligence the management of the victims' assistance displayed. Thompson's first argument consists in denouncing the main mistake that was made

before the storm; that is, the late mandatory evacuation. The citizens were ordered to evacuate less than twenty-four hours before the storm made landfall and no transportation was organized whatsoever. Thompson represents the voice of those who simply could not physically leave: "I know you've heard all of this foolishness about the people that did not want to leave" (70). Yet she materially had no way to depart, with but one dollar in her pocket and no vehicle, leaving the city was not an option. Thompson is well aware of the causes of this would-be negligence: "I know that race card was being played[,] I don't know exactly what percentage of the city had evacuated, but there were masses and masses and masses of black people left in the city" (71). Her outraged remarks articulate the impact of the harsh reality she experiences with her acute sense of responsibilities.

Trapped in a city that is "like one big riot" (71), Thompson and the twenty members of her large family take refuge in the projects building, which are "good for things like natural disasters, because you got bricks" (111). Once water has been cut out from the buildings, she realizes that it is time to "try and get rescued" (111). Thompson's plain talk is no doublespeak, she candidly refers to their necessary resort to looting: "at this point, it's not stealing, it's survival" (112). Their fight for survival is, however, violently repressed by the police:

> It's dark, there's broken items all over the floor, there's glass, and they're in the place shooting. And the police are shootin' because they want the people to get out so they can get what they want. [...] You name it, they were stealing it, and the residents were getting blamed for it! I seen the stuff that they had. I seen guns. I seen TVs. I seen computers. (112)

Here again, Thompson shows she is not easily fooled. The TVs, guns and computers citizens have been accused to steal ended up in the back of the officers' personal vehicles. Her angry tone is here further sustained by her colloquial repetitive syntax. This episode is further contrasted with another episode in Thompson's testimony in which she tells of a young woman's reluctance to loot milk for her baby from a supermarket. As it is factually announced by the editors, by Wednesday August 31, the authorities ordered the police force to stop any search and rescue operation to focus on stopping the looting (117). The officers' overt overstepping of their authority and excessive reliance on physical force appears to obliterate their pledge to serve and protect citizens, a fact Thompson cannot silently accept.

Thompson further vents her anger against the authorities when she recounts her family's arrival at the highway bridge they had been informed would serve as a temporary shelter. She describes the scene in her colorful plain style:

Lo and behold, this is where we met resistance. The guns weren't pointed at us, but they were raised. […] You see, the sheriff, Mr. Harry Lee—and I say Mr. Harry Lee because I can't even tell you what I'd like to call him 'cause he's an egotistical, racist, ignorant somebody—he definitely has no love for blacks it's just blatant. The politicians have been doing what they want to do and getting away with it for so long now, it's the normal thing to do. […] Let me tell you something. That is nothing new for New Orleans. The police been doing that. The police has been doing that. And I hate to say it, but the black police are just as bad as the white. That's the way I read it, anyway. (123-124)

Fully assuming her position of the bellowing militant, Thompson hammers down the troubling truth some of the other contributors to the volume already voiced: New Orleans has been long devoured by cancerous corruption and mismanagement, Katrina simply lifted the veil. Thompson seems to consider these two evils to be even worse than racism as they run rampant across all communities.

Thompson's testimony ends on similarly negative remarks. If she eventually considers Katrina to have been a sort of blessing for her because it allowed her to leave New Orleans and start anew in Texas, her experience nevertheless left her a bitter taste. Faced with the inhumanity of authoritarian police and dismissive military and FEMA representatives, the only solution she appears to advocate is that of solidarity and independence. Faced with her dehydrated fellow refugees, Thompson wholeheartedly gives up some of her own water: "I was like, 'Use the water,' 'cause where we were, there was no help, we had to help each other" (143). In the absurd inhumanity of what makes for their everyday-life society, these invisible individuals have to fend for themselves in sticking together.

Underground America – Lorena

Lorena's testimony offers yet another approach to the activist paradigm. Like a bildungsroman, it is the story of the life of a developing activist that the Mexican-American young woman is here sharing. Lorena immigrated to the United States at the age of six with her mother, stepfather and two younger brothers, primarily to escape their abusive alcoholic father. Lorena recounts her memories of crossing the boundary after a long walk through the desert, of her first weeks in an English-speaking school, of the experiences of her hard-working mother. Lorena's identity and social position is already a telling example of the necessary evolution immigration policies need to go through in the United States. She represents the typical embodiment of the young immigrant who has been spending most of

her life on American soil, is totally integrated in the educational system and society, and feels committed to her community, but is constantly impaired in her social evolution because of her lack of documentation. In this very sense, Lorena's testimony speaks for itself. She, however, voices a deep concern for her active positioning in social change. Because she was offered the opportunity of education, she considers that her duty lays in contributing her fair social share.

In 2002, when a law still allowed undocumented immigrants to pay in-state tuition, Lorena started college. Her first encounter with systemic inconsistencies arises at that very moment:

> I had to sign an affidavit that I graduated from a California high school, that I'd been there a certain number of years, and that I would get legal residency as soon as I was able to. I think that last one is for those conservatives who think we're just educating terrorists. It's pretty ludicrous. I mean, who wouldn't want to get legal residency? (190).

Young Lorena realizes the absurd paradox of institutions: she meets a set of criteria that give her access to higher education but has been a non-existing citizen for twelve years or so. Her use of the pronoun *we* and her final remark tell of her deep sense of identification for this country she has known almost forever. The incongruity of conservative policies, assuming that immigrants refuse to legally integrate, strikes her hard.

She leads her reader to follow her development as a young woman in search for a true identity and a purpose in life. When her advisor tells her of an internship in North Carolina with immigrant farmworkers, Lorena's missionary instincts are awakened. She appears deeply grateful to her parents' "backbreaking labor," (190) which allowed her to access education. Faced with the opportunity to help laborers, she feels that it is a true opportunity for her to meet her "need to give back" (190). Lorena takes her sense of responsibility for granted: it is a simple question of duty. Though this internship will force her to travel, hence expose her to possible legal retaliations, she decides to go, against her family's will. Lorena's aesthetic of impact manifests itself through ingenuous comments over her experience. In the same way as the hero of a bildungsroman is faced with his own psychological and moral evolution, Lorena questions her decisions: "I was trying to make something better, trying to broaden my horizons, and I had people telling me not to do it" (191). "So, I think that's why I did it, because people kept telling me not to do it," (191) she confesses. In spite of her parents' reluctance, the young girl is leaving the family home for an initiatory journey.

