Inside Voices: Witnessing Oral Disclosures of Trauma

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Abstract

Examining the relationship between speaker and listener provides insight into empathy and ethical responses to disclosures of trauma. This study examines the delivery and reception of testimony in performing arts contexts and quasi-juridical settings to find patterns in the way the communication of trauma is delivered and received. What can we learn from the patterns that emerge among survivors as they speak out about their trauma in various settings?

Vocalizing an experience that has caused trauma creates a space that exposes both the speaker and the listener to a kind of vulnerability, which can be felt in that instant as either a release in a process of healing or a new trauma. By analyzing recordings of testimony and spoken word poetry, trends in responses occur that suggest venue and sense of personal responsibility greatly impact the relationship between speaker and listener and the communication process as a whole. These results offer several ways to consider new approaches to sharing and responding to disclosures of trauma.

*Keywords:* voice; speech; acoustic geography; trauma; vulnerability; vulnerable space; witnessing
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# Contents

Air – An Introduction ........................................................................................................... 2

Anatomy – The Study ......................................................................................................... 31
- Study Design .................................................................................................................... 32
- Researcher ......................................................................................................................... 37
- Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................... 38
- Poetry and Performance ................................................................................................. 40
- Acoustic Geography ....................................................................................................... 43
- Voice, Trauma, and Testimony ....................................................................................... 45

Vibrations – Conceptual Framework .................................................................................. 53
- Acoustics as Meaning .................................................................................................... 54
- Necessary Noise ............................................................................................................... 56
- Sound and Subjectivity .................................................................................................. 59
- Healing and Risk ............................................................................................................ 61
- Voice as a Tool ................................................................................................................ 65
- Trauma Narratives of Testimony ................................................................................... 70
- Decolonization and the Challenges of TRCs ................................................................. 74

Voice – Performing Engagement ...................................................................................... 83
- The Poetic Voice ............................................................................................................ 84
- The Community Voice .................................................................................................. 93
- The Joyful Voice ............................................................................................................ 97

Sound – Testimony as Relationship ................................................................................. 101
- Testifying ....................................................................................................................... 103
- Witnessing ....................................................................................................................... 113
- Responding .................................................................................................................... 116
- Vulnerable Space .......................................................................................................... 120

Echo – Ways to Move Forward .......................................................................................... 130
- Performing Arts ............................................................................................................. 133
- Testimony ....................................................................................................................... 134
- Pedagogy ........................................................................................................................ 136
- Self-care ......................................................................................................................... 140
- Finally, Let’s Exhale .................................................................................................... 141

References .......................................................................................................................... 147
truth telling,
this is a profound commitment
help set our spirits free
make best efforts
provide a safe, supportive, and sensitive environment
the goal of witnessing?
engage
establish new relationships
pave the way
to a brighter future
continued healing...
do no harm
ownership over experiences rests with those affected
receive
acknowledge
respond
witnessing
this is a profound commitment.

(Mandate devised from Schedule N by Shannon Kitchings)
Air – An Introduction

When an audience attends a live performance, a play for example, they enter the space with an intention to be open to the experience (Fortier, 1997), hoping it will move them in some way. I argue that there is potential to transfer that openness to other experiences beyond the arts. If people enter testimony spaces, as jury members or even public in the gallery, with the same intentional openness, I contend there is a greater possibility for ethical response. This ethical response could help to minimize retraumatization of survivors telling their stories and also minimize secondary trauma on the audience member bearing witness. Intentional openness is the appropriate receptive approach to the vulnerability inherent in giving testimony. With both parties (speaker and listener or witness) embracing their vulnerability in the moment, the potential for ongoing empathy and healing increases.

The conditions needed for this scenario to work include mindful spatial configuration, assumption of social responsibility, and heightened sensory relationships. I refer to all three in this thesis, but I primarily focus on sensory relationships, specifically the relationship created through voice. The sonic experience of voice is a significant component of the speaker-witness relationship (Bakhtin 1981), and, I argue, a misunderstood component. This thesis considers the impact of voice when giving testimony in order to expand understandings of witnessing.

If you read this document out loud you would have a different experience than reading it silently to yourself. Silence and sound feel different. But they absolutely feel. They have material effect, cause sensation: a tingle, a vibration, pressure. Silence can feel like the absence of something. A voice can be a beacon, a tether, a comfort, a distraction, a weapon. Voice cuts
through silence and performs an act on our bodies. The range of definitions for voice is broad and offers this study several ways to examine oral speech acts. Here I am defining voice as a sonic act made by a human body for the purpose of communicating a story. My approach to the sonic nature of voice draws on the work of Mikail Bakhtin (1981) and Marshall McLuhan (1988/89), and their introduction of polyphony and acoustic space, respectively. Both understood aurality to be multi-sensory and distinct from visual ways of knowing. With this premise, I define voice as a complex material force that contributes to the soundscape in specific ways to elicit a response from listeners. Voice comes into physical contact with the surface of our skin. This is evident in perhaps no circumstance more than in testimony. When someone addresses people in a space by speaking out loud about their trauma, a profound act is occurring. Too often, the profundity of the speech act, defined here as an enunciation made by human voice, is diminished by bureaucracy or bias or some other instrument of oppression. Speakers are interrupted, limited by specific questions, objected to, or dismissed entirely as unreliable or not credible. Even silence can be criticized. When a person is silent it is read differently by different observers. What does it mean when a friend doesn’t answer or return a phone call? What does it mean when a lover stays silent instead of reciprocating the words ‘I love you’? Or when someone chooses not to testify in a legal proceeding? There are many scenarios where silence occurs, with or without a deeper meaning. As Spy Dénommé-Welch and Jennifer Rowsell note,

Silence invites all kinds of misunderstandings and misassumptions, but then again it also has the potential for self-reflection wherein one’s own judgement or biases are called into question. For instance, why does one assume that the “minoritized” voice only
speaks when needed or necessary, such as in moments where it is seen as necessary to address or redress forms of social inequity or injustice? (Dénommé-Welch and Rowsell, 22)

These contexts are founded in the philosophical perspective of the actors involved. Western perspectives often prioritize speech above silence, and minoritized voices referred to by Dénommé-Welch and Rowsell are all too often silenced or commanded to speak a particular way in their own defense. When commanded to speak, the speech may be silenced further; edited and constrained by the framing of the questions, for example. In testimony, these various forms of silencing of voices deny people the capacity to articulate themselves using the full range of resources available. They are unjustly denied the capacity to be understood on their own terms. This injustice especially affects marginalized and oppressed people as they are often the ones experiencing and then articulating trauma. Voices out loud are powerful, or at least they can be. Let’s explore how empowering vocalization might happen.

At the moment of birth, the confirmation of human life is the scream of a child. From this early experience, humans connect to each other through phonic communication: through voice. Various modes of communication are developed throughout our lives (body language, eye contact, written language, etc.), but most communication heavily relies upon speech. Where speech is hindered by obstacles such as deafness or muteness, new physical expressions are utilized, such as sign language. Communication is not simply an intellectual endeavour: it is embodied. While these many forms of expression have an embodied element, voice is
particularly interesting because it is experienced by so many senses: visually, sonically, vibrationally (Bakhtin 1981).

Studies in sound (Schafer 1970; Bakhtin, 1981; Sui 2000) have offered a growing understanding of the ways humans experience the sonic environment. R. Murray Schafer, in his early work on the World Soundscape Project at Simon Fraser University in the 1960’s and 1970’s, established that our sonic environment is changing with the growth of technology and the increased urbanization of our landscape. These changes include a significant increase in noise pollution (Schafer 1970), effectively altering the way we navigate our surroundings. Sound is also identified as a potential weapon causing harm to humans. Workplace injuries of hearing impairment were sited, along with other adverse effects, including but not limited to, nausea, headaches, coughing, and vision impairment. Schafer’s work in soundscapes reaffirms the important sonic considerations of voice. Acoustic ecology extends this work, analysing the soundscapes in environments as they pertain to nature and human interaction with nature (O’Conner 2008). These studies of sonic environments question the impact of everyday sounds, asserting that sound, like vision, is a component of our sense of place. The sounds of voices, like all sounds, have material effect. We orient ourselves by that effect (Hemsworth 2016). Voices can therefore be understood to also contribute to our sense of place.

Voice is already given some significance due to its transmission of language. In the context of Canadian settler colonialism, words are emphasized as valuable. What is said is key: is it accurate, is it true, is it believable, is it provable? I argue that the focus on the statement, what is said, is insufficient to comprehend the scope of what is being communicated. In
testimony, the exclusive focus on what is said limits our understanding of any given expression. One expressing testimony is communicating much more than just ‘what is said’. Vocal expression is significant to communication not only by content (language and word choice), but also by the sound itself. Once the voice is released it becomes part of the environment, like a chair in a room or a bird that flies past you in the park. It takes up space, it has substance. The physical act itself makes sound tangible in multiple ways. It becomes a moving object in space, bouncing off all surfaces, including the people surrounding the speaker. The sound waves displace the air and vibrate the solid objects they encounter. Sound physically impacts listeners (Schafer 1970; 1977). Because of that impact, this is also a site of emotional entanglement created by voice. The embodied reception of an oral narration opens up the possibility of emotional response. This is where it begins. I am suggesting that once a person absorbs the acoustical force of the speaker’s voice it becomes part of them. In combination with the words spoken, voice itself physically impacts listeners. It changes them, either imperceptibly, or at times, profoundly. In this study I explore the existence and nature of that encounter.

The two forms of this encounter I am reviewing are performing arts, specifically spoken word poetry and theatre; and judicial testimony, specifically statements relating to a sexual violence case and statements from or about the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. I am interested in the live aspect of these ‘performances’, the out-loud action, what is happening beyond the ‘text’. I use the word *performance* here to indicate vocal activity meant for another person to witness. When understanding of testimony is limited to what is said, we disregard the live human speaking and the way that speaker impacts the listener, and vice versa. If this is the intention, why ask survivors to speak out loud at all? How ethical is it to ask
someone to describe their own trauma, only to reduce that verbal description to a lexicon of key words the witness can interpret as they choose? So much of the media coverage of testimony lends support to my suggestion that there is significant room for improvement in how our various testimony settings handle first-person narratives of trauma. Speakers are exposing themselves to the audience in a way that must be carefully considered. Beyond the language used in speech, voice communicates something more through the sound itself. I wonder what, if any, connection the sound makes between the speaker and the listener. In a moment of oral expression, in testimony or example, a personal trauma may be shared vocally. How is that orality different from other ways of communicating? Does the act of using voice impart additional meaning to the speaker and the listener? The sound of someone’s voice has a meaning which is unique to that form of expression. A study by psychologists Lima, Castro and Scott (2013) of the non-verbal sounds associated with eight emotions concluded that the human responses to these emotions are consistent among individuals and recognizable by listeners. In response to stimuli, each of the subjects made vocalized sounds (sighs, gasps, moans, etc.) that were found to be similar to the other subjects and also could be identified as being in response to particular stimuli (for example each of them made similar sounds for fear). If the sounds humans make, even those that are not fully formed words, are both predictable and recognizable, then the acts of speaking and listening have a complicated impact on both parties. The results of their study suggest that non-verbal vocalization closely relates to emotional experience. This study offers a baseline to use as a lens for specific experiences, performances, speeches, and vocal acts by suggesting there is an emotional component of sounds made by voice. Voice is positioned as a sonic act that communicates not just words, but
also translates emotions. This position is significant and I argue that the importance of voice in oral narrations (versus written statements or those delivered more indirectly) can broaden our understanding of disclosures in testimony and beyond. Our bodies reflect our feelings in the sounds we make with our vocal chords. Simultaneously, receiving those sound waves taps into an internal database of contextual emotional cues that the listener responds to in some way. This ‘call and response’ relationship can help us understand some of the dynamics of entanglement at work in highly emotionally charged spaces such as testimony settings. At the site of entanglement, both the speaker and the listener are changed. The question is: to what extent and how are they changed?