Similarly, Lorena's arrival in North Carolina leads her to share her sense of inappropriateness. Becoming an activist demands adaptations: Lorena is picked up at the airport and brought to somebody's house where she is served tofu. "It was horrible," she says, "that first day was really difficult for me [,] [i]t was all too hippie-ish" (191). Again, her innocence is disarming. Abandoning the fierceness of Thompson's voice, the activist paradigm in this case settles for the beauty of young utopian ideals. Nevertheless, this internship is about learning how to become a militant, and Lorena lets her readers know this by a succession of well-chosen term: she is brought to the "headquarters," is trained on what "to fight for," is coached into "marching," "picketing," and "protest[ing]" (191). Her youth overtakes her again, in spite of her good will: "right away, I thought, I don't know if I want to do this. It was a little too much exposure for me, and I didn't know if I'd get into any trouble" (191). In spite of her precarious position, Lorena stands fast. Her youth, through her treatment of the aesthetic of impact, indicates that the activist paradigm does not necessarily need to rely on shock and indignation but can become friendly, even moving.

As she majors in premed biology, Lorena's internship is not restricted to activism, she also takes part in a research project about the effect of pesticides on farmworkers' children. The project turns out to be a revelation for her: "part of my job was to educate people, [...] [a]nd we were able to help in other ways" (192). "My experience at the internship opened my eyes to a lot of injustice that I didn't want to know about before," (193) she vouches. This last remark, of course, hints at her readers' similar behavior faced with issues related to immigration. The workers' deteriorating health, their squalid living conditions, the growers' blatant lack of humanity, Lorena's own predicament appears almost foolish to her compared to these men's and women's lot.

As she is gaining in maturity, Lorena presents her testimonial vow as a moment of epiphany:

> When I saw all this, I told my supervisor that my mission is to change one person's life. Educate one person, so if their boss tries to be bad to them, they'll say, "No, I know you can't do that, that's against the law." If I can do that, then I've done my job as a human being. I at least wanted to give them the knowledge to defend themselves with. (194)

Lorena's implicit message is, of course, that of emulation. "My job as a human being" is to help around, to raise awareness. As human beings, she indirectly contends, her readers are all required to do the same.

Lorena, in spite of her still current quest for identity and citizenship as an illegal immigrant, transformed her words in actions and created a campus organization aimed at helping local farmworkers. In a candid passage on pages 198 and 199, Lorena questions her identity as a Mexican immigrant in the United States, refusing to abide by stereotypical standards of the Mexican, the Latina or the Chicana. Yet, she confesses that "[she] had come back from North Carolina full of fire and revolutionary spirit" (199). Knowing her mission is to carry on "educating people about the issues" (199), she, again, very candidly invites her readers to follow the lead. Her future educational prospects in becoming a doctor say it all, "it's about helping people" (201). Lorena's story calls for countless sequels. If such a young girl whose status as a citizen is unfortunately precarious managed to undertake such a solidary endeavor, the average citizen is capable of ten times more. Lorena's testimony though it belongs to the directness of the militant paradigm seeks to meaningfully bring out the activist inside her readers.

Patriot Acts – Amir Sulaiman

As mentioned previously, the activist paradigm, as I first defined it, implies a rather aggressive writing-style and tone. Narrators are lineal descendants of consciousness-raising movements; accordingly, voicing vehement protest is the main purpose of their effort at disclosing their personal experience. As can be concluded from the previous examples, this protest can take different forms. Amir Sulaiman's text offers a telling example of the slap-in-the-face aesthetic this specific paradigm may adopt. Sulaiman presented by the editors as a poet, activist and teacher, sets the tone of his militant testimony with his opening statement: "I'm an artist. I'm a Muslim. I'm a pretty serious man about serious things" (133). It is, indeed, a very serious issue that Sulaiman wishes to plainly put in his readers' face. He presents his personal experience and art as means to animate in his audience an indignant response to the senseless "drunken patriotism" (136) Americans have been intoxicated with after the 9/11 attacks. Overtly questioning the authority of American officials (mainly FBI agents) and the seemingly limitless jurisdiction permitted by the USA PATRIOT act, Sulaiman through his poetry and testimony adopts an irreverent yet responsible rebellious posture.

As an African-American, Sulaiman has been used to a lifelong endurance of racial discrimination. Raised in an all-white neighborhood by a mother who courageously put up with racial and economic discrimination in the hope to offer wider opportunities to her kids, Sulaiman seems to have realized since adolescence the destructive potential of misplaced self-

consciousness: "I was hyper conscious of my blackness, and I made everyone around me conscious of it" (134). He adds: "I knew even at that age that race had too much room in my consciousness" (134). Race, it seems, has too much room in the consciousness of all, a problem that identity politics has not always helped to defuse. Sulaiman overtly confesses that his self-consciousness had first led him to radicalism in his younger years. This radical point of view seems to have been counterbalanced by his education into Islam during the eighties. Sulaiman presents Muslims as the "Eagle Scout[s] of blackness" (135), people who care for their communities and seek to better their people's lot, who display in fact a different, conscientious, form of self-consciousness.

It seems needless to insist on the fact that Sulaiman puts self-consciousness at the center of both his aesthetic of impact and ethics of responsibility. Sulaiman's message challenges coercive and intolerant efforts at asserting one's community's powerful position. Sulaiman's understanding of self-consciousness, which implies a number of rights but more meaningfully a number of responsibilities towards other communities, constitutes his crucial contribution to the volume's main issues. His aesthetic of impact is mainly achieved through the poetry he quotes in his testimony. Sulaiman's art stands as his major asset, his personal way of unraveling intricate issues that Americans have a general tendency to oversimplify, or overshadow. The first excerpt Sulaiman proposes deals with his mother's selfless devotion for her children's education, which most often resulted in a severe form of urban poverty. This behavior awakened Sulaiman's sense of responsibility as a man. He is thus indirectly questioning racial and social forms of discrimination and broaches another form of injustice triggered by systemic inconsistencies:

> Two jobs during the day and one at night.
>
> And the struggle I saw her enduring
>
> I never want to see in my wife.
>
> So I know that being a man is more than being a male.
>
> AND I'm focused and I'm doing it right. (134)

Sulaiman explains how the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, most particularly the war in Afghanistan, led his art to adopt a "different energy" and become "way more overtly aggressive" (137). "[D]riven by this feeling of anger and injustice" (137), Sulaiman decides to defend his religious community by opening a cultural dialogue: "I wanted to say things that would force people to respond" (137). This attitude will lead him to be faced with very different types of reactions from the most positive to the most negative ones. Indeed, through

his art, Sulaiman adopts, for some, the position of the helper, while for others he acts as an opponent.

In early 2004, Sulaiman was invited to perform at HBO's *Def Poetry Jam*. Sensing that this invitation represents an opportunity for him to voice protest about the war, he decides to perform "Danger", a poem fuelled by anger at senseless violent intolerance while also presenting the terrorist's position. Sulaiman knows that he is going to shock but assumes his position of the bull in the China shop and decides to introduce his performance as follows:

> This poem has four reasons for being. Number one, it's a poem of desperation. Number two, it's a poem to remind those who would like to be reminded. Number three, it's a poem to remind those who would not like to be reminded. And number four, it's to inform those who don't know. (138)

Needless to say, this introduction offers a powerful articulation of the aesthetic of impact and the ethics of responsibility. The dominant note of this powerful piece "[is] anger," (139) yet the poem cleverly questions Justice—which he sees "between plans and action" (139)—and Freedom—"between the page and the pen" (140). Sulaiman's aim is to shock but also to trigger an emotional response. His endeavor initially achieved considerable success. Ironically, Sulaiman explains this success with a sentence that could easily stand as a statutory definition of the testimonial aesthetic of impact: "I think the only way I can attribute [this emotional success] to is just the sincerity, that although it can be seen as political, it's really just a man expressing for so many people" (141). He stands in the exact position of the activist who relies on poetry and the mass media as his megaphone for protest.

Sulaiman's success, however, was short-lived. Right after the poem was aired, he was informed while being at his mother-in-law's that FBI agents wished to speak with him. As could have been expected Sulaiman's vehement words coupled with his religious affiliation raised a number of concerns. "That black consciousness, and that black revolutionary narrative combined with the current political, social, and legal environment around Muslims, Islam and terrorism made for what appeared to be a deadly recipe," (143) Sulaiman remarks. Approached by the agents, he refuses any form of interrogation without counsel. Sulaiman is aware of custody, deportation and disappearance stories within the Muslim community and chooses to adopt the lowest possible profile. His refusal to cooperate leads to month-long harassment; FBI agents tap his phone, on several occasions they try to call or approach him, put him on a no-fly list and even question his family, his friends, his boss and his former students. Caught up by fear, Sulaiman resigns from his teaching job, refuses to get out of his house, living as a hermit.

It is self-consciousness, again, that will trigger his return to the social world, as well as his decision to responsibly respond to this blatant trespassing on a citizen's rights to privacy and freedom of speech. It is because of an encounter with "some of the people a generation older [...], who had gone through a lot of this in the Islamic movements and the Black Liberation movements in the sixties" (145) that Sulaiman experiences a radical change of behavior. Sulaiman realizes that silence is not the answer, that it should never be the answer: "you have to be on the offensive and talk about it and write about it" (145). He chooses to smartly go on the offensive and writes a public statement entitled "The High Cost of the Freedom of speech".[134] Sulaiman's ethics of responsibility expresses itself, as his aesthetic did, through the power of words and speech. As a rightful descendant of his communities' historical liberation leaders, Sulaiman assumes the position of the activist as a responsible citizen, not only enjoying but capitalizing on his inalienable rights.

His testimonial vow manifests itself as an unquestionable mission statement, but also as a controversial issue he proposes his audience to ponder upon:

> [T]he experience helped me to crystallize my resolve and my mission. The whole thing showed me the importance of what I do. Altogether that was a defining moment in my life. [...] This whole scenario, as it's played out, has taught me about the power of language, of words and art, and that that power enlightens some people and inspires some people. [...] As light destroys darkness, as the voice destroys silence, every act of creation is an act of destruction. And so the question is what will you create and what will you destroy? (147)

Sulaiman's mission is that of consciousness-raising in the sense of awakening the responsibilities all citizens should shoulder in entering the communicative action a deliberative democracy should display. Freedom of speech is not a right, it's a duty which a number of social agents seem all-too-eager to forget.

Inside this Place not of It – Francesca Salavieri

Francesca Salavieri's testimony resembles in a number of ways Tabatha Rowley's story and her treatment of the activist paradigm. Salavieri displays a similar naivety and immaturity towards her experience behind bars. She eventually contrasts this previous lack of self-awareness with a powerful discernment she acquired through educational empowerment. Here again the activist paradigm does not seem to develop through aggressiveness. Salavieri's long

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[134] The exposure actually led the FBI to eventually abandon their investigation.

mental history leads her to adopt a childish *ethos* through which she denounces her numerous opponents: mean officers, violent fellow inmates, incompetent medical staff and brutal medical procedures. It is only by the end of her text that she represents the crystallization of her maturity through an unexpected figure, which leads her to utter a hopeful vow for her future as a helpful figure for her community.

Salvieri's text begins with the depiction of her younger years. Her profile, in itself, lists all possible traumas that can be imposed on women in our society. She grew up as the younger of six in a working-class family. She suffered domestic violence, repeated sexual abuse at the hands of her siblings and cousins and soon was to fall into alcohol and drug addictions, become a teenage mum and eventually marry into two highly violent abusive relationships. Salavieri's tone is childish, yet somehow detached from the shockingly fierce events destiny put on her way. Salavieri adopts the position of the secretive child. "I just knew I wanted to be numb," (135) she confesses. This craving for numbness, which is a recurrent motif among the testimonies of the volume, leads her to cut herself as she finds in self-mutilation feelings of relief and satisfaction. In this horrible series of events, which, needless to say, serve Salavieri's aesthetic of impact, she skillfully manages to include remarks about a society she considers dismissive. In spite of the restraining orders imposed on her first husband, the police recognize their inability to protect her and her daughter: "the police kept saying that there was nothing that they could do about it until something happened" (137). These casual remarks repeatedly mark her text as if to constitute the political agenda that she will eventually develop.

It is, however, still a long way to go for Salavieri to acquire the necessary maturity and education to become a full-fledged activist figure. The young woman, after escaping her second husband and giving birth to her son, becomes more seriously addicted to drugs. She loses her children's custody and ends up homeless, living under a bridge for two years. Salavieri's aesthetic of impact does not solely rely on her depiction of utter poverty and desperation, it appears strongly supported by a seemingly uninhibited, however detached sincerity. For example, Salavieri's references to her mental illnesses—Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, self-mutilation, psychotic condition, or kleptomania—are presented as a series of factual remarks. "I always had a petty theft problem. [...] In my family, it wasn't wrong to steal," (139) she writes. Such a conclusion raises serious doubts about her understanding of ethics and responsibilities. Again, her activist *ethos* at first resembles a child's account of her past stupid decisions and actions while trying to explain their circumstances by accusing the other protagonists—as if to stubbornly refuse her position as her own opponent. The

misdemeanor that led her to end up behind bars appears as the most significant example of her crooked perception of reality due to her addictive and mental condition. Salavieri shouts at and then threatens a woman for a few dollars in a supermarket parking lot. Since her endeavor seems to have been successful, she decides to reiterate it on the next two days, which, of course, leads her to be arrested.