I am suggesting voice can catalyze an interconnected healing process between the victim verbally disclosing and the audience witnessing the disclosure, but is often disregarded as inconsequential. Perhaps this is because we are conditioned to listen for language, understand through words. More is happening than just semantics when the voice catalyst occurs: a physical experience is shared. This catalyst can also be disrupted by factors such as resistance to change, spatial inhibitors, and political will, to name a few. Still, the process of healing, even mutual healing, is increased by vocal expressions. While there are numerous psychological studies that explore this healing and studies that examine the effects of voice in linguistics and performing arts fields, there is a distinct gap in the understanding of the use of voice in juridical contexts. Kelly Oliver begins to explore this process in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001) as she examines the way we perceive testimony. By extending and problematizing the recognition theories of theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Nancy Fraser, and others, Oliver questions what *beyondness* might offer in understanding testimony.
Acknowledging, as Shosha Felman does in *Testimony: Crises Of Witnessing In Literature, Psychoanalysis, And History* (1992), that witnessing narration by someone who has lived through the experience invoked offers a unique perspective on history, Oliver positions witnessing as a paradox. While necessary to working through a trauma, testimony evokes the inner witness to one’s own narration and constitutes the inherent tension between subject positions. The performance of testimony, she asserts, is essential to the testimony itself. More than merely what is said, the inner witness of testimony is a necessary condition of address-ability and, importantly, what Oliver terms “response-ability”. Oliver draws upon J.L. Austin’s distinction between the performative and the constative in the text *Doing Things With Words*, which is useful in this understanding. J.L. Austin initially proposes the idea of performative utterances and indicates that speech is not solely an act of forming words or conveying transparent meaning. Some things that are said also serve to act out what is said, in addition to the words and the intention. Contrasting theories of performativity as they relate to subjectivity, Oliver invites us to understand our obligation to “witness beyond recognition, to testify and to listen to testimony – to encounter each other – because subjectivity and humanity are the result of response-ability” (Oliver 2001, 90). The assertion that subjectivity is the ability to respond and be responded to lends support to Oliver’s concept of ethical obligation as fundamental to subjectivity. To exist is to be able to respond and be responded to by another (Oliver 2001). Oliver contends that witnessing calls upon us to respond in an ongoing process of reconstituting subjectivity previously destroyed by trauma, and that this response-ability is an ethical imperative. Her notions of response-ability lead me to investigate the connection that comes with such a response. Does response-ability increase reception to
testimony in ways that may be useful for healing? Oliver dives into recognition studies to come to a useful distinction that we must be open to receive that which is unrecognizable to us in order to learn something new. This receptiveness is essential to witnessing, in Oliver’s work. Indeed, I would add that receptiveness to voice in particular offers a more holistically embodied mode of witnessing than disregarding voice as just another part of the semantic experience. Voice itself is a key element of the coming-to-knowledge to which Felman, and later Oliver, refers. In testimony, the disclosure of a trauma narrative positions both the speaker and the listener in a vulnerable space that I contend has tremendous potential for healing and other kinds of ‘moving forward’, or as psychoanalysts might put it, “working through”. Despite such potential, there exists risk as well. The vulnerable space I am describing is a site of entanglement that is induced by the vulnerability of both the speaker disclosing their own trauma and the listener witnessing the narrative and so living through a small part of the trauma being expressed. Even without close attention paid to voice as a tool of deeper exploration, testimony settings often create space for retraumatizing of survivors. Additionally, witnesses in a testimony setting (juries, media, public attendees, etc.) are left with the aftermath of having been exposed to someone else’s vulnerability often without concrete tools to process the witnessing experience. I contend there is significant potential to optimize outcomes by changing the approach to testimony practiced in Canada. Oliver offers a detailed account of the immediate need for the role of the witness to be re-imagined. Indeed, she insists that the witness must relinquish a desire to recognize the experience of another in order to acknowledge it. Instead, she advocates for a kind of responsiveness that exceeds comprehension. Building upon the work of her predecessors, Oliver advances performance
theory and begins to make specific calls to action that are alluded to in many ways in the works of Judith Butler and J.L. Austin, but never explicitly expressed. I am building on her argument further by including the history and potential of performing arts to call for an alternative approach to testimony in Canada. Using Oliver’s insightful work, I will extend the way we understand the witnessing role (and the role of the speaker) in order to recommend practical possibilities within our justice system that might offer new ways to increase the value of testimony for survivors beyond using their story as an instrument to influence the verdict or juridical outcome. In agreement with Oliver, I contend that the performative nature of testimony is important to consider, beyond the words spoken. Those testifying are certainly invested in conveying a message “for the record” and the words chosen are central to that task, but there is more at stake in testimony settings than the archived transcript. Further to Oliver’s argument, I argue the sonic geography of the moment of testimony is essential to understanding the process of response-ability for which she advocates. That sonic sphere has a physical impact on the speaker and the listener. Perhaps there are ways to make the experience of speaking and witnessing testimony a potentially powerful and productive process for everyone involved.

Performing artists, particularly those working in the medium of spoken word poetry, have dedicated themselves to mastering their voices. Survivors who testify typically have not had the same rigorous approach to mastering voice in their lives. Still, there is much to be learned from the theories of performance (Hagan 1973; Fortier 1997; Kennedy 2009). They have been drawn from psychoanalysis, psychology, education, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and many more fields. Here I want to attempt to transfer some useful aspects of
performance practice to testimony settings in an effort to respond to my primary research question: how can careful consideration of voice in testimony settings create more ethical scenarios of speaking and witnessing? It is relevant that there are so many similarities between delivering testimony in an artistic performance and delivering testimony in judicial or quasi-judicial setting. With both experiences, there are responsibilities and response-abilities for all participants.

Using my own spoken word performance work and the theatrical work of other performers, fictional accounts of disclosures, my own witnessing of public speeches regarding trauma, and archived video of hearings and speeches, I will position voice and the responses to voice as the salient component of testimony, over the content of speech. Where juridical and quasi-juridical contexts, such as truth commissions, focus exclusively on the content of testimony, I will explore what, if anything, changes when the intersubjective dynamics of vocalization are foregrounded in analyses of these same scenarios of witnessing. My initial interests were in sexual violence trials. In these cases, many accused perpetrators were found not guilty because the survivor was deemed not consistent in their trauma narrative. This highlights the troubling conditions in Canadian law that negate the pursuit of such a case through restrictions that exclude the existing scholarship on recollections of trauma. Consistency of narrative should not be the measure of what trauma may have occurred. To assume that a survivor will be able to tell their story in a particular way denies the survivor the opportunity to fully express their narrative, in essence silencing them to a degree. Without the full testimony, there are gaps in the assessment of illegal activity. Even the notion of assessing whether there was, in fact, an illegal act disregards the impact of the act. Is consistency of
testimony, repetition of the verbatim tale, the only way to learn that a traumatizing event has occurred? If we insist that eye-witness testimony be delivered in person before second-hand witnesses, how do we account for the information provided by the sound of a live voice? I will apply Oliver’s theory of witnessing, along with several theories from acoustic geography and performing arts in an attempt to pursue a more rigorous exploration of verbal disclosures of trauma in hearings, accounting for why so many acts of testimony prove to be re-traumatizing. Through this study I intend to question the customary practices of western legal systems and the public perception of trauma disclosures.

This is not a substantial leap, rather a logical investigation of parallel theories. This parallel is apparent to me because voice has been the core of my work in multiple fields, including performing arts, speech writing, teaching, and first response mental health support. These experiences, along with such recent events as the hearings during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, have led me to ask the following questions: What is the nature of the experience between speaker and listener during oral disclosures of trauma? How is that experience affected by spatial arrangements within the hearing site and existing power dynamics? And finally, how can careful consideration of voice in testimony settings create more ethical scenarios of speaking and witnessing?

Because the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was both criticized and fraught with political challenges, better understanding the process and effects can broaden our understanding of what might be possible with close attention to voice in similar disclosure situations. Initiated as a response to the Indian Residential School
Settlement Agreement, the formation of the TRC was challenged by accusations of inequities and disagreements on the process, culminating in the resignation of the original Commissioners (Anker 2016, Final Report of the TRC 2015). Despite these initial challenges, the TRC was implemented and a series of hearings took place across Canada. The parameters of the hearings were drafted in the mandate of the TRC in Schedule N, with input from Indigenous leaders, government officials, survivors, and others. These parties, both Indigenous and settler, created an arena for the storytelling of survivors. While I think it is fair to say the TRC was successful in bringing much needed attention to the histories of the residential school system, especially among the many settlers who had never heard of residential schools, the goals of ‘truth’ and reconciliation’ were far more nebulous. As scholar Kirsten Anker reminds us, TRCs are positioned as a more inclusive form of justice practice, but in actuality remain as flawed as their adversarial counterparts,

For many, alternative or restorative justice processes, such as the TRC, offer the possibility of a more respectful inclusion of Indigenous practices and philosophies or directly reflect them. The assumption that any given process does so has to be approached with caution, however. As the critical literature on restorative justice suggests, “reconciliation” and “truth” as the path to a peaceful community have as much European baggage – such as the harmony model or confessional practices of Christian traditions– as the adversarial litigation process. (Anker 2016)

TRCs are historically structured to reinforce and further legitimize the nation state which perpetrated the relevant crimes in the first place, hosted by government officials and, in some
cases, ensuring amnesty for violent criminals in the name of “truth seeking”. The Canadian TRC is no exception in its inequities. The relationship between Indigenous people and the Canadian government is well documented, if not well understood. Colonial practices over centuries have systematically dehumanized Indigenous people. Residential schools are one way colonizers (Canadians) sought to eliminate the inhabitants they encountered upon arrival at Turtle Island. After more than four hundred years of cruel and oppressive practices, the Canadian government and settler citizens are still participants (even if passively so) in the ongoing colonization of this land. Poor conditions and lack of clean water on reserves, missing and murdered women, girls, and 2spirit people, these are issues covered by media frequently. Still, there seems to be settler apathy towards these issues, perhaps because colonization has so thoroughly dehumanised Indigenous people in Canada that government initiative are seen as a casual investigation into a small problem and not as an urgent intervention to recover culture and protect lives. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*,

> Even after the Second World War, when the post-colonial period was beginning according to some cultural theorists, many indigenous peoples around the world were still not recognized as human, let alone citizens. The effect of such discipline was to silence (for ever in some cases) or to suppress ways of knowing, and the languages for knowing, of many different indigenous peoples. (Smith 1999, 69)

Smith associates dehumanization with silencing. Her association draws interesting parallels to the kind of loss of subjectivity Oliver attempts to remedy through witnessing. This silencing
Smith refers to is core to the necessity of carefully considering voice. In these cases, voice is a mode of resistance to centuries of colonial violence. The history of treaties, policies, residential schools, and land claims follows a long trail of broken promises and cruel treatment that Indigenous people have experienced since first contact. Settlers in Canada often have no knowledge of this history, despite the publically available historical record. These histories are not entrenched in the public school curriculum. As Smith says, “Under colonialism indigenous people have struggled against a Western view of history and yet been complicit with that view. We have often allowed our ‘histories’ to be told and have then become outsiders as we heard them being retold” (Smith 1999, 22). Colonial research practices have done little to benefit Indigenous people. Decolonial theory challenges Western perspectives that have suppressed Indigenous knowledge and practice. Decolonizing methodologies are becoming more urgently needed and enacted, as academia explores the potential for alternative worldviews in research (Linklater, 2014). I have struggled with my own euro-centric education and complicity in colonialism. This struggle is perhaps most apparent in the fact that I am studying the TRC, in some way, without inclusion of Indigenous participants. However, the immediacy of the TRC and its reconciliation efforts make settler engagement with the process timely. Considering excluding the TRC as a site of testimony in this study seemed to leave a gap in ways testimony occurs in the Canadian context. Including the TRC, in the context of this research, may also mean missing an opportunity to decolonize this research because I am focusing on the application of voice and sound in testimony, and not specifically on the ways decolonial theory and decolonial methodologies might be applied to this work. The TRC gathered data in the form of testimony, in the hope of producing direct benefits in the form of improved conditions for
Indigenous people in Canada. From 2008-2015 in the TRC Indigenous survivors and their descendants shared vivid and shocking details of the abuses and traumas experienced in the school system designed to “kill the Indian in the child” (Molloy 1999; TRC 2015). The publically available video recordings of the hearings (utilized in this thesis) are often difficult to watch in their painfully urgent wringing out of memories. Each survivor who spoke orally expressed their own trauma for the archives. At what personal cost to them? And what is the result for the speaker and listener? How, if at all, do the effects of testimony on these speakers figure into assessments of the successes and failures of the process as a whole?

The relationship between the speaker and the listener must also be accounted for, and understood to be fluid in many ways. Pre-existing power relationships and social positions are not abandoned upon entering into a moment that includes a trauma narrative expression (Bakhtin, 1981). The TRC made efforts to include Indigenous traditions, but the overall process was still steeped in colonialism. Both Anker and scholar Anna Cook address the TRC process and the challenges of settler denial in the possibility of hearings that are actually truly ‘heard’. In her 2017 article, Cook investigates settler denial as a road-block to justice, because Indigenous voices are never really heard in colonial structures that presuppose indigeneity is a disqualifying criteria for credibility. An epistemology of ignorance (settler denial) can never account for the injustices perpetrated by the nation state that creates the structure (TRC) of accountability (Cook 2017). I suggest that the urgency that comes with such a moment doesn’t suspend those relationships, but rather places them at the mercy of one’s empathetic capacity. Where power imbalances exist, as is often the case in survivor testimony, those with more power are briefly invited to physically explore their own capacity for empathy while those with
less power are briefly invited to explore the empowerment that comes from being heard. There is no guarantee that these invitations will be taken up, bodies may be too entrenched in positionality to recognize the opportunity. But the possibility exists in a tangible way when speakers and witnesses engage in the sharing of oral trauma narratives.

To disclose the details of a traumatic event is to pour out something deeply felt by the victim of that trauma, leaving them vulnerable. Disclosure is a limited term for my purposes, as it does not fully encompass the whole experience of vocalizing that disclosure to an audience. Beyond what Oliver (and Austin) would call “the constative element of speech...what is said” (98), the enunciation I am interested in elaborates on the disclosure by evoking an energetic and emotional interconnection between the speaker and the listener, because the acoustical act of speaking exposes the speaker more than written accounts or acknowledging facts without speaking. These evocations are directly linked to the vulnerability experienced by the speaker, and also by the listener who witnesses the disclosure. The constative is merely a small part of testimony; more can be learned if one listens more deeply. Oliver’s use of the term constative immediately calls to mind Austin. Austin works to distinguish between what is said and the act of saying it. The act of performing testimony has sonic implications through voice that need to be explored.