Salavieri's entry into the criminal justice system corresponds to one of the most traumatic events of her already ghastly life. Her gestures of denunciation seem to adopt an increasingly indignant format. She first puts the blame on the judge: "even though I had gone into rehab from the street with a diagnosis of dissociative disorder and borderline personality, the judge looked at me and said, 'You look fine to me'"(140). In spite of her child-like perception, Salavieri is able to sense injustice in the judge's remark and indirectly questions the legal status of such gestures. She then describes her "inhuman" (141) treatment during her first year of incarceration. Salavieri is kept in the psychiatric ward under suicide watch, locked up twenty-two hours a day dressed in a paper suit and denied any object that would facilitate suicide attempts (comb, brush, blanket and sheet included). Still relying on her childish sincerity, Salavieri tells of her need to bond: "I eventually made friends with the mice, and started naming them" (141). She even saves "[her] friends" (141) from the officers' traps. As a child confiding in her imaginary friend, she capitalizes on the sole possible relationship she can imagine to establish. This unexpected episode, beyond the limits of realism, strengthens Salavieri's powerful story.

On the other hand, Salavieri's denunciations of serious problems in the criminal justice system management of prisons are, unfortunately, very real. As is also revealed by other witnesses, Salavieri tells of the uncanny similarity between problems on the outside and problems on the inside. Drugs are the prison currency: the girls "cheek[135] [...]" (142) their pills so as to later sell them for commissary items. Salavieri, again very childishly, expresses her indignant appraisal of this practice: "It's actually disgusting, because you're eating something someone had in their spit" (142). She further describes the abuse she suffered at the hands of officers and inmates, as well as the dismissive behavior of most officers:

> Half of the [officers] spend their time in the bathroom texting, and the rest of the time, they're getting blowjobs in the bathroom, or they're calling you 'crackhead', or 'toothless,' and that's when they are not high themselves. One married a pregnant

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[135] Instead of swallowing their pills, the girls hide them between their teeth and gum, show their empty mouth to the officer and then spit them out.

inmate to avoid going to jail for sleeping with her, and some were dismissed for sexual assault. [...] Most officers [would] say, 'As long as no one dies on my shift, I don't care what you do to each other'. (145)

Again, Salavieri's tone reminds us of that of a child's confession, enumerating a series of misdeeds emanating from other disobedient kids. For example, Salavieri has been diagnosed with hepatitis C, which apparently led to a serious gum problem and to her losing her teeth—hence the officers calling her toothless. She, however, refuses to be treated while incarcerated as the dental office is located in the male sex offender ward, where women have to wait surrounded by glass walls behind which male inmates stare and pleasure themselves. As simplistic as her understanding may appear, she still manages to convey her deep feeling of injustice.

Salavieri, nevertheless describes the key event that finally led her to differentiate the period when "[she] was still stupid" (145) from the moment when she "started learning [her] legal rights" (146). As is always the case, it is through education that she gains empowerment. Education is in her case personified in a rather friendly figure:

> When I got to the halfway house, I saw an African American lady who was carrying a book-bag, the kind with the wheels attached. Everyone else at the halfway house was wearing t-shirts and talking about drugs. That lady was close to fifty, and she had done more than twenty years inside. She wasn't trying to fit in, she wasn't ashamed of her book-bag; she held her head high [...] like she had every right to get a college education. I wanted to be like her, free of shame. (147)

This woman's attitude, unbeknownst to her, affects Salavieri's childish perception and makes her stand as a sort of glorified militant figure: the person who stands for her rights, holding her head high. This role-model leads Salavieri to "fight for [her] education" (147). She ends her testimony with a retrospective evaluation of her previous life: "I'm not garbage. That was a hard lesson to learn, [...] I'm not a criminal; I'm a person led astray, [...] I am now a grown-up, and I take responsibility for my actions" (148). This highly mature and positive conclusion leads her to fully accept her position as a helpful figure of militancy. Salavieri has pledged to help people "like [her], who are coming out of prison with little idea of what to do [...] to survive" (147). Salavieri's treatment of the activist paradigm presents the powerfully positive impact the experience of injustice can have even on the most outwardly desperate souls. If social agents accept their responsibility, there is still hope for a future of solidarity.

IV. Conclusion

Throughout this work, I have sought to present a new branch of testimonial literature which developed on the scene of contemporary American culture. I have termed the writing and editorial projects collected here testimonials of social empowerment. With such a label, my point has been to emphasize the significant social aspect displayed by such contemporary cultural products. My purpose is mainly framed in an effort close to the one Doris Sommer describes as cultural agency in the wake of a new humanism. Indeed, in an academic and scientific sphere framed within postmodern conceptualizations, it appeared crucial to re-center the approach to cultural productions on the achievements of agentive subjects within a given social structure. It is with such a project in mind, that I decided to construct my analysis of testimonials as a double procedural understanding. My purpose was to present their social significance along with their literary craftsmanship.

In both aspects, the contemporary notion of empowerment appeared a most meaningful theoretical framework. This process expresses through individuals' regained capabilities at assessing their social environment in the hope of acquiring a resolved and respectful position in the participatory procedures that direct the social evolution of their community within the polity. Empowerment's various conceptualizations, indeed, offered a purposeful reference to the interdisciplinarity I am convinced scholars should nowadays demonstrate. As counterparts of social movements in the cultural field, testimonials of social empowerment lead their readers to ponder over crucial societal notions, mainly in the form of justice, solidarity and egalitarian processes fostering equitable figurative and political representation. The narrators' fight for social justice develops through contemporary concepts such as the recognition and representation frame for justice respectively developed by Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser.

As was demonstrated with the help of Leigh Gilmore's findings, these consequential social aspects are supported by cultural and socio-psychological notions symptomatic of our current culture of confession. Universalized signifiers such as trauma, victimization, resilience and the necessary inclusion of victims in deliberative democracy as concrete and competent other figures offer a substantial theoretical scaffolding for understanding the

apparition of cultural productions which have too often been discarded by the academic sphere as a popularization of previously elitist genres.

This primary social understanding was mainly backed up with the sociological theory of Emmanuel Renault. His presentation of social movements as groups essentially formed around a common fight against the experience of injustice revealed particularly sound in the description of testimonials of social empowerment as polyphonic volumes uniting the voice of differentially positioned individuals in a close-knit community. Significantly, it is Renault's conceptualization of social movements as groups relying on a double dynamics, both practical and normative, that became the theoretical hinge between my social and textual interpretation of the texts. Based on Renault's double dynamics, I proposed two hypotheses. First, I surmised that testimonials could be considered as specific forms of speech acts—making them practically dynamic. I found in Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action, that is action oriented towards reaching understanding in the hope of coordinating agents' action plans, an appropriate, yet partly fragmentary, model. His rejection of speech acts' perlocutionary level as well as his understanding of rhetoric and literature as being parasitic forms of linguistic expression had indeed to be revised. Second, I assumed that, if testimonials were indeed communicative speech acts, it was still necessary to describe their function within political debates in the public sphere. I supposed that the texts could in effect exert a significant normative influence. Here again, I had recourse to Jürgen Habermas's theory and proposed his concept of discourse ethics in the frame of deliberative democracy as testimonials' possible, though ideal, forum of representation.

Habermas's model, here again, presented a number of imperfections, which I sought to remedy with the help of Seyla Benhabib's and Iris Marion Young's multiculturally inclusive re-appropriations. Benhabib, by proposing a multiplication of the concept of the public sphere, made it possible to describe testimonials' polyphonic volumes as unofficial public spheres gathering the narratives of concrete other figures in the hope to enter a national open-ended dialogue for justice. Her presentation of enlarged thinking, Habermas's ideal role-taking, as the base of political and social judgments, showed how the narrators by enjoining their readers to abstract from the individualized features of their narratives hope to reach shared understandings over the norms for the good life of the generalized public. Young, on the other hand, offered a convenient way of framing my rejection of Habermas's monological model of bargaining processes for persuasion in the public sphere. Where Habermas saw argumentation as the sole linguistic possibility, Young proposed to adjoin greetings, narrative and rhetoric.

My description of the narrative format of testimonials indeed demanded such a larger-encompassing view. I demonstrated that the texts function according to Aristotle tri-partite understanding of rhetoric as the art of persuasion. Testimonials capitalize on *pathos*, through their aesthetic of impact, *logos*, through their ethics of responsibility, and *ethos*, adopting one of four paradigmatic constructions of the narrator's literary persona. The aesthetic of impact proposes a form of perlocutionary realism from which a strong sense of authenticity is derived. This authenticity supported by the narrators' overt use of sincerity as a form of (sometimes) extreme self-disclosure serves to create the impact of raw experience. The ethics of responsibility, on the other hand, heavily relies on rationality in placing agents' responsibilities—both in the sense of citizens' rights and duties—on the forefront. It is by shouldering one's numerous responsibilities that we can all hope to thrive in bettering the future of our community. These two narrative weaving threads, as I conceptualized them, can be modeled in various ways. These arrangements correspond to the four paradigmatic *ethe* testimonial narrators can adopt. These formats, interestingly, re-enact stereotypical social context in which testimonies may be found. The narrators in developing an intimate, forensic, religious or activist *ethos* seek to reach understanding over their experience of injustice by differentially capitalizing on the bonding/binding potential of testimony.

As I mentioned, my approach to testimonials of social empowerment was essentially aimed to be procedural. In spite of my very short encounter with a representative of the Voice of Witness Series, I put aside a possible questioning of the actual effectiveness of the texts, avoiding any remarks about their reception. This, I argue, might, indeed, be picked up as a possible line for further research. Kimberly Nance focused on such a description in the second part of her volume on *testimonio*. She, however, benefited from the necessary time perspective as her volume was published in 2006 and she was working on texts that had mainly been produced in the 70s and 80s. Though the genre of testimonials of social empowerment seems a pretty young one, the fact remains that thorough research could be conducted in the effort of assessing the texts' success and their appropriation by the audience. The projects' significant presence in contemporary media such as social networks, as well as the numerous activities proposed around the volume's publication, tells of course of their constant effort at securing a regular contact with the audience. However, if Gilmore's views on contemporary culture are correct, these productions might well solely be inscribed in a cultural moment and respond to the audience's 'trendy' tastes.

Another query that often surfaced in the course of this research took the form of questioning a number of borders. Geographical borders, first, appeared significant. I focused

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on American productions for obvious reasons. But does it mean that such cultural products are American in themselves? Gilmore seemed to acquiesce in her description of the re-appropriation of autobiography by the downtrodden as she sees there a typical reference to American individualism. Could we imagine finding similar productions in other areas of the world? *Testimonios* were indeed produced in Latin-America but their format remained different from the one developed here. Chantelle Warner talks about German social autobiographies, yet there again, the format remains individualized and presents a higher degree of fictionalization. Comparative research might indeed offer new insights in the approach to these marginal polyphonic appropriations of personal literature.

Are *polyphonic* testimonial volumes products of the American culture and society *per se,* then? Such a question could also open queries about issues of translation and bring linguistic boundaries in focus. If the Freedom Writers remark that their diary was indeed translated in some European countries (which is probably due to the success of the movie), they still deplore this limited international outreach. Voice of Witness proposed a Spanish translation of *Underground America,* their most successful model. Could translation stand as a primary aspect of the emulation such works may deserve? Similarly, I decided to leave aside the Voice of Witness volumes centered on international issues, thus shadowing the editors' endeavor to include a globalizing view of human rights abuses—an effort also aimed at questioning political and cultural borders. Young's and Benhabib's intentions to include multicultural aspects in their sociological theory serve as significant echoes in this case. Our contemporary sensitivity to globalization and the possible creation of a globalized public sphere—a possible development scholars consider to be embodied in the notion of human rights itself—could, indeed, primarily express through the creation of a cultural globalized public sphere in which cultural products would testify to a universalized form of *paedia.*

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Appendixes

1. Illustrations

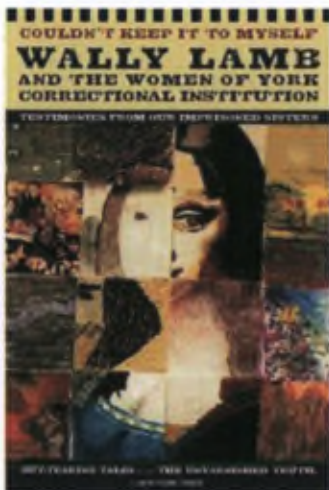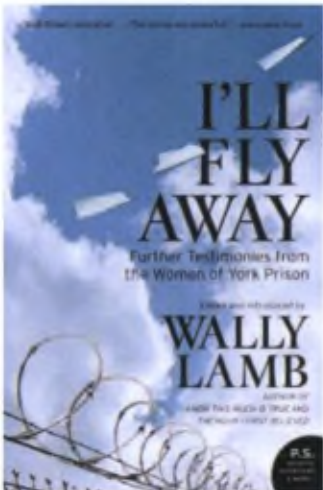**Covers of the volumes that served as a final corpus for the present research**
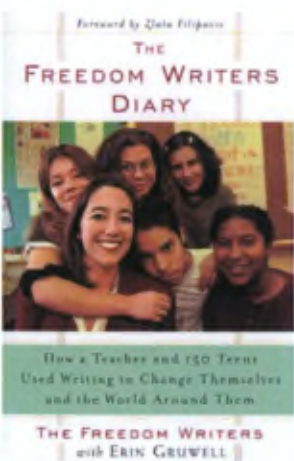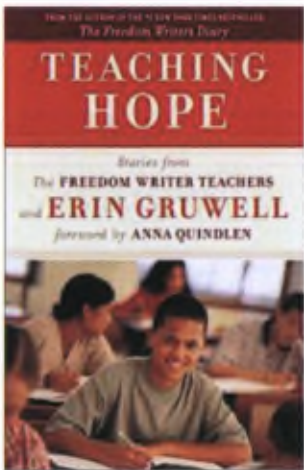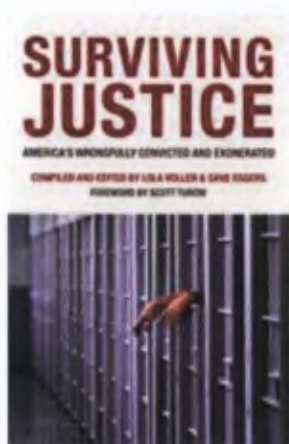