When disclosure happens through vocalization the speaker is made more vulnerable by the use of the emotionally connected tool of voice. This vulnerable state is recognized in psychoanalytical theory (Levine 2016), but has not been fully appreciated in everyday encounters or other scenarios. Every act of vocalization generates a moment of exposure. The
physical act of opening my mouth allows me to *let out* something and to *take in* something. It is an unconscious exchange that can be managed by conscious attentiveness but never controlled or even predicted. Like many bodily responses, it exceeds conscious thought. For the speaker it is a process of attempting to share trauma. For the listener it is a process of attempting to know a trauma that is largely unknowable. A tension is created between the listener and the speaker that momentarily (and possibly permanently) connects them to each other’s making and unmaking.

Butler touches on this tension by describing it as an undoing. She speaks to the ways in which we are made vulnerable to one another in *Precarious Life*. She writes,

> Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something.

This seems clearly the case with grief, but it can be so only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. One may want to, or manage to for a while, but despite one’s best effort, one is undone, in the face of the other, by touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel (Butler 23-24).

Butler offers a clear and useful perspective on the intersubjectivity of our vulnerability. To be “undone” by one another is to experience the change that cannot be erased. In my argument, this undoing is the way the vulnerable space leaves both the speaker and the listener changed somehow. Perhaps there are ways to exercise some measure of control over the likelihood of the change being valuable for all involved. By sharing the details of a trauma, by speaking the words out loud for an audience, a vulnerable space is created because expression of personal
pain requires exposure and opening up, risking becoming “undone” as Butler insists we must.

This vulnerability is brought about by the embodied nature of acoustic geography: our bodies are impacted by the sounds we hear, including the voice of another person. I propose that the oral trauma narrative is inscribed in the bodies of the speaker and listener. There is a tiny fissure created by shared exchange of personal pain. The exchange is both precarious and inevitable, as emotions often are. The uncertainty of this precarious position is how the vulnerability manifests. How can we control what we feel or how we react when raw emotional content is voiced and so permeates the air we stand in? The vibrations of the sounds waves of voice touch our bodies and so affect us. It is a physical encounter that reverberates within us going forward.

Performing arts as a field of study relies on the physicality of the exchange between speaker and audience. Performers use this connection to inspire an emotional response by inviting audiences to pay close attention and participate in an emotional exchange that requires physical engagement. The audience is unlikely to be moved if they fall asleep, distract themselves with their program or phone, or are too far from the performer to get the full expression being shared. Physical presence, in all senses of the word, is the essential component for good live performances. Physical engagement is insisted upon by the physics of vocalization and poses a risk for both the speaker and the audience. Voice has a material effect: it resonates within the body and reverberates out of the body as sound waves, coming into contact with surfaces (and people) in the space. Engagement occurs for the listener when the body receives the contact of sound waves as language, but also as vibrations (Hemsworth, 2016). For the speaker, the release of vocal sound from the body is a complicated physical
action. Speaking is not just a cerebral action. It engages multiple body parts operating in unison. When any of these body parts are not functioning properly, speech becomes impaired. Such impairment, including aphonia, can leave sufferers feeling trapped in their bodies. Speech is a necessary release. As sensitive speech, that is to say speech that is emotionally fraught for the speaker, leaves the speaker’s body the speaker becomes a conduit for energy being released through the mouth. For the speaker the experience can be managed in some ways but cannot, perhaps should not, be controlled. Letting out what had previously been held in is an exercise in being fully connected to our bodies and in connecting to others. In my own arts practice I have explored this phenomenon at length. One of the first things an actor, public speaker, or singer (those who utilise their voice as their primary tool) learns in training is breath control. Breath control is essential for management, or manipulation, of the vocal sounds emitted in performance, but also some level of management of the performer’s emotional state. Technically proper breathing can diminish nervousness and enhance a sense of confidence. Speaking, especially speaking something of personal significance, puts breath control to the test as the power of the words battle the breath inside our bodies. This tension within our bodies is how the speaker is transported to the vulnerable space; a precarious space forcing the speaker to experience and hopefully examine the uncontrollable emotions associated with the trauma. The words are going to have an impact one way or another and so speaking them becomes something of an exercise in letting go, like dropping a fragile object from a great height, unsure where it will land or how much damage will be done. The actual content disclosure, or confession, has been pre-determined. The constative aspect is something planned by the speaker, not a simply casual or spontaneous conversation being made up on the spot without
previous knowledge. As Felman, Laub (1992), and Oliver (2001) claim, and I agree, testimony is performed with dimensions that exceed the constative speech. It comes with an emotional import that may not be understood at the moment, or ever. Testimony can include details which are indelibly inscribed in the speaker’s memory and details which emerge unexpectedly or unknowingly. Due to the act of letting out of the narrative by speaking it out loud, an emotional exchange occurs. Referred to as affective energy (Oliver 2001), this emotional exchange is significant in testimony. Arguably testimonial spaces are emotionally charged at all times. The sound of a voice declaring its own pain draws that charge into focus.

The key characteristic of performing arts that differentiates it from other enunciations of trauma is the agency inherent in public performance. There is an examination of power occurring in every performance (Smith 1997). By virtue of occupying space on a stage and drawing the charge of the room into focus, the performing artist has an agency agreed upon by the audience. The audience acknowledges that what is said by the performer has some authority, some significance. This does not presuppose an automatic understanding of what the performer articulates or the vulnerable space that is subsequently created. However, it calls into question for me the veracity of the vulnerable space in situations when the person disclosing has less agency or whose authority is deemed unreliable. In these situations, perhaps the space is only available to the speaker. This may be relevant in examining the outcomes of the vulnerable space, be they healing or traumatic.

Testifying is challenged by potential consequences of giving evidence. To testify is to make a political statement, rather than keep a disclosure private and personal, by contributing
a narrative to the public archive and inviting a result of some kind (verdict or in the case of the TRC Call to Action). Politics and pain can be difficult to navigate while one is also working through one’s own trauma. This navigation can lead to unforeseen outcomes for the speaker. Trauma theory can illuminate some of these divergent outcomes. Most of trauma theory is predicated on the notion that pain is difficult to express, potentially inexpressible, and that many of the challenges of dealing with pain are tied up with loss of identity and subjectivity. This inexpressibility has consequences. Elaine Scarry tells us,

>We have seen that physical pain is difficult to express, and that this inexpressibility has political consequences; but we will also see that those political consequences – by making overt precisely what is at stake in “inexpressibility” – begin to expose by inversion the essential character of “expressibility,” whether verbal or material. (Scarry 19)

Scarry helps us to understand the social justice imperative in the testimony problems I am highlighting. Paying attention to voice is so essential, because with doing so we receive the constative testimony as given silently, without the full expression the survivor intended. The silencing of survivors by failing to create space that promotes expression of painful narratives is politically beneficial to the nation state in the case of the TRC. Without any single story, the violent history of Residential Schools is minimalized. The inexpressibility Scarry describes is a consequence of what Oliver would refer to as the destruction of subjectivity caused by retraumatization. The political consequences are directly reflective of power imbalances. Trauma victims often state a feeling of being dead, being divorced from the world. This
separation makes communication and the connection that it allows all but impossible (Brison 2002, Scarry 1985, Luckhurst 2008). In some way, there has to be an agreed upon openness between speaker and listener. There has to be mutual agreement that both will enter the vulnerable space prepared to be changed.

As a performing artist, it is common practice to invoke past feelings of pain and pleasure to repeat them for an audience under the new conditions of the art being expressed. This method acting technique draws on emotional recall or affective memory popularized by Lee Strasberg and Constantin Stanislavski in the 20th century. This live performance technique in rehearsed artistic performance (as opposed to the performative) amplifies the vulnerable space. Because the performer has an intent to influence the audience in a more specific way than the survivor who testifies in court or one who discloses in a public ceremony, the performer can be at lesser or at greater risk of exposure to the vulnerable space. Unless it is a confessional text, such as a personal poem, the artist performer has an opportunity to distance themselves in advance of the performance. The study of the text creates a separation between the speaker and what is spoken. The words that are vocalized are imposed, not known. They are a reflection. When the words spoken are personal, about a private traumatic experience, then the vocalization is letting out that private knowledge. In this situation, the performer has some understanding of the experience to be shared with the audience because it is an experience repeated over and over again in the course of a career. In situations of more personal performance the constative content is known in the most private sense and so the performance becomes more precarious for the artist. Still, knowing the unexpected will happen does not suggest knowledge of what will happen. Both parties are still vulnerable to the
moment and may feel a release or a trauma. A change of some kind, however small, takes place by virtue of having been present, having heard or spoken the words, having felt the resonance in the room. That change is an unknown result of the site of entanglement of vulnerable space.

The emotional impact is the undetermined aspect of the disclosure event. Indigenous scholar Dian Million introduces a more complex telling of trauma narratives in her treatise on felt theory (2009). She positions emotional response as necessary data that is disregarded by colonial academia. This is helpful to my argument because I also strive to make a case for a more complex perception of testimony that includes consideration for the sonic aspects of speech. Shosana Felman examines the act of this speech process in sharing testimony by invoking Stephane Mallermé’s suggestion that some speech (such as the news of a revolution in poetry) is like sharing the news of an accident just seen. Felman states that in the sharing of this news,

he speaks too soon, before he is quite ready, before he quite knows what his subject is about. And yet, since he has been a witness to “an accident known”, since he does know that an accident has taken place, and since the accident “pursues him”, he has got to speak “already,” almost compulsively, even though he has not yet had time to catch his breath (Felman, 21).

Felman posits that this speech is “in advance of the control of consciousness”, but I see it similarly applied to speech with an unknown emotional effect, not just an unknown choice of language. Like the dropping of the object from a height, there is a moment of doubt, even during and immediately after the point of no return, as to the potential outcomes of letting go.
How does the announcement of the accident change the immediate environment? Is there action to be taken? Is there judgement that you didn’t do something already? Has your delivery of the news brought into question your sensitivity? Your empathy? There is a control of consciousness with regard to the word choice in vocalizing disclosures, but not necessarily in the delivery. The listener is drawn into the trauma in unexpected ways. As Felman observes, “By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-worker of the traumatic event: through his [sic] very listening, he comes to partially experience the trauma in himself.” (Felman 1992, 57) This is how the shared vulnerability between the speaker and the audience occurs. Our Canadian justice system is adversarial by nature and so directly rejects connection of this kind (Anker 2016). As witnesses in juridical spaces, one is expected to deny the vulnerability being experienced in favour of a more objective approach (Hibbitts 1995). It seems that emotion is thought to be a destroyer of truth seeking. However, Felman and others (Butler, Oliver) state that there is value in exploring the emotional responses. Vulnerability has a role to play in the processes enacted in the pursuit of justice.

There are certainly a range of possible responses to the vulnerable space, such as regression, resistance, conflict, and others. In this study I focus on two: healing and further (new) trauma, or retraumatization. I am interested in these two possibilities in particular, because my questions regarding ethical responses are hinged largely on the tension between healing and trauma. Oliver refers to this question of outcomes by suggesting the possibility that the performative nature of testimony can humanize those who have been objectified. Being heard is the immediate reward for speaking up, which has significance in itself, but it is
not necessarily enough for long-term or ongoing healing. The relationship with the audience is the key factor in this possibility. Oliver writes,

Bearing witness reconstitutes the inner witness even as it is addressed to an external witness. The process of bearing witness begins to repair address-ability and response-ability damaged through [abuses such as] slavery and oppression. Bearing witness works through the trauma of objectification by re-instituting subjective agency as the ability to respond or address oneself. (Oliver 105)

If this sense of agency is not recovered, the enunciation of trauma can re-traumatize the survivor. In some cases, the feelings are simply too deeply suppressed to access from a single vocalization. However, the survivor is still exposed to the potential for healing through the vulnerability inherent in the disclosure.

In performing arts, the vulnerable space manifests differently. Artists deliberately create the conditions that introduce vulnerability to the space in order to connect to the audience as profoundly as possible. The audience, having made a choice to attend the arts event, has an unspoken agreement that they are open to that connection. The performing arts unsettle audiences as part of message delivery and meaning making. Artists also attempt to offer something of themselves. Performers attempt to communicate more intensely than in daily life. Theatre teacher, Uta Hagen, discusses this necessity in her famous book “A Respect for Acting” (Hagen 1973). She highlights the performer’s drive to stimulate something most people shy away from in life,
If someone publicly expresses tenderness, and our heart melts, we look for an immediate mask to prove that we aren’t softies, haven’t been touched, and so we laugh or make a joke of it, or cover with nonchalance. But as an actor, in order to reveal what’s at stake for the character on the deepest level and allow for pertinent communication with the audience, I must make myself, for ultimate expression, more vulnerable than in life. (Hagen 214)

Hagen draws attention to the barriers to vulnerability and the actor’s role in bringing those barriers down. The conditions of the vulnerable space are constructed in performance. Perhaps there is something to learn from that process to create a vulnerable space in testimony settings that allows all parties to encounter vulnerability and respond with empathy.

In this thesis I investigate how the vulnerable space might offer both speakers and listeners in quasi-juridical settings the same possibility to be changed by the sonic experience shared as is those in performing arts settings. I argue that voice is a key catalyst to manifesting the vulnerable space, through three key aspects: the physical release of speaking out loud, the acoustical geography of the speaker and the listener, and the ethical response of the listener. I examine physical release through reflections on artistic practices that deliberately tap into some level of deep emotion to evoke a connection with audiences. I examine acoustical geography through careful consideration of the spatial elements of both performances and testimony. I speculate upon ethical response through review of various juridical events (primarily the TRC) and the responses and results that can be identified. The vulnerable space is important because it is a gateway to allow people to change in some way. Healing and
empowerment are the hope for something like the TRC, but in reality this is not always the case (Cook 2016, 2017; Anker 2016). There is distinct risk in engaging in the vulnerable space, especially for the speaker. But can healing ever be possible without risk? Or, if we assume it is impossible because the word “reconciliation” presupposes a return to a balance of power that never existed, is there a possibility for a new conciliation?