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

VOICE OF WITNESS

Fig. 5

SURVIVING JUSTICE
AMERICA'S WRONGFULLY CONVICTED AND EXONERATED
COMPILED AND EDITED BY LOLA VOLLEN & DAVE EGGERS
FOREWORD BY SCOTT TUROW

Fig. 6

VOICES FROM THE STORM
THE PEOPLE OF NEW ORLEANS ON HURRICANE KATRINA AND ITS AFTERMATH
COMPILED AND EDITED BY LOLA VOLLEN & CHRIS YING

Fig. 7

UNDERGROUND AMERICA
NARRATIVES OF UNDOCUMENTED LIVES
COMPILED AND EDITED BY PETER ORNER
FOREWORD BY LUIS ALBERTO URREA

Fig.8

A TEACHING RESOURCE FOR
PATRIOT ACTS
NARRATIVES OF POST 9/11 INJUSTICE

Fig. 9

INSIDE THIS PLACE, NOT OF IT
NARRATIVES FROM WOMEN'S PRISONS
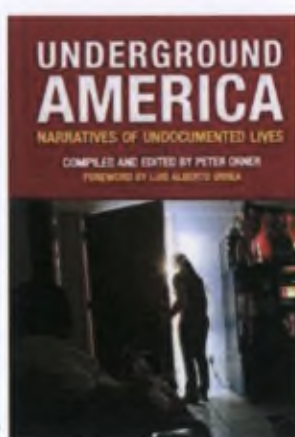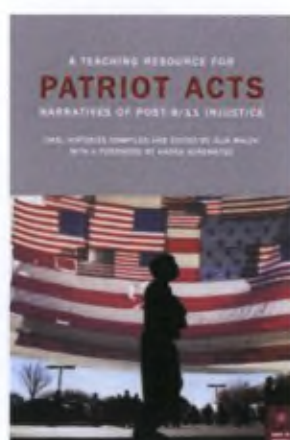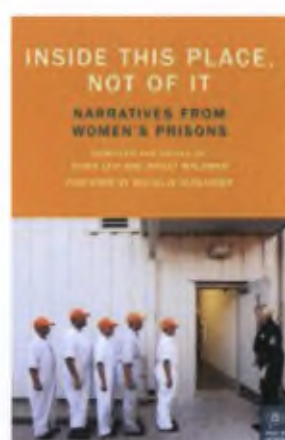
Fig. 10

Portraits from *Couldn't Keep it to Myself*

THEFTS
‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖
CAROLYN ANN ADAMS

Born: 1950
Conviction: Larceny by embezzlement
Sentence: 5 years
Entered prison: 1998
Status: Released

Fig. 11

HAIR CHRONICLES
‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖‖
TABATHA ROWLEY

Born: 1973
Conviction: Assault in the first degree
Sentence: 7 years
Entered prison: 1996
Status: Released

Fig. 12

389

HELL, AND HOW
I GOT HERE
|||||||||||||||||||||
BRENDA MEDINA

Born: 1975
Conviction: Homicide
Sentence: 25 years without parole
Entered prison: 1993
Status: Incarcerated

Fig.13

PUZZLE PIECES
|||||||||||||||||||||
BARBARA PARSONS LANE

Born: 1948
Conviction: Manslaughter, due to
emotional duress
Sentence: 25 years, to be suspended
after 10
Entered prison: 1996
Status: Incarcerated

Fig. 14

Fig. 15

Tabatha Rowley's graphic autobiography: a life recalled in hairstyles.

Portraits from *Surviving Justice*

JOHN STOLL

BORN: *1943*
HOMETOWN: *Bakersfield, California*
CONVICTED OF: *Child molestation*
SENTENCE: *40 years*
SERVED: *19 years*
RELEASED: *2004*

Fig. 16

JAMES NEWSOME

BORN: *1955*
HOMETOWN: *Chicago, Illinois*
CONVICTED OF: *Murder and armed robbery*
SENTENCE: *Life*
SERVED: *15 years*
RELEASED: *1994*

Fig. 17

GARY GAUGER

BORN: *1952*
HOMETOWN: *Richmond, Illinois*
CONVICTED OF: *Murder*
SENTENCE: *Death*
SERVED: *3 Years*
RELEASED: *1996*

Fig. 18

CHRISTOPHER OCHOA

BORN: *1966*
HOMETOWN: *El Paso, Texas*
CONVICTED OF: *Murder and sexual assault*
SENTENCE: *Life*
SERVED: *Twelve years*
RELEASED: *2001*

Fig. 19

Portraits from *Patriot Acts*

FARID RODRIGUEZ

AGE: 72

OCCUPATION: *custodian*

INTERVIEWED IN: *Brooklyn, New York*

Fig. 20

AMIR SULAIMAN

AGE: 32

OCCUPATION: *poet, activist, recording artist*

INTERVIEWED IN: *Irvine, California*

Fig. 21

RAED JARRAR

AGE: 33

OCCUPATION: *architect, blogger, and political advocate*

INTERVIEWED IN: *Washington, D.C.*

Fig. 22

RIMA QAMRI

AGE: 37

OCCUPATION: *student teacher*

INTERVIEWED IN: *Brooklyn, New York*
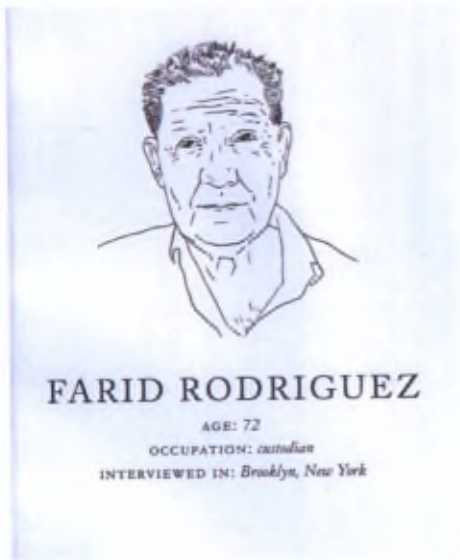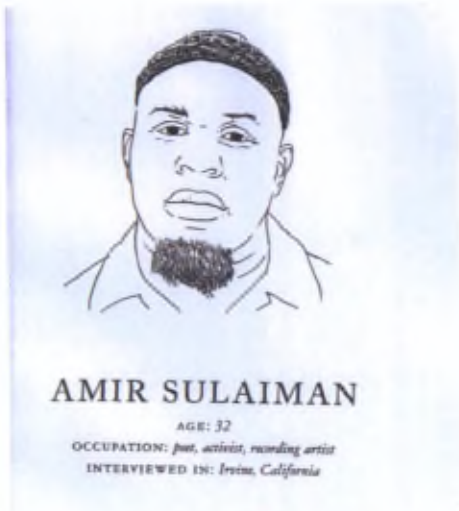
Fig. 23

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NARRATORS

Patricia Thompson is a mother of six. She lives in the William J. Guste Housing Development.