In this thesis I explore a series of testimonial moments in the performing arts and in more formal and more familiar testimonial settings to illuminate possible opportunities for new perspectives on witnessing. By better understanding the act of listening to someone else express pain orally, I intend to offer insight into how we collectively miss the mark on listening to disclosures of trauma. It is a difficult thing to hear about someone’s agony. We are well equipped to ignore the pain of others. Are we also built to notice that pain? Empathize? What types of transformation might be possible if we do? I suggest there is a potential for a more ethical and empathetic approach to testimony. I hope we are capable of more.
This was the deepest artifact, box bruised and bound by locks and rope so thick we could barely cut through it. Inside we found a poem.

JUST LIKE THIS ONE

Those are the artifacts.

Those are the remnants of a bigger dream and a better god

BUT THEY ARE SO SMALL

Can we take these pieces of hope and build them into something?

Something great

Something I can wrap my hands around

We gathered here together

But we never let ourselves touch

Never felt the skin and pain and heart of our neighbors and teachers and children

We understood that we weren’t safe

But never understood why

Because we haven’t yet learned we are forced to repeat the year.

And every year that we take the class,

AND FAIL

We lose another brother or sister,

another child in this wild world

and it should be understood by now that any life lost is a loss to all of us.

But it isn’t.

We, the people, learned that some among us are bad, lesser than the rest. And try as we might we can’t get rid of them all.

Instead, we build bigger jails to house our demons.

We smile and wave, but refuse to save the world as it drowns.

And if it comes down to me or you,

We both know what we have to do.

We have to choose or we both lose, that is the only way.

But it isn’t.

There are other ways,

There are better days out there

Waiting for us to choose them.

We are afraid of people crashing into us.

We are waiting for directions.

We are waiting to be told how to be good.

I am waiting with you.

(“Dig It Up” by Shannon Kitchings, reflections on the research process)
Anatomy – The Study

This thesis draws upon the fields of poetry, sonic geography, performing arts, and trauma studies. This interdisciplinary approach is meant to help me utilize my own expertise to discuss the possibility of a more nuanced and ethical witnessing practice. These fields come together to articulate what I call the vulnerable space – a geographic location between at least two people who are open to transformation and sharing an exchange that is highly emotional. I use these fields of study to ground the narration of trauma in physically embodied acts and experiences. As I reflect on the public debate regarding the #blacklivesmatter and #metoo movements between 2014-2018, it becomes easy to contemplate the ways we listen to the voices of others. Not voice as a metaphor for agency, but rather the actual sound made by humans expressing their pain. Social movements project voices in multiple ways: chants at rallies, speeches to government officials, sound bytes in news stories, etc. We also use voice in a variety of healing modalities: sighing in yoga, singing hymns, meditative chants, talk therapy, to name a few. This suggests to me that there is at least some acknowledgement in our everyday lives that voice has potential transformative power. Isn’t that why we sometimes speak out loud to ourselves? This action can offer us some comfort or help in our processing. If we accept that possibility in voice, then it becomes possible to accept that there is the same, if not more, potential power at work in the more performative spaces in which we use voice.

I have chosen to focus part of my testimony process analysis on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada hearings conducted between 2010-2015. I review several passages from witnesses and speakers to draw observations about the way the testimony given in the TRC impacted speakers and listeners. Data are drawn from archival records of the TRC.
This case offers a particular kind of witnessing, because part of the mandate of the TRC was to make space for the official vocalization of traumas, especially those that had been silenced or ignored for cultural or political reasons. The TRC is also a useful example of testimony that has reverberated beyond the courtroom. The results of the hearings include Calls to Action that are intended to be carried out by the government and citizens of Canada. As a Canadian, I have a responsibility to witness the TRC in some capacity in order to learn and work toward a transformation that allows me to better understand those who have been traumatized. This shared responsibility is relevant as I move forward with this study. I focus on two hearings, Hay River in NWT and Thunder Bay in ON. By focusing on these moments of oral expression I can work to understand the unique impacts of speaking out loud and listening to live disclosures of trauma. The principal focus of this study is not on the content of testimony, or the experience of Residential Schools. I am exploring, rather, the limits and potentials inherent in the act of vocalizing.

**Study Design**

This is a Masters thesis for the Social Justice and Equity MA at Brock University. I am investigating my research questions through a combination of archive, live performance, and video analysis. Initially I had intended to interview Residential School survivors who spoke at the TRC and witnesses who heard their testimonies. In 2016 I travelled to Yellowknife, NWT and met with five people who spoke or witnessed testimony at the TRC hearings. These initial conversations were intended to help guide me to potential research participants. The conversations also illuminated some similar examples of vulnerable space I observe in this thesis. However, the process of finding an ethical way for me, as a non-Indigenous researcher,
to engage people who had already experienced so much trauma was difficult. The Research Ethics Board at Brock had valid concerns about the risk of retraumatization and I reconfigured my research when the process of obtaining REB clearance for interviews became protracted. This reconfiguration resulted in the final decision that this study, as presented here, is better suited to my own speculation about the possibilities for change in how we share and receive disclosures of trauma. It did, however, mean that this project would no longer have the benefit of Indigenous participants with whom to consult and collaborate. This limitation is addressed later in this chapter. Using my skills and expertise in voice I analyse video and text, but also include experiences to which I bore witness as a speaker or audience member (witness). Because one of my objectives is to find ways of enhancing victim-centred testimonial practices, so that the likelihood of retraumatization through testimony is reduced, I was strongly committed to conducting research without further traumatizing survivors. The self-reflexive element of this study, which takes the form of a review of my own experience with live performance and my own performing practice, is essential to capturing the ‘live and in-person’ aspect of vulnerable space. Through application of theories of witnessing and sonic geography, I argue that testimony setting could benefit from an approach comparable to the approach most audiences take with performance, openness to transformation.

There are several known limitations to this study. The first, and perhaps most significant, is that I approach researching Indigenous lived experiences (as well as the lived experiences of non-Indigenous people), as they pertain to giving testimony at the TRC, as a settler on Turtle Island. I endeavor to clearly articulate where I know I am unable to fully grasp the specific histories and power dynamics that are at play on this territory. It is important to
again note that this study focuses on the process of giving and witnessing testimony, and not on the content if that testimony. Voice and how it is expressed and experienced is the element of speech with which this study is concerned. I am limiting my examination of current juridical practices in such a way that I exclude some alternative justice methods that are already being applied on a relatively small scale. I have two key premises. Premise 1: the adversarial nature of our legal system disregards the necessity of ethical response-ability (Oliver 2001) or empathetic vulnerability. Premise 2: judges, juries, and other listeners are given both coded and explicit instructions to decide on the ‘truthfulness’ of a survivor’s narrative. Premise 1 is important, because it situates the problem outlined in premise 2 as a problem of a denial of social justice. Premise 2 is important because it suggests listeners can be empowered to make decisions based on their own, likely differing understandings of truth and witnessing.

I begin by examining a series of artistic responses to trauma. I chose a variety of artistic mediums that I have organised in order to demonstrate the depth of potential in voice. I start with a variety of spoken word and theatre pieces about different kinds of trauma to explore how voice in performance settings can affect people. I finish the artistic study with readings of two Indigenous performance events, both of which help me to situate voice in performance as a helpful window into the potential for a more nuanced understanding of voice in testimony settings by drawing parallels to the act of witnessing in hearings. Following an analysis of these artistic interventions, I examine recent hearings in Canada, focussing primarily on the TRC. The TRC is an interesting case study, because it was deliberately set up to be an alternative form of statement giving. Schedule N, which outlines in detail the mandate and scope of the TRC, specified that the process must be:
accessible; victim-centered; [that it should ensure] confidentiality (if required by the former student); do no harm; [protect the] health and safety of participants; [be] representative; public/transparent; accountable; open and honourable process; comprehensive; inclusive, educational, holistic, just and fair; respectful; voluntary; flexible; and forward looking in terms of rebuilding and renewing Aboriginal relationships and the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians (Schedule N)

This aspiration is counter to the way the traditional Canadian justice system operates in many ways, but I want to focus on two aspect of the mandate: that the process is victim-centred and comprehensive. I propose the hearings were neither appropriately victim-centred, nor sufficiently comprehensive precisely because they did not adequately address the interpersonal dynamics of voice in the testimonial setting. As Métis visual arts scholar, David Garneau states,

Testimony produced for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is constrained by non-Indigenous narratives of healing and closure; by Western religious ideology (the Catholic rite of reconciliation and Christian concepts of forgiveness); by an emphasis on individuals over communities; by the public display of victims but not perpetrators...

(Garneau 2016, 23-24)

The limitations Garneau outlines are not only challenges to the structure of the TRC but also lenses through which testimony was heard by some listeners. Noting the absence of perpetrators, Garneau highlights one of the most important factors of the Canadian TRC. By excluding perpetrators, the TRC all but ensured the process would be at best unsatisfying to most people involved, at worst exploitative and insulting. This context is important to consider
in the relationship of speaker and listener. The fact that the structure of the TRC is fundamentally Christian and Western, as Garneau points out, further entrenches the process as beneficial to the nation state and not the Indigenous survivors. Additionally, the TRC calls upon settlers to engage in the process of reconciliation. Reconciliation is itself a complicated and problematic notion, steeped in assumptions and attempts to placate survivors. Is reconciliation an appropriate or attainable goal? Probably not. But there may be other positive results of the TRC. This study attempts to place the testimony shared as a living record to be engaged with and learned from in an ongoing process of witnessing.

Without interviews, I am instead utilizing my reflections as a speaker or witness to performing arts events and statements made in media or recorded comments in video archives that refer to the experience of speaking or listening to testimony. The data sources included in this study are appropriate to the scope of the study. I certainly invite future research into my hypotheses, as I recognize this study is in no way comprehensive and that there is abundant scope for my insights to be applied to other contexts and case studies. Instead, I have opted to analyse and interpret a small sample of experiences in order to open up the conversation on the possibility of transferring some of the cultural and social practices in performing arts spaces to judicial and quasi-judicial spaces. With these limitations in mind, I offer this study as a rigorous review of a small sample of relevant examples of witnessing. Analysis of these data points will illuminate a concept I call ‘vulnerable space’. Through developing this concept I intend to extend the work of Kelly Oliver, propose key recommendations delivering and receiving testimony, and initiate a necessary conversation into the merit of oral communication in a time of complicated and arguably poor communication.
Researcher

I come to this work as a mixed race, black, female-identifying settler living in the Anishinaabe/Haudenosaunee territory referred to as Niagara. My presence here is due to colonization and the lasting effects of the European slave trade. Examining the ways our bodies engage with the people and geography of the space we occupy is a key feature of my thesis. As a researcher I am combining elements of fields in which I have significant experience: performing arts, community development, and communications. I was inspired to this topic through my experiences in rural Rwanda in 2014. At that time I was exposed to narratives from survivors of the 1994 genocide. One story particularly struck me: a narrative of “reconciliation” between neighbors. The details of the narrative are particularly gruesome and as it is not my story to share I will refrain, but the proximity of the survivors and the perpetrators stuck with me. Neighbors, in homes side by side for years, are forced to live with the knowledge and language of what had transpired in 1994 filling the space of the garden between them. So how does that happen? How do people respond to not only the trauma experienced, but the act of talking about it afterward? I imagine the chasm between the two homes is a space of enormous vulnerability for both parties. It is a vulnerable space that is created by not only the memory of violence that occurred there during the genocide, but the speaking out about the trauma. Instead of ignoring it, the narratives were spoken, broadcasted, archived, and experienced publicly in tribunals, gacacas (Rwandan community courts), and the media. Two decades later, the echoes of the survivor’s voice, stating in detail what had happened, still ring in whispered conversations on street corners and in offices. Communities still remember, still feel the trauma, still talk about it in hushed voices. This is a complicated result of the aftermath of
public hearings about injustice, but it is important we reflect on it as it has implications for how we listen to these narratives in the future. Because I am a settler and outsider to the experiences of survivors referenced in this thesis, I recognize my role as observer, as witness, and as participant in engagement with these records and the conversations I have had with survivors. I utilize my own experience with trauma and voice to reflect on the examples and cases I engage within this thesis.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research is grounded in Kelly Oliver’s theory of witnessing as response-ability. I am combining Oliver’s work with theories of acoustical geography to explore some of the possible responses to voice. These theories are then supplemented by performing arts theory and practical application. These three access points (Oliver’s notion of response-ability, acoustical geography, and performing arts) come together to offer a fresh perspective on the singular experience of orally narrating one’s own trauma. These access points are interrelated. For the purposes of this study, they can be summarized, in order, as body, space, and relationship: three areas I suggest haven’t been explored in conjunction in a sustained way. By approaching trauma disclosures with a focus on the bodies relating to each other in a given space, I propose a more ethical and potentially healthy scenario is possible.