Renee Martin helped raise seven of her siblings in New Orleans. She works as a clinical nursing assistant and lives in the West Bank.

Jackie Harris is a native New Orleanian, and a founder of the Louis Armstrong Summer Jazz Camp.

Rhonda Sylvester was born and raised in the Desire Housing Project, and lives there with her niece.

Dan Bright was wrongfully convicted of first-degree murder in 1996 and released in 2004. He is a father of four.

Father Jerome LeDoux was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana. He is the pastor of St. Augustine Church in Tremé.

Sonya Hernandez is a native of Cuba, and a mother of five children.

Kalamu Ya Salaam grew up in the Lower Ninth Ward. He is a journalist and a teacher.

Kermit Ruffins is a New Orleans native. He is a renowned trumpeter and performs around the world.

Daniel Finnigan moved to New Orleans in 1996. He is an artist and lives with his dog Blue.

Anthony Letcher is a resident of the Ninth Ward, a father of two, and a grandfather.

Abdulrahman Zeitoun was born in Syria and moved to the United States in 1973. He is a father of three.

Father Vien The Nguyen was born in Vietnam in 1963, and moved to the U.S. in 1975. He is the pastor at Mary Queen of Vietnam Church in New Orleans East.

Fig. 24 Narrators in *Voices from the Storm*

2. Interview with Juliana Sloane, Development and Communication Director for the Voice of Witness series.

October 7, 2013 – San Francisco, California

Qu. Juliana Sloane, you have been working as the Development and Communication Director for the series.

J.S.: Yes, development and communication, so a lot of different newsy things. But since we are a small organization, all of us wear a lot of different hats. So, probably, I can speak to a lot of pretty general questions.

Qu. How does the series' staff choose the topics for the volumes?

J.S.: Basically, there are a couple of different manners for the way in which we pick the books that we write in the Voice of Witness series. One is that sometimes there will be an issue that we recognize has a real need to be written about. And we'll contact just somebody and say "you know, we think that this is worth dealing with and you could be a good lead for us." That's one way. It's not the most common way, though. Usually, what happens is that we actually have a formal peer proposal process. We look for proposals dealing with Human Rights crises that are contemporary, ongoing, and not documented nearly enough. So those are really three of the main criteria for selection.

Qu. Tell me more about this proposal process. Who are the persons who contact you? Do they have a specific social status or position? Are they involved in social movements or specific organizations, for example?

J.S.: Primarily, it's specific people who want to write a particular book about a subject they are already really involved in. Every now and then, we'll have some organizations who want to have some involvement with our books. *Inside this Place, not of it*, our book about women's prisons, was one of these books, where there were two editors who were really really invested in the issues. But they also got in contact with an organization that really supported us with a lot of the logistics of getting into the prisons.

Qu. About the narrators, now. How do you come to contact them? Are you faced with spontaneous proposals of people who are ready to comment about their own lives? I mean, with your volume on women's prisons, one can imagine that it was, indeed, thanks to the effort of the organization that you were told about potential narrators. Do you primarily contact your narrators with the help of organizations?

J.S.: Really, with all the Voice of Witness books, the way we like to describe it, is essentially that we contact our narrators through kind of a 'chain of trust'. So, most of the time, it will be

either someone that the editor has come in contact with already. Or, they come into contact with someone who is really invested in the issue and who tells them 'you should talk to so and so', and that person may say, like 'now actually you might want to talk to my aunt'. So it's really about dealing into relationships and asking the people, who are involved in the issues, who is the best person to speak to about specific things. And then, sometimes, it is totally random. There are often times when people have come up and said 'I heard about what you're doing and actually there's something I want to tell you about'.

Qu.: That's interesting. So you have some kind of spontaneous reactions as well. People coming to you and deciding to share their story.

J.S.: It's a really organic approach, in general.

Qu.: This is just amazing. This is exactly what I like about your books, that they feel so spontaneous. Speaking of the 'chain of trust' is exactly what the books feel like.

J.S.: That's so good to hear!

Qu.: That's what I feel, at least. Did you ever face rejections? Either when contacting potential narrators or later in the writing and editing process? Since narrators have an important say on the final version of their narrative, did you ever face negative reactions?

J.S.: Yes. Basically, the way the kind of approval process with narrators works, is that they can pull out at about any time up until the book is published. So, they may do an interview with us, and then, decide halfway through that 'oh, no, I don't feel comfortable about having my story be told', which is completely compatible with a real understanding of the issues. This is very possible because these are very intense stories. They are very personal, and a lot of things come up in the process of sharing those narratives. They do not necessarily realize what would have come up.

So, we know that in order not to face these reactions, we, actually, make sure that we do more interviews. There are always more interviews, than the ones that are presented in the books. For every ten or so published narrators, there are always probably twenty people we have spoken with, or more. Sometimes, there may be a book with twelve interviews, and the book would have started with forty or fifty narrators.

The way that we tend to do this, though, is actually, we work with the narrators throughout the process. So, we interview them, then we do a follow-up, then there will usually be fact checking and things like that. And then we also show them the final draft, saying 'this is what your narrative is going to look like in print, is this ok with you?' We do that whenever this is logistically possible. Every now and then, a narrator will have

disappeared from, you know, the face of the earth and we cannot contact him anymore. Especially when we're dealing with refugees and people who are really in danger…

Qu. Oh yes, obviously. Do you still decide to publish the narratives when you're faced with these cases?

J.S.: Usually, when we know this is likely going to be the case, which is with a lot of international books, that it can be harder for us to make a follow-up, we ask for more explicit permission and really talk with people.

I think it's also about anonymity. We work with our narrators a lot. There have been times when the narrator has said 'I want to go with my real name' and we've had to say 'No, we're not really sure that that would be safe for you'.

Qu. So, there have been serious issues of safety as well?

J.S.: To our knowledge, there has never been anything that has actually come up. But that's because if there is any chance of that, I mean we will change narrators' names, we will also try and take out as many identifying characteristics of places. So, if somebody says 'they attacked me by this river in this town', we take out what river what town, and we just say 'they attacked me by the river'.

Overall, our narrators are our first priority, and we want to make sure that their stories are told but also that their safety and integrity is consistently intact.

Qu. Do you use any written material in your shaping of the narratives, like letters for example?