This relationship of bodies in space is steeped in vulnerability. Corporeal existence makes us flesh and bone and blood, matter that can be touched, changed, injured. Butler discusses vulnerability at length in ways that can illuminate the necessity and function of the vulnerable space to which I refer. To begin, she directs our attention to the body as vulnerable:
The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimension. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, it bears their imprint, is formed within the crucible of social life... (Butler 2004, p26)

The body, as Butler describes it, is material. That materiality exists without our permission, and our bodies experience the world in ways that exceed our consciousness. Bodies are transformed by the world, marked by each moment and experience. Butler’s attention to the body allows me to further investigate the body as an instrument of voice, thereby assigning voice the ability to express self beyond language. Through this investigation I come, as Butler does, to vulnerability as essential. In Butler’s work on grievable lives, she illuminates vulnerability as a “precondition for humanization” and establishes an argument in favor of vulnerability as a necessary condition of the body. It is with this line of thinking in mind that I suggest the vulnerable state is a potential site of entanglement that can offer a strong possibility of healing. Butler finds vulnerability to be a common aspect of bodies that can offer new possibilities for perceiving both self and others. In the same way Butler proposes vulnerability as a vehicle for recognizing one another, I propose it as a vehicle for empathizing for one another.
Using Oliver and Butler in these ways, I intend to conduct a study that examines several potential sites of entanglement and examine them for examples of witnessing in the vulnerable space. These two theories of Oliver’s and Butler’s act in tandem to support the existence of the vulnerable space to which I refer, and also to offer a possible ethical pathway for those who find themselves in that space.

**Poetry and Performance**

I am also applying poetic inquiry to this study, both in the examination of poetry as data, and in the inclusion of original poetry that reflects my process and findings in the study. Poetic inquiry has come onto the research scene as a qualitative research tool that allows for exploration and communication beyond boundaries of science. This poetic approach encourages a lyrical study of the data and a lyrical response, a response founded in empathy and unbound from the pursuit of a single empirical truth. This approach allows for a different quality to ‘knowing’ as Nilofar Shidmehr claims:

...critics of modernist epistemology, including poststructuralists and critical theorists, have prepared the scene to include the chorus in the dramatic play of inquiry. They have done so by showing their concern not only with ‘what there is to know’ but also with ‘what they [poets] know they almost know, what they have yet to know, and what it is likely they will never know’ (Sanger, 2010, p. 8). The lyrical quality of poetry addresses this concern because it goes beyond knowing and representing what there is to know and draws attention to the mystery and ineffability of things. Lyric also draws attention to the perishability of what there is in the world (Shidmehr, 2014).
Shidmehr’s acknowledgement of the potentials in poetry enhances my attempt to create within this document a sense of language that is changed by the application of voice. My hope is this will help the reader engage in a sense of “beyondness”. Each chapter opens with a poem (or excerpt) that is meant to be read aloud by the reader. These interventions are tools to help my readers engage in the physical embodiment I refer to so frequently. This study endeavors to ask the reader to consider more than what is seen, more than what is heard, and find what might be discovered by considering the impact of voice. As much of trauma theory has done (Luckhurst 2008, Scarry 1985), I am attempting to move past a specific element of trauma (the oral narration) to find the hidden aspects that affect healing and connection. Oliver’s subtitle “...Beyond Recognition” hints at the necessity to move beyond the initial comprehension to experience a sense that may not be describable, knowable, or expressible. To accomplish that ‘beyondness’, I am using poetic interpretations of excerpts of data to assist in evoking a response that may be unfamiliar to the reader. It is this effort to break down expectations that will help the reader to understand the vulnerable space I describe. As the work explores deeper levels of sound and silence, poetry is a helpful tool to engage in what is ‘beyond’ knowing. This idea of moving beyond is essential, as this study is focussed on the limits of current practices. There is much more beyond what is commonly considered in the various spaces in which I have chosen to intervene. Please allow me to attempt to create a world of imagining using poetry to help explore that which lies beyond this practical reality. I invite readers to speak the poetry out loud themselves. Feel it vibrate in your body. Hear it echo in your head as you engage with this subject with me.
Building upon what poetry can offer, I include performing arts events in this study to help understand the nuances of voice. I use several examples in my data, but spoken word poetry specifically offers a close approximation of oral disclosures in other settings such as testimony, though I recognize there is a different performative aspect in this example. While not always the case, I have selected performances that the performers claim to be autobiographical or reflect lived experience. These artistic expressions of trauma are communicated in a similar way as testimony, though certainly with less at stake. By deliberately creating the space, an artist invites, or rather insists that the audience come into close contact with the story of trauma. The audience has no choice but to experience the vulnerability in their own way. They may not have a profound experience or be open to an ethical or empathetic response, but the experience itself is indelible. Exposure to the pain of another is as permanent as a memory. Even if it is forgotten, it infiltrates the way we think and feel to some degree going forward. It is imprinted in our bodies, as Butler would say. Bodies in the audience of a trauma story are vulnerable. In spoken word art this vulnerability is directly addressed by speaking to the audience directly (as opposed to a character in theatre). As poets, we choose to enter into a sensitive agreement to give something of ourselves in the hope that our audience will take it and give something back in reciprocity. We also deliberately ‘set the stage’, so to speak, by delivering a well-rehearsed monologue in an environment that favors the performer as credible. However, there is still the same aspect of uncertainty found in first-hand disclosure in other settings such as testimony and rituals. While the language has been selected in advance, the poem is already written, the experience for both the speaker and the listener within the vulnerable space is still dependant on both parties and unpredictable.
As this research focuses on a sonic subject (voice), it is logical to examine it with a research methodology based in sonic ways of knowing. Purely text-based methodologies are limiting for a study of this nature. It is difficult to consider the multitude of layers in voice with a simple recounting of the verbal text, “sounds that lie outside the ‘normal’ range of human vocalization tend to be marginalized in conventional written accounts,” (Gallagher and Prior 2014). For this study, I will be utilizing acoustic geography, the study of sound as it relates to space, to better understand how the venues of disclosures affect the speaker and listener relationship. I am reviewing the video footage and live experiences I witnessed to include as much of the information that ‘lie[s] outside’ the mere text. I agree with the hypothesis that “how people listen in and through the situated body may provide insights to the uncertain and ever-shifting visceral responses that shape orientations, identifications, choices, social interactions, as well as human and non-human relations that configure everyday life” (Duffy et al. 2016). Though the field of sonic research is still growing and expanding fairly rapidly, there are several leaders in the field upon whose work I draw here. As the field evolves, it opens up a plethora of opportunities to explore transdisciplinary potentials, such as the geography of voice and the potential meanings that arise from the sound of human voices. Why differentiate sound as a unique meaning maker? Because it is a sensory experience that is perceived in physical and temporal ways. Walter Gershon helps here by highlighting this unique quality in his studies of educational spaces and sound. He writes,

Attention to sounds requires a different way of being than reading text. As anyone who has tried to render hours of audio or listened to a song knows, listening unfolds
temporally in ways that reading does not—skimming through sounds is not the same as skimming through a text. (Gershon 2013)

Gershon and others (Hemsworth; LaBelle; Duffy et al) distinguish sound as a unique sensory stimulus which causes physical and emotional reactions. Gershon’s attention to the temporal aspect of sound is a useful approach to the difference between the oral expression of text and the written expression. The act of *spending time* in the experience of listening is possible criteria for access to the vulnerable space. By giving time/taking time to listen there is a kind of commitment to the speaker. The relationship doesn’t occur casually. It is a deliberate experience in which two parties agree to participate. Simply reading the text would certainly be faster than attending the oral disclosure in testimony. Gershon insists something is gained by observing the sound of voices beyond the word choice. My efforts to move ‘beyond’ the text require an approach that encompasses a broader experience than simply the transcript of a disclosure.

Here Austin’s distinction between constative and performative (reprised in Oliver’s work) aligns in useful ways. As audiences become attuned to the sonic dimension of testimony, they can consciously respond to more than the semantics. This is no easy feat; it is easy to ignore the performative in favor of the constative because words on their own can seem easier to interpret. We have been trained to listen for the constative. But audiences are receiving more than the constative when witnessing testimony in person. Access to the vocal variety of testimony (pitch, tone, volume, pace, etc.) offers a broader perspective of the testimony given, reinforcing the idea that the sonic sphere has something additional to offer that the transcribed
text alone. Sound connects bodies (LaBelle 2010) in ways that need far more attention than is typically given. The visceral response to speaking and hearing a disclosure of trauma deserves a visceral approach to researching the data. Again, I invite readers of this thesis to engage as deeply as they feel comfortable (or perhaps uncomfortable) by viewing the videos referenced and speaking written portions out loud. If, as Oliver argues, ethical responsibility is tied to the potential of ongoing response, or ‘infinite response-ability’, then close attention to the sonic nature of witnessing allows us to consider resonance and acoustics as methods of connecting and reconnecting ad infinitum. This is a useful jumping off point for exploring in more detail the specific aspect of sound in the intersubjective dynamics of witnessing. I propose that sound is unique and important, that voice is a specific mode of communication that transmits more than just words. This proposal draws attention to how sound touches us on multiple levels. Sound is immersive. Sound surrounds us. Unlike vision, which we can only perceive from the periphery, sound reverberates around and through our whole bodies. Speaking is the act of constructing the environment with sound waves and then experiencing that environment in an embodied way. The embodiment, for both the speaker and the witness, is the nexus point I hope to understand.

**Voice, Trauma, and Testimony**

Poetry, performance, and sound align with witnessing and trauma theory by expressly attempting to come up against the unknowable and embrace the discomfort of never knowing the whole truth. At best, the confrontation leads to a new understanding, but never full knowledge for which Western judicial process may strive. The vulnerable space is a site of possibilities; speakers and listeners can question what they think they know and communally
explore what *might be*. In testimony, I hope to find possible moments of vocalization that may benefit from close attention to new possibilities and offer participants more carefully empathetic experiences. Because of the uncertainty in vulnerability, there is endless potential for empathetic response-ability.

This is an exploration of the relationship between a survivor orally disclosing a traumatic experience and the audience witnessing the disclosure. Vocalizing a traumatic experience creates a circumstance that exposes both the speaker and the listener to a kind of vulnerability, which can be felt in that instant in any number of ways, including as a healing release or a new trauma or perhaps an entirely different kind of occurrence. Better understanding such encounters between survivors and witnesses in testimony and other disclosure scenarios is essential to broadening our understanding of testimony and perhaps decreasing the potential for retraumatization. Here, I distinguish between disclosure (the revealing of something secret or private) and testimony (a statement as evidence) by positioning all testimony as a kind of disclosure, while recognizing that disclosures of trauma occur in many situations beyond the forum of juridical or quasi-judicial spaces. Felman argues that testimony is a particular kind of *speech act* which “dynamically explodes any conceptual reification and any constative delimitations” (Felman 1992, pg. 5). Understanding testimony more broadly using voice as an instrument of communication is one way to explore oral disclosures as social justice concerns. Beyond legal justice, social justice seeks to afford equitable experiences to all living things. This distinction is relevant to testimony as traditional (Western or Canadian) justice systems have frequently privileged some parties over others placing the survivor in a position to have to defend their own credibility in a no-win situation. Susan Brison discusses this situation at length
in her autobiographical thesis of her own trauma as a survivor of rape and attempted murder, 

*Aftermath:*

This bind allegedly faced by trauma survivors is uncomfortably reminiscent of the dilemma of the rape victim on the stand who is viewed as traumatized because sick (emotional, hysterical), and, thus, not credible or calm and reasonable, and thus clearly not traumatized, and so not credible. (Brison 2002, pg. 70-71)

Brison highlights the initial denial of power that survivors can experience by sharing their narrative on the stand, as the system of gathering testimony does so without acknowledging trauma already endured and endured again in repeating the narrative. Additionally, the “all or nothing” format of guilty/not guilty trial processes leaves one side (or both sides) of the oppositional space dissatisfied, because the outcome reflects the trial proceedings, not the needs of the survivor (or the perpetrator). My research is informed by my exploration of possible pathways to transformative justice (Lambourne 2014; Schwartz, Hennesy, Levitas 2003). I use arts-based examples to ground my approach to voice in testimony and possibilities in the TRC process. In this paper I have used poetry as an entry point into voice as a tool for transformative justice.

I also see spatial considerations as opportunities for voice to be better understood. The set up of the TRC hearings include some key weaknesses. Much criticism can be made of the perceptions of the TRC as “victim-centred”, as Schedule N mandated. In many ways, the TRC failed to centre victims through structural limitations such as focussing exclusively on victims rather than including perpetrators. As a process, TRCs take personal trauma narratives and
collect them as focused, individual stories for the archive. This serves to diminish the contributions of each story to a greater national problem and depoliticizes the exercise by personalizing the testimonies to such a degree that national responsibility becomes erased as individual responsibility for the conditions of violation is foregrounded. This problem is at the heart of the conflict between a “victim-centred” endeavor and a nation-building activity. The public is asked by the government to rally around the “victims” in a show of patriotic unity, essentially relieving the government of responsibility for causing the trauma in the first place. This is especially evident in the Canadian TRC’s omission of narratives from perpetrators. By excluding the perpetrators, the hearings were arguably exploitative in their reliance on survivors to articulate the full archival account. So, with the focus on victims and the exclusion of perpetrators, there was an imbalance in the hearing. Those giving testimony were thrust into the spotlight in a way that may have felt alienating and isolating, instead of supported. The inability or survivors to face and respond to perpetrators, left the public as witnesses and the only possible players to engage with inside the vulnerable space. This limitation offered a unique opportunity to focus on voices and how they were heard, in an activity that emphasizes nation-building over victim-centering.

In this thesis, I attempt to draw a path from voice as a specific experience, to the vulnerable space and its possibilities, to the ways that interacting within the vulnerable space through voice can lead to more response-ability (Oliver 2001). There is still much work to be done to resolve the continued conflicts injustices exacerbate. Restorative justice (for example) has been significantly introduced into schools in conflict resolution practices, classroom management, and the Ontario Safe Schools Act, but not into legal systems in any widespread
way. This alternative justice practice emphasises victim healing and accountability of those responsible for harm. The Canadian court system has engaged in restorative justice, but it is not necessarily the prime philosophy utilized. A recent report (2018) from the Law Society of Ontario identified gaps in treatment of Residential School Survivors during the compensation process, leading to a series of recommendations for more culturally sensitive relations between lawyers and Indigenous communities. Calling out the inadequacy of compensation and the disappointment and difficulties of interviewed survivors, the report states,

They wanted healing and closure! They wanted to share their LIFE STORIES without feeling like a loser or a criminal, feelings that brought to the forefront by foreign and often adversarial processes. Most Residential School Survivors felt that they were not heard and accepted. It was not easy for them to disclose deep wounds, especially the sexual assault and abuses they experienced in Residential Schools. (Law Society of Ontario 2018, pg. 32)

Reflecting on the handling of cases involving survivors, the report highlights the same series of gaps that I am critiquing in the TRC, gaps which left survivors feeling unheard and confused. These gaps were the most interesting findings for me. In my thesis, I was interested in exploring these gaps using an approach that was as attentive to affect as possible. When I read Delice Mugabo’s article *In Ntozake Shange’s Word: Sexual Violence Against Black Women, Organizing for Transformative Justice, and Finding My Way as a Black Feminist* (2015) referencing Shange, who has been an inspiration to me for years, I knew that poetry was a key aspect of my approach. In her article, Mugabo describes working on a video project inspired by the poetry of Ntozake Shange, an American black feminist artist and activist. Mugabo’s article serves as a reminder that there are deeper levels of experience that prose can’t approach. Attempts to
articulate that which is difficult to express are made in many forms. The testimony I viewed in
the archived videos of hearing are sometimes lyrical. There is an access point that poetry offers
to try to better understand the trauma and implications of voice, the interpretations of
Shange’s work by Mugabo reinforce this suggestion. Poetry emerges as a way to understand
and express ideas to better reflect the affective import of information. Mugabo explains, “I
knew that I would only trust the process if I read Shange’s poem with Lena [her friend and
colleague] there to support me” (Mugabo 2015, pg. 56). Mubago understood that she would be
deeply affected and would need emotional support when reading the poem. She anticipated
the thoughts and feelings the poem would evoke. Mubago further articulates the way poetry
can profoundly impact the reader, especially if read out loud as it was in the video project to
which she refers. Here I attempt to do the same. I have included a poem at the start of each
chapter to help situate the chapter for the reader. Some of these poems are my self-reflexive
research in response to the process and data of this study. Some are the work of Ingrid De Kok,
a poet and theorist analysing the South African TRC. I offer these as complementary to the
ideas considered within this thesis. The potential value of such an endeavor is affirmed in
literature on poetic inquiry. Monica Prendergast illuminates in her 2008 study of poetic inquiry
the embodied effect of poetry I draw upon in her reference to the work of Sparkes, Nilges,
Swan & Downing (2003),

Since poetry embraces the notion of speech as an embodied activity, it can touch the
cognitive and sensory in the reader and the listener. Therefore poetic representations
can touch us where we live, in our bodies. This gives it more of a chance than realist
tales to vicariously experience the self-reflexive and transformational process of self-
creation. (Prendergast 2008, xxviii)
Poetic methods can transform, just as much as data can. Sometimes words can move mountains. Sometimes voice can move us all.

The challenges identified in the TRC are also pervasive in rest of the Canadian justice system. Current practices in Canadian courts include an adversarial approach, and a hierarchy of players within the space, designated by spatial assignments and perspectives. A binary decision is sought and sides of the argument are assigned to specific parties. These parties then argue their own side, while attempting to erode the credibility of their opponent. This is mediated by levels of hierarchy. For example, the judge, justice of the peace, or other ‘leader’ is often elevated, requiring survivors of trauma to plead their truth to a ‘higher power’. This is just one common instance of a counterproductive approach to truth finding and justice seeking. It is useful to examine the aspects of testimony, such as orality, that can add to the available tools and processes for coming to justice (Hibbitts 1995). In a time such as this, when the number of human rights cases in popular media has exploded due in large part to the proliferation of user-generated content from the centre of spaces of violence (Posner, 2014; Shafei and Tyas 2017), close attention to the specific aspects of vocalization can contribute to understanding processes of disclosing and witnessing, and contribute useful knowledge to improve these processes.
From the speaker’s mouth
through the engineer’s ear,
sound waves of drought and flood
are edited for us to hear:
dunes filtering burnt desert sand,
corrupted wells, and shocks, shouts,
no longer muffled in the cochlea shell.

Listen, cut; comma, cut;
stammer, cut;
edit, pain; connect, pain; broadcast, pain;
listen, cut; comma, cut.
Bind grammar to horror,
blood heating to the earphones,
beating the airwaves’ wings.

For truth’s sound bite,
tape the teeth, mouth, jaw,
put hesitation in, take it out:
maybe the breath too.
Take away the lips.
Even the tongue.
Leave just sound’s throat.

Keep your ear to the ground,
to pain’s surfacing,
its gulps for air, its low ragged flight
over history’s topography.
The instrumental ear
records the lesions of eroded land
while blood drums the vellum of the brain.

A stain hovers like a small red butterfly
over the studio recording table
where the wall is listening,
so the ear dares to rest.
Then nothing.
Nothing but static,
insects invading the air.

The sound engineer hears
his own tympanic membrane tear.

(The Sound Engineer by Ingrid de Kok)
Vibrations – Conceptual Framework

This thesis is an attempt to better understand the nuances of voice in various settings. In particular I am exploring voice as a site of emotional entanglement for the speaker and the witness of testimony. Greater understanding of the dynamic effects of voice may allow listeners to fulfil their own response-ability as Oliver insists we must. The existing literature on voice and sound sets the stage for deeper questions around sonic geographies and vocal interpretation. Examining storytelling and oral traditions led me to wonder about an ethical approach to testimony that explicitly acknowledges the emotional power of voice. Some cultural traditions, such as African-American, Hispanic, and Jewish traditions (Hibbits 1995, pg54), include greater emphasis on oral testimony in jurisprudence. When someone offers testimony about their own traumatic experience, there is significant risk of retraumatization. This risk is arguably exacerbated by the speaker’s vulnerability, but also potentially mitigated if the speaker and audience both acknowledge their mutual vulnerability. By considering voice as a potential avenue for connection in the vulnerable space, voice can be used as a tool for forging renewed subjectivity.

As a site of contestation, which often comes under scrutiny for lacking credibility or being an insufficient indicator for truth finding, testimony should be examined in a broad and dynamic way. While there are no standards for how to receive or witness a voiced disclosure of trauma, it occurs with such frequency in hearings, therapy, and everyday life, that examining this interaction offers bountiful potential to understand how trauma lives in the body and how careful witnessing of these disclosures might result in more empathetic responses. This chapter will consider literature regarding oral narration and the use of voice in complex and emotionally
charged contexts. I am going to examine the ways voicing a personal narrative is understood to affect the speaker and the witness. To begin, it is important to understand the materiality of voice and how it differs from other forms of communication.

**Acoustics as Meaning**

Voice is a multilayered word. As a material object it is both an act (to voice) and a possession (my voice). As an abstract construct it is an aspect of the agency with which one claims an identity. As such a flexible and useful word, it is also steeped in coded vocabulary. In what way does voice play a role in narration? Oral tradition? Speech? Testimony? How is voice used as a measure of value? There are many ways in which voice has been used to determine positionality of a statement or speaker: marketing and broadcasting using a male or female voice to denote authority, evaluating the validity of a cry for help made by a woman or a child, the persuasiveness of vocal strength in a debate, etc. We know that voice is an indicator or influencer in a variety of situations. But why? And how? Is there a standard of understanding of how voice works and what it means?

As the discourse in this topic grows, different streams of thought have emerged, inviting questions about the emotional entanglement of voice. This emotional entanglement is predicated upon the bodily experience that accompanies (and is a significant aspect of) vocalization. By sharing a physical space with a voice there are vibrations that come in contact with the witness. I draw upon that physical concept to understand the affect of those vibrations beyond bodily sensation. Walter Gershon introduces this idea by saying, “Theoretically, if everything vibrates, then everything—literally every object (animate and inanimate), ecology
(“natural” or “constructed”), feeling, idea, ideal, process, experience, event—has the potential to affect and be affected by another aspect of everything” (Gershon 2013b, pg 258). The potential Gershon references can be applied to the intersubjective nature of the relationship between speaker and listener. The listener is positioned to be affected by the speaker’s voice. They cannot observe without coming in contact with the vibrations of the speaker’s voice. Oliver’s notion of infinite response-ability aligns with the reflective back-and-forth process that is evoked by the vibrations about which Gershon theorizes. As Gershon calls to mind a vibrational interaction that may occur, Oliver posits an ongoing interaction that must occur if we are to fulfill our ethical obligation. Furthermore, Oliver contends that we must acknowledge our relationship to one another and actively engage in ongoing witnessing, which is a form of ethical response-ability. She insists, in an extension of Laub’s work, that, “testifying and listening transform our reality” (Oliver 2001, pg.106). These two acts, testifying and witnessing, are fundamentally sites of entanglement offering the potential for affective change in one or both parties. Voice increases that potential by adding a physical dimension unavailable in written text. So using this potential connection as a starting point, I turn to performing arts and testimony to find examples of affect for and by both speakers and witnesses.

In order to construct this understanding of the connection I refer to, acoustemology is a useful contribution. Loosely defined as “sound as a way of knowing” (Feld 2012), acoustemology allows us to look at the sonic experience of voice as more than just the words spoken. This is where I am intervening with my questions because there is a clear opportunity to look at voice as a fully bodily experience for anyone within the acoustic range of the voice, speaker and listener alike. With this physical arena to explore in, I want to better understand
how the acoustical elements of speech carve a path out of one body and inscribe themselves on another.

**Necessary Noise**

The materiality of voice is the starting point for understanding the ways the sound of a voice affects a person. Katie Hemsworth’s work on sound in carceral settings illustrates the importance of sonic relationships which in turn underscores my argument for sound as a consideration in testimony. Her work is grounded in research that understands the potential of sonic geographies in helping us understand the world around us and our place within it while appreciating the bodily experience of sound. She draws upon several scholars to create the foundation of a sound focussed epistemology:

As numerous sound scholars have demonstrated, sound is a key epistemological tool for knowing and organising our world (Attali, 1985; Born, 2013; Gallagher, 2011; Schafer, 1977; Smith, 1994, 1997; Matless, 2005; Wood and Smith, 2004).

(Hemsworth 2016, pg. 92)

By setting this particular stage, Hemsworth turns our attention to the aural experience as a possible site of understanding the world. This is a good place to position ourselves when applying Oliver’s witnessing practices to testimony. By homing in on the sound experience, we can conceive of a new iteration of response-ability: response-ability to the sound of the voice of a traumatized survivor and to the witness that hears that voice as the speaker also hears it. Affective energy is exchanged and *felt* in the sound waves as they resonate. Some responses will be tactile and perhaps unnoticed, but internalized nonetheless. If, as Oliver argues, ethical
responsibility rests in the ongoing obligation to leave open space for further response—not to fix or finalize meaning—then the idea of resonance becomes crucially important. The body comes in contact with the resonance and processes it going forward in a form of infinite response-ability. Once the slight reverberations are felt, they become part of that body’s history. Sound is a key component to the body’s understanding of its place in the world.

Hemsworth’s study of sound in carceral spaces highlights some of the ways sound and silence orient and disorient people (Hemsworth 2016). She identifies sound as a significant way of perceiving our surroundings, both in knowledge seeking and in affect. In her study, she identified that inmates in prisons around Kingston, Ontario had an intense need to connect with others and that in many cases (such as solitary confinement) sound was the only way to accomplish that connection. Various methods were used to communicate with other inmates, and they learned a complex communication system through toilet plumbing by listening in new ways to the tapping or voice of another inmate or other sounds in their surroundings. Hemsworth found that this need for auditory contact was necessary to dignity, despite the fact that the methods were undignified. This need to hear and be heard is relevant to testimony setting, in that the act of testifying is an act of need.

Speaking out about a trauma experienced, especially one that is being contested or denied altogether, is an act of political resistance. The acoustic geography is relevant to how that testimony is perceived, by both the speaker and the listener. If sound exchanged between people is a key component to self-worth, as Hemworth suggests, then the sound exchanged in a testimony setting is key to the vulnerable space I am defining. Sounds other than the voice of the testifier occur in these spaces: breathing, shifting in seats, gasps or cries, etc. The acoustics
of voice are part of a larger soundscape. Stepping outside of the prisons Hemsworth examines, how might this apply to everyday experiences? When listening to oral testimony, one has a completely immersive bodily experience. Consider the logistics of hearing for a moment. One of the significant differences between hearing and sight (the other sense it is often compared to) is aural experiences have a 360° range (Schafer, 1985; McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988). Sight is peripheral, we are always outside of what we can see. Hearing is immersive, we are inside our own soundscape (Schafer, 1985; McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988). Visual knowledge, which in many cases is considered the highest form of truth finding (“seeing is believing”), comes to us in one direction. That is to say that our eyes are located on one side of our body and we see what is beyond them. Unlike visual knowledge, aural knowledge surrounds us.