J.S.: Every now and then, if it's not possible to do an oral history interview. There is one narrative in *Patriot Acts*. There was one narrator who was confined to a communications management unit, which is a super sketchy prison, basically completely off the grid. Your communications are severely limited, you can't talk to people, you can't make phone calls, you can't do the normal things that prisoners are usually able to do. That person wrote us dozens and dozens of pages about what they would tell us, if they were able to tell us their oral history.

Qu. Since the narrator was imprisoned in such a specific unit, do you have any idea whether or not those letters were submitted to censorship?

J.S.: They came to us fully intact. There wasn't anything that was scratched out. I have no doubt that they were probably read.

I mean, even when we send the books, like for *Inside this Place not of It*, we make sure, whenever possible, that each narrator gets a copy of their book, or multiple copies. And, actually, if they want to give them out and do advocacy work or different things, we are trying

to supply them with as many copies as they need. Getting the books back in to people who were still incarcerated was really difficult. And sometimes they would get the books, and sometimes the books would never get past through the initial screen.

So it can be really difficult to continue that.

Qu. My next question is probably linked to the issue of anonymity. I realized, by looking at the first edition of Surviving Justice, *that you used pictures of the narrators and then these evolved into sketches in the second edition as well as in the other volumes. Could you comment on such a change in editorial policy?*

J.S.: Part of it, I think, was an artistic choice; because, within McSweeney's, there is a lot of care about design that goes into their books. And part of it is about anonymity.

Because there have been a lot of times when folks want to tell their stories but they don't want their picture to be shot. And people feel more comfortable with an illustration, but not with an actual photograph.

Within our most recent of our volumes, *Highrise Stories*, we actually don't have pictures of the narrators but we have pictures of the buildings.

In terms of the overall design of the books, we do try to keep on stretching it and make it something that is continuously compelling and really illustrates, kind of what the stories are all about. We've been working a lot on this one and tried to think outside the box.

Qu. This is really interesting to see how you try to focus on the artistic aspect of the volumes. As my own point is to emphasize their literary and cultural value, your interest in creating compellingly creative volumes is of definite importance.

J.S.: One of the things we insist on when we speak to people about the word-part of what we are going for really is a novelistic level of detail within personal narrative.

Qu. It's interesting how we seem to agree on this. When I present my research, people often object to me that I speak about contemporary literature and yet present testimonies, and thus non-fiction.

J.S.: Especially with conveying information like this that can be difficult for people to relate to and tackles really tricky subject matters, there is really a lot of power in storytelling.

The way that we understand it is: since storytelling builds empathy, if you're able to connect with the story of one of our narrators on that personal level, and it is really like a novel, and it is in a way like you feel you're sitting with that person and that they were telling you a story, you would feel able to connect with the issues on a much more personal level and on deeper level of understanding than if we just gave you some pie charts.

Qu. You are a non-profit book series, so you are publishing books, but your point is also to raise awareness on complex social issues. I saw that you proposed a number of other activities. What are these? Are they any successful?

J.S.: We do actually get a number of persons in these activities. Basically outside of the publication of the books, some other of our program areas are actually we do events surrounding each book.

Readings, talks, and things like that and those always get a good turnout, people are very interested. Whenever possible, we have narrators come and participate and we're really trying to make an interesting discussion for everyone involved. We also have an education program that brings the stories into High Schools and Colleges throughout the U.S.

So, that's something. Last year we reached 9000 teachers and students through our education program. And this year we anticipate that the number will be even larger. *Power of the Story* is part of our education program, it involves lesson plans for teachers to bring the works into their classroom.

We also do trainings for teachers and folks working non-profit who want to use the oral history storytelling process to tell the stories of their own work with their communities.

Then also, part of what we have been doing, are some oral history and storytelling workshops for members of impacted communities. For *Patriot Acts*, we actually did a series here in San Francisco of workshops just for folks in Arab, Muslim and South-Asian communities who in doing that sort of work were impacted by Civil Rights issues. People who wanted to get a little bit deeper into how the storytelling and the oral history aspects could potentially be helpful for them and are looking forward to what they could do.

So it is really multifaceted. We try to be as dynamic as possible because not only do we really believe that the specific narratives in the books are important. But we believe that the format is really important in the sense of something that kind of builds up a radical sense of empathy that could foster social change in a very special way.

Qu. I'm so happy to hear what you are saying because it is actually the exact way in which I understood your volumes, and this is also exactly what I try to demonstrate with theoretical support. We really are on the same wavelength. This next question is maybe going to seem closer to your specific job as a communication director. I was wondering whether you have any specific 'marketing' strategies?

J.S.: We don't advertise a lot. In terms of outreach and public relations sort of work, we do kind of market in a way that typical non-fiction social justice kind of oriented book would be

marketed. But we do also try to market to audiences that are more interested in literature and in creative non-fiction, and that sort of things.

The relationship with Mc Sweeney's is definitely something that helps with that. We have associations with a lot of schools, a lot of oral history associations. And then Mc Sweeney's has a reach with a much broader audience. We're featured on their website, we're featured in different newsletters coming from them.

We're trying to make something more dynamic, using Tumblr' and Tweeter, so that there might be a little more interaction with the audiences and that we can continue to be in touch in a more dynamic way. So that people know 'oh, that's what's going on with this book' and 'this is an interesting article'.

Qu. Do you have any interactions with the academic world?

J.S.: A lot of our readings and events are held at universities. So there's a lot of different speaking engagements. A lot of universities and colleges use our books in their curriculum, so we have relationships with different boards and come to speak at the beginning of the semesters. Especially when they have like hundred freshmen reading *Underground America*. There is a lot of overlap. Right now, everybody [the staff] is at the *Oral History Conference*. There are a lot of efforts in bridging the gap. We are starting to go to a lot of conferences but since we are such a small staff it is not really easy.

Qu. You are talking about a small staff. What's it exact size? How many people do work for the series?

J.S.: Right now, we are a staff of five, we were six. In 2010, we were two. So, there is a significant process of grow up.

Qu. This is amazing since you are such an active series. And your books are published on a rather regular basis. Do you receive mail from the audience?

J.S.: A lot. We get emails, we get mail, people drop by. Different things like that. We definitely feel that people want to get in touch. Plenty of people are touched with the books. But we have periodical reactions, most often right after the publication. We don't have a lot of contact information since we're such a small staff.

Qu. You must receive lots of things and probably have to discard part of it. But there are much more contacts right after the books are published. Do you have any idea about the number of copies that are actually sold?

J.S.: In terms of the type of book that it is, they actually have a really really good reception. For each title that we publish, the rate our first print run is 3000 to 5000 copies. We are also

trying to publish ebooks. We had to do reprints of several books. *Underground America* is on its second or third print run and it actually had a higher initial print run than the others.

For the average academic oral history book, the average sales is 500 to 600 copies a year and in our first six months of the last two volumes we sold more like 1500 to 2000 copies. For the market that is out there, the sales are pretty high. The most successful was *Underground America*, it is now running on its fifth reprint.