A sound, if it is heard by a human, necessarily envelops his or her body. Ears cannot be shut, and their evolutionary function is precisely to be able to register information from places the eyes cannot see. (Saldanha 2009, pg. 237)

Our physiology places us at the centre of sound, inside it. When we hear something, a voice for example, we are immersed in that sound. We are compelled to acknowledge we are not occupying a space of ‘objectivity’. We lose the ability to feel like an observer, as the way we feel viewing visual stimuli. We become a part of the experience in some way. This positionality situates speakers and listeners in similar surroundings, immersed in the sound made by voice. This shift of the listener from observer status to participatory status is a necessary condition for Oliver’s response-ability to be realised. By becoming enveloped in the sound of someone else’s expression of trauma, the listener becomes involved, compelled to respond in some way.
Sound and Subjectivity

With the relationship voice creates between people established, we can now consider the social and political implications of this relationship and its potential for healing (or at least mitigating retraumatizations). To get a clearer idea of how voice operates as a social and political tool in these two sites, speaker and witness, this chapter investigates the discourse on voice as it pertains to my central research question: how can careful consideration of voice in testimony settings create more ethical scenarios of speaking and witnessing? To work toward that solution, I must begin with this question: what is the nature of the experience between speaker and listener during oral disclosures of trauma? I have limited the scope of this investigation to theories that relate to the entity of voice in order to illuminate the bodily effect of being in proximity to oral expressions of trauma narratives.

Exploring the potentials of voice has been an increasingly popular field of study in, among others, both the performing arts and psychotherapy. Both fields understand that this basic human action is deeply entwined with emotion and identity. Even non-verbal vocal sounds resonate with emotion. Diane Austin, a vocal psychotherapist, suggests that these sounds hold emotional power and information and that the release of such sounds can also release repressed emotions, such as those caused by trauma (27-28). As Amy Clements-Cortés states in her description of vocal psychotherapy, techniques from the practice are “often used with those experiencing issues surrounding childhood trauma” (Clement-Cortés 2014, pg.40). Clements-Cortés stipulates that vocal psychotherapy (a subset of music psychotherapy) uses natural sound (sighs, crying, etc.) to release emotions and build understanding of those emotions. In this way, we can see that voice has been used as a tool for accessing personal
truth regarding trauma in the psychotherapy field. The techniques practiced have been developed in recognition of power of vocal sound to express significant emotions. So the physical act of using voice can also be the moment of access into a form of internal engagement. In addition to the emotional resonance of vocalization, there are acoustics of the voice itself. A material occurrence takes place when oral expression happens. And because of this occurrence, there is a physical and emotional relationship engaging both the speaker and the witness. As Kelly Oliver points out, “We are obligated to witness beyond recognition, to testify and to listen to testimony – to encounter each other – because subjectivity and humanity are the results of witnessing” (Oliver 2001, pg. 90). Oliver argues that response-ability is intersubjective, it cannot happen without an “other”. Subjectivity, in the Hegelian sense, is often theorized as a form of subordination. Oliver insists that instead of bestowing rights upon a subject through recognition, witnessing constitutes a method for ethical encounters.

Witnessing is the method by which we address our response-ability. She is suggesting that by pushing past recognition as the goal of witnessing and entering a more unsettling and unclear place we come into contact. Allowing ourselves to be uncertain, to acknowledge our own vulnerability, we can then respond ethically to one another. Beyond the recognition paradigm she is dismantling, Oliver offers us a glimpse at how witnessing can begin to break down the oppressive systems that allow and sustain the power dynamics of recognition in the first place. Witnessing produces insight into the humanity of another, not just the “differences” of the other. The speaking and listening creates a deeper connection than the simplicity of speaking would imply. It is here that my research question emerges. Oliver positions recognition politics as a barrier to witnessing, as it limits our ability to comprehend to only that which we already
know and understand. Intersubjectivity requires joint “coming to knowledge”. As with witnessing, vocalization requires us to listen beyond the words to the voice itself, which may represent an unknown or unsettling state of being. I contend that the intersubjectivity to which Oliver alludes is crucial to understanding the ways voice affect us. Speech is a part of everyday life, but there are also moments of increased significance when voice plays an important role. This role exceeds that of merely a vehicle for communicating words.

**Healing and Risk**

Voice as a vehicle for establishing intersubjectivity in this scenario can help a survivor re-establish their own agency. Psychotherapy contends that voice is a vehicle for emotional exploration, but I suggest that it can also be an active mode of expressing deeply felt experiences of trauma to a witness. What Oliver refers to (from the Freudian theory) as “working through” is an effort to process trauma instead of repeating the violence by acting out as a response to the pain of trauma. Working through trauma allows survivors to move forward without ever assuming the possibility of forgetting, on one hand, or returning to the state of being before the trauma occurred, on the other. So with this psychoanalytical tool at our disposal, we can question how voice plays a role in the process of emotional exploration and working through of trauma. Voice offers survivors the opportunity to express themselves in a fully embodied way. Beyond simply being seen, being seen and heard offers a more intensive expression of self to assist in the recovery of subjectivity to which Oliver refers. If we begin with acoustic geography and acknowledge that speaking out loud expresses a part of the trauma felt by the survivor, and that they can potentially know that there is some relief by letting it out and sensing it ‘land’ on someone else, then we can look to that catharsis for some pathway to
healing. The speech has allowed a transfer or sharing of vibrations that may carry the trauma in some way. This is inherently risky. That transfer exposes the listener to vibrations that can be uncomfortable or even traumatic. The transmission of trauma is always a potential danger. But I am suggesting that through understanding of voice as a carrier of message and meaning, listeners can learn to be vulnerable while observing their own experience as one of learning and not solely suffering. There is an exchange that occurs in speech, connecting the speaker to the listener. The connection is intended to communicate the speaker’s vulnerability in testimony settings and to instill in the listener an understanding of their own vulnerability. This connection is the intersubjectivity that is necessary for comprehension of the vulnerable space.

In her book *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler contends that speech is not wholly owned by the speaker and is intersubjective. Using hate speech as her case study, Butler contemplates the idea that words can hurt. It is commonly understood that there is a kind of violence that can occur through language, but the nature of that violence is largely considered metaphorical. Despite this, in Canada we punish those who utter hate speech, without actually understanding the nature of the crime, just the result of it. Butler contends that speech exceeds the speaker. Speech incorporates more than just the vocabulary and intention of the speaker. Butler’s excess can be extended by Oliver and her notion of response-ability if we examine it as including the listener and their response. If speech can cause injury the meaning with which is imbued and the social hierarchies it implies, as Butler argues, then it has material force and can also cause other results. Oliver insists that by virtue of humanity inherent in the act of witnessing, the witness has an obligation to receive and interpret the speech. Receiving can be in the form of an injury or another physical or emotional result. This process is complicated by
the relative frame of reference of each speaker and each witness. Every utterance is perceived within a context that is constructed by history. The history of language produces an agency separate from the speaker. This is how Butler and others explain the force of injurious speech. Instead of engaging in infinite response-ability, one party does quite the opposite and actively dehumanizes another, degrading their subjectivity. By connecting Oliver to Butler in this way, we can see how the material force of voice can compel responses from witnesses that have physical and psychic implications for both parties.

There is room in Butler’s argument to contemplate the ways the injury to which she refers is experienced. Her study of hate speech is limited to that which is legally referred to as hate speech, but does not engage with speech that is hateful, beyond the specific word choice. Certainly, there is the choice of words to consider “the constative element of speech...what is said” (Oliver 2001, pg. 98). But also there is some other element, perhaps multiple others. Extending Butler’s work to speech that is emotionally charged in a different way (not hateful), we can see how her argument that voice is a material force is relevant in testimony settings. Drawing on Oliver, Butler, and Austin, I argue that the materiality of voice makes the sonic experience of testimony as important as the text itself. Oliver (referencing Austin) distinguishes between the performative and the constative, a distinction which lends itself to further consideration of voice. Austin contends that speech is more than merely words spoken, and that speech has elements which convey different meaning. Even further, he outlines these elements in three parts: locution, Illocutionary force, and perlocutionary effect. For speech to have a material power, to be able to hurt someone as in the case of Butler’s examination of hate speech, it has to have significance beyond simple wavelength in space. Speech must have
a force that causes a material effect. I suggest at least part of that material effect is the resonance of the voice itself. The performance of the out-loud utterance has a multi-sensory result: visual, aural, kinetic, vibrational, emotional, to name a few. The material power of speech is central to my argument that bodies are made vulnerable in testimony space where disclosures of trauma occur. The vulnerable space I propose is instigated by the material force Butler addresses.

However, this idea of speech’s material power also illustrates that speech acts have multiple potentials within each of Austin’s categories, based on numerous variables. What is said (locution) is heard differently by witnesses with assistive hearing devices, different first languages, and varied spatial positions to the speaker. What is meant by what is said (illocutionary force) is different depending on the emotional state of the speaker, the authorship or source of what is being said, and the constitution of the audience. Finally, the effect of what is said (perlocutionary effect) differs based on cultural or ceremonial significance, reception of the witness, and context of the utterance. These are only a few of the variables. There seems to be a general understanding among theorists that ‘something’ is happening in the speech act and that it is a largely under-examined web of intricate dynamics. Within these intricacies we find that speech alone is not only speech, it is message and meaning and often misunderstanding. Speech must be versatile. Speech must have multiple layers.

When speaking about pain, these layers are significant, because the language of pain is so limited. As Elaine Scarry states, “...the existing vocabulary for pain contains only a small handful of adjectives, one passes through direct description very quickly and... almost immediately encounters an “as if” structure; it feels as if...; it is as though...” (Scarry 1998, pg.
The necessity of metaphor asks the listener to retreat into their mind and body to recall the image or sensation alluded to. In a way, it is an invitation to go into the body/mind of the speaker and have the speaker enter into the body/mind of the listener so they can agree on the same idea. By doing this, the speaker (often unintentionally) creates both intimacy and distance: intimacy from the agreed upon significance of the metaphor, and distance because now that the agreement has been made, the object of discussion lives outside both parties in the space between. More layers have been created.

**Voice as a Tool**

In the case of artistic performance an actor attempts to use voice as an instrument to deliberately convey layers of meaning, often more intentionally than in everyday speech. In everyday speech, there are often layers of meaning both deliberately and unconsciously included in speech. The deliberate layers indicate the access available to a kind of control of messaging. However, the unconscious layers also convey meaning and can lead to misunderstanding. Additionally, many people lack the vocal skills to explore the whole range of possibility in voice. In performance text delivery, there are subtleties of voice that are directed or developed in the performance: pitch, tone, tempo, volume, etc. Art is often attempting to disrupt the audience in some way, dwelling in tension as a way to elicit a response. Voice can be a tool to accomplish that disruption. In addition to delivering the lines of text, the actor conveys a performance that includes signals as to how the audience should receive that text. Theatre maker Floyd Kennedy says “in performance, voice exists as a material, substantial event or sequence of events; it is the voice of the actor, the voice of the character, and the voice of the author” (Kennedy 2009, pg. 412). These multiple responsibilities suggest that voice
is a complex and integral component of intersubjectivity, in part, due to the nature of authorship. Authors express themselves, but the reception of that expression is subject to context. The audience reads contextual cues based on their own experience and position. Together, the author and audience work at communication, with the possibility of reaching some common ground. Beyond the constative, there are also the layers of meaning embedded in what is said that must be actively sifted through and interpreted by the listener. So again, voice becomes the instrument of action on the part of both the speaker and the witness.

To review, voice has at least two important purposes: to deliver a complicated and highly interpretive set of coded communications, and to do so acoustically. Can we explore a more expansive relationship with voice? As Kennedy proposes, “in re-imagining the voice (whether object or medium) as a site of contestation, it is possible to engage with the voice as an entity in its own right, emerging as it has from its submerged status as either a metaphor for individuality or as a carrier of language” (405). What kind of agency, if any, does this separate entity have? What kind of power? Some of this agency is explained in the concept of performativity, as mentioned earlier, originated by J.L. Austin in *How to Do Things With Words*. Austin’s theoretically significant text isolates speech acts that perform action instead of just indicating it. This concept of varying speech acts reinforces the multitudes of potentials made available through the use of voice. Still, the voice is simultaneously misunderstood and taken for granted. There is a basic notion that the speaker is entirely in control of the voice, but as mentioned earlier in Butler’s theory, the speaker’s intention is only part of the whole picture.

Because there is more at play than simply a speaker saying words out loud, increased attention to voice can offer insight into healing and witnessing. Close attention to voice can
problematize the notion that messaging is solely in the semantics (what is said), that the message is a single moment isolated in word choice. Voice can demonstrate that messaging has layers that include physical responses in the speaker and listener, and the potential for ongoing reflection upon that response. Instead of taking words at face value, as though reading them from paper, the full effect of voice can alter our understanding of catharsis, vocal confrontations, singing, and more, by offering additional context for meaning making. However, this potential is often overlooked, particularly in the case of hate speech and also in voice research. While research into voice has been growing in recent decades, little has been done to study voice in unstaged and emotionally charged contexts. Indeed, in their work on measurement tools for emotion in speech, Daniel Rochman and Ofer Amir aptly point out that most psychotherapy case studies “requested lay or professional actors to portray specific emotional expressions (383).” They contend that in doing so, there is a layer of falsehood instantly introduced. The actor is intentionally trying to portray something and in doing so, creates the circumstances they are aiming for. Rochman and Amir, rightly I believe, suggest that the use of actors is perhaps limiting to the intended psychoanalytical study by avoiding lived emotions and instead producing replicas or approximations of emotions. Without the personal experience for the actors to reflect on in the portrayal of emotion, the researchers risk missing aspects of the emotion. Conversely, theatre practitioners have been studying voice in this same performance context with fruitful results. Liz Mills states,

A parallel awareness of acoustic layers is actually quite pronounced in theatre practices that have long since ceased to occupy the margins of theatre. These shifts in theory and practice are testimonies to potential and actual shifts in perception; indeed, theory and practice must continue to inform each other and
encourage differences in hearing and vocalization to shape and articulate practices specifically for works in which the voice itself is imagined and produced as image. (Mills 2010, pg.401)

This evolution of theory affords a space where application is not only possible, but necessary to advance the discourse, and it is within such praxis that I position my own research. Mills’ statement supports my suggestion that the realities of vocalization and reception of vocalization must be reflected in practice in testimony settings, as is has been in theatre. Voice is not limited to the specific categories J.L. Austin envisioned. Indeed, even the theory on performativity has evolved, separate from its applications to voice, largely due to Butler. As Miller argues,

Judith Butler appropriated Derrida’s modification of Austin’s speech act theory and married it, under the impetus of feminism and nascent queer theory, to something more or less alien to Derrida’s work, namely Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and his *History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, with Lyotard probably hovering in the background. On that basis, Butler invented a new and immensely influential theory called performativity... (Miller 2007, pg. 224)

Butler’s idea of performativity as intersubjective challenges the idea that identities are innate. Instead, she argues that gestures and behaviour are repeated, recognized and responded to, seeming natural when they are actually socially constructed. These assertions lead to questions about the relationships in a speech act. In what ways do the cultural frameworks that exist influence the reception of speech? Of voice? How do the individual historical contexts of speaker and witness create tension in a speech act? These questions help to guide us to question the relationship between the
Inside Voices

speaker and the witness. For this new direction, it is useful to draw on the theories of speech as storytelling.

Joanne Banks-Wallace iterates that all qualitative research is founded on storytelling, which has roots in oral traditions. This storytelling act, the recounting of events that take on a meaning, represents a macrocosm of the speech act itself. A physical action produces a material consequence which is contextual by nature. Without language and an understanding of the semiotic relevance of elements of a story, the telling of that story is meaningless. Due to the interactive nature of storytelling, there is an immediate connection between the storyteller and the audience, or the speaker and the witness. The intensity of this relationship depends on the nature of the story being told. Banks-Wallace elaborates, “Certain stories bring forth a whole series of deep-seated memories about experiences that either cannot be or are not easily articulated” (Banks-Wallace 2002, pg. 411). This vulnerable interaction is especially relevant in recounting trauma. As Shoshana Felman articulates, the witnessing role becomes vulnerable as the speaker is made vulnerable. She explains, “By extension, the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-worker of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience the trauma in himself” (Felman 1992, pg 199). Here we can begin to understand the vulnerability of the listener, which reminds us again of the vulnerability of the speaker. As I highlighted earlier, Butler refers to an “undoing” that occurs between people who allow themselves to be vulnerable. She suggests vulnerability is an asset, not a weakness. Vulnerability can be a source of healing, strength, and ethical connection. This interaction of being vulnerable and becoming aware of your own vulnerability while in the presence of another’s vulnerability is a cyclical process of bodily experiences. Butler refers to
Felman’s position on this topic when saying, “In speaking, the act that the body is performing is never fully understood; the body is the blind spot of speech, that which acts in excess of what is said, but which also acts in and through what is said” (Butler 1997, pg. 11). This point is where the risk to the speaker and the witness occurs. In testimony contexts, these vulnerabilities are compounded by structural limitations of the systems in which they occur, such as legal frameworks.

**Trauma Narratives of Testimony**

In trying to bridge the connection between the body’s role in speech and the vulnerable space in testimony, I turn to a more precise comprehension of personal trauma narratives. Felman reveals that testimony is a personal journey of coming to knowledge discovery and not just a repetition of already known facts. The “personal” aspect is body centred. The power of the personal trauma narrative is explored by Oliver. Oliver also engages with the work of Felman extensively. Moving from storytelling in the general sense to testimony in a specific sense, Oliver illuminates the listener’s role as a witness of something profound. The role of witness, she argues, is necessary for testimony. The significance of this necessity is reinforced by Banks-Wallace who insists the experience of sharing is greatly impacted by the witness (Banks-Wallace 202, pg. 419). That necessary relationship has potentially life-altering consequences in an environment of testimony that may not be present in traditional storytelling settings. Oliver’s call for a re-imagining of witnessing practices asks for responsiveness that exceeds full knowledge. In advocating for a dismissal of recognition as the basis of witnessing, Oliver offers an advancement of voice theory by suggesting that the words spoken are only part of testimony. In exploring what else is expressed in testimony, or what
potentially changes through the performance of testimony, voice must be considered. As I have previously mentioned, the fact that testimony is given in person and out loud whenever possible affirms my basic premise that the constative is not the only component values in testimony. But further understanding of voice as materially important is required. Performing artists have long sought to understand the voice and the ways it can affect audiences. For example, actors and singers in particular have applied anatomy and acoustic theories to a range of exercises and performance styles, in an effort to impact the experience of the audience. By transferring some of this understanding to testimony spaces we can begin to unpack oral testimony and learn about the various aspects of speech, especially voice.

The materiality of voice is a key component to my argument because it illustrates the sonic dimension of voice beyond language. It is important to note that voice does not insist on intersubjectivity, especially as it can occur in isolation without any outside witness at all. While I am focussed on voice that is heard by another, the act of vocalization itself is not necessarily intersubjective. Still the speaker who understands the vulnerable space and how to do their part to achieve it, is a speaker with greater access to the healing powers of speech. As Mills offers, “When the actor grasps that sound can operate materially and as image referencing the prelinguistic and language phases of voicing and notions of other, voicing becomes less subjectively grounded and more acoustically liberated” (Mills 2010, pg. 400). Knowledge of the power of voice is essential to the wider possibilities for encountering the vulnerable space. Voice can evoke images the exceed language, but still have meaning for the listener. The materiality Mills refers to is embodied, largely through the physics of soundwaves and acoustic geography. As I have repeated, voice is multi-layered. I am merely asserting the potential and
frequent occurrence of intersubjectivity, especially in situations of disclosure of trauma. As the narrative of trauma is revealed, ethical obligation is invoked through response-ability of subjectivity. The speaker and the listener engage in an ongoing relationship of address and response that continues even after they leave the space of testimony and carry with them the memory of what happened there. Intersubjectivity is also an instigator of the vulnerable space, creating the conditions of interaction that offer potential for disruption. Due to the commonly accepted theory that voice is closely linked to emotion and can both illustrate and affect those emotions, it is not surprising that the vocal experience has a significant impact on the speaker and the witness in situations of disclosure of trauma. The recounting of traumatic memories orally for a witness has tremendous potential for a wide range of possible outcomes. There is significant room to explore what these potentials might be in the case of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and, more generally, testimony. Are there new ways we can approach healing? New policies for delivering testimony in judicial contexts? Different understandings of what it means to be a witness? By comparing and combining theory from psychoanalysis, the performing arts, and philosophy I hope to address the question: what might be possible in these scenarios of disclosure? By engaging in a process of praxis I intend to offer new ways of applying the theories of voice in testimony that acknowledge the participation of both the speaker and the witness in a mutual act of vulnerable connection.

This is arguably an advantage to understanding something. Instead of relying solely on our visual perception we have the added cue of the feeling we experienced when hearing something. As Hemsworth states, “one way to know something is to feel it, in both a tactile and emotional sense.” (Hemsworth 2016). The addition of a tactile experience can be useful in the
connection between speaker and listener. Especially when a trauma narrative is being shared. It is difficult to express trauma, but in sharing the narrative out loud, there is now an opportunity to share some of the feeling. Brison calls it “diffusing memory”,

Narrative memory is not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor remake a self. (Brison 1999, pg. 40)

She concedes the destruction of self that trauma induces and strives to find ways of working through it, knowing she is still forever changed. I suggest the body is changed as well as one’s sense of identity. Drawing upon Butler’s assertion that the body is constituted at least partially in the public sphere and vulnerable to that exposure to social life, I observe the body as malleable material that adapts and adjusts moment by moment to every experience. Trauma changes the body as the body absorbs the injury, wound, damage, or wear that is inflicted upon it.

The body is similarly affected by the acoustics of a trauma narrative. As a sensorial knowledge gathering tool, the body both hears and feels the speech of another in a shared space. As the listener feels the voice of another, the speaker feels the return of those same sound waves as they bounce around the room, reflected and absorbed in different ways. Both are drawn into a physical connection that exceeds the words spoken and the ideas about truth that those words create in another. So by virtue of being in a space with someone speaking we are physically connected in a participatory way, rather than an observational way. This
connection extends beyond carceral space that Hemsworth discusses to everyday life, and so, to testimony settings. “...simply being heard - having a voice and making a noise - can rekindle a flame of dignity that might facilitate survival through another day in an act of defiance against a system that is designed to silence”(Hemsworth 2016, pg. 96). Here Hemsworth helps us understand how significant the sound of voice is and the suffering created when one is deprived access to the sound of voices, including one’s own. In this regard, a TRC may seem like the perfect solution: a forum for oral expressions to be given and received. While there is some validity to the TRC as a stage for being heard, there are so many conflicting framing contextual conditions occurring simultaneously in such a space, that it is easy for voices to get lost. However, the shared space allows for listeners to be immersed in the sound, and therefore in the experience of the speaker. Perhaps by acknowledging the shared acoustic geography, this immersion can offer a stronger possibility of witnessing that leads to response-ability.

Decolonial theory offers ways to deconstruct the deeply entrenched colonial remnants in modern life. Trauma theory emerges in a Western discourse, and applying it to this thesis means acknowledging that trauma as a concept utilizes a Western lens to understand the injurious experience (Linklater 2014, pg. 22). While the legacy of colonization is imprinted on Western society, decolonial theory opens up critical discourses that help isolate and illuminate the ways colonialism affects Indigenous and settler people. This seems to be what is necessary to achieve the changes in thinking about testimony for which I and others are calling. In order to undo the destruction and oppression caused by colonialism, including the silencing of survivors and the dehumanizing approach to disclosures of trauma I describe in this thesis,
engagement in active disruption is necessary. However, the processes of decolonization are not swift. As Stó:lō scholar, Dylan Robinson states, “As scholar committed to processes of decolonization, we struggle with the reality that almost nothing we can do will lead immediately or directly to the return of land or to the unsettling or dissolution of Canada’s claim over Indigenous territories” (Robinson 2016, pg.1-2). There is a temporal factor to resisting centuries of colonial practices. In this regard, decolonizing methodologies have some similarities to the response-ability Oliver discusses. For example, Indigenous research as described by Smith demands on-going knowledge sharing (Smith 1999). As a settler in Canada who faces her own challenges with the aftermath of colonization, I acknowledge that my experiences are also steeped in privilege and are dissimilar to those of Indigenous people with whom I share space. I endeavour to embrace my inability to truly “know” those experiences. Acknowledging this limitation requires me to find a way to engage with the TRC based on my own positionality. I cannot investigate the testimony shared by Indigenous survivors without significant collaboration with Indigenous researchers/participants. Instead I approach this research with an eye to shared and on-going learning, as opposed to what Eve Tuck would call damage-centred research which focuses on marginalized communities as broken. In Tuck’s words, “Some folks out there are always going to think of us as damaged, and not because they are so convinced of the devastating after-effects of colonization” (Tuck 2009, pg. 422).

Decolonization processes need participants who will look forward and not just backward. With that in mind, I specifically focused all TRC material reviewed on the discussion of giving testimony shared among Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in the TRC, not the survivor stories of residential schools. In this way, I attempted to center my research on the
structural concerns of the TRC process as truth-seeking in nature. TRCs, and the Canadian TRC in particular, are challenged by the on-going responsibility of undoing the damage that is acknowledged as “truth”.

TRC processes claim to be pathways to alternative forms of justice, such as cultural protections and long-term education strategies. However in actuality the basis for the Commission is steeped in nation state power dynamics and colonial oppression. The nation-building aspect of TRC is important to note. While these kinds of reconciliation activities may be driven by the will of the violated, they are designed to protect the greater nation and reinforce the power of the prevailing authority. In a way, it is a re-enactment of the violence for public consumption. At this level, the sound of one voice may seem inconsequential. Still, it is important to examine the TRC at this more personal level, including the politics involved. The crimes committed in Residential Schools were committed against individuals, and those survivors and their families continue to suffer as people, regardless of the broader political motivations of a TRC.

Testimony is unique in a way. It is a narrative that has meaning imbued and exacted, with material results. That is to say that the speaker delivers testimony with one intention and meaning, the listener receives it with another intention and meaning, and the listener decides the outcome. In everyday conversation, the speaker typically controls the meaning by adjusting to the responses of the listener, editing or adding to the narrative until the desired understanding is achieved. The TRC offers an interesting opportunity to understand the voice in disclosures of trauma. Nationwide hearings received extensive media coverage and political
attention. The devising of the TRC in Canada is worth exploring because it differed from other TRC processes in significant ways and offers insight into some of the gaps in healing potential evident in most hearing scenarios. The TRC was mandated with the understanding that “the truth of our common experiences will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation” (Schedule N). Built into the mandate is a fundamental cue that the ‘truth’ is available for discovery. As is the case with all legal hearings, the mission is to find the truth. To that end, evidence is presented, often in the form of testimony. To better understand the experiences of vocalizing trauma as testimony, the rest of this chapter includes a break down the concept of testimony and some of the patterns that have become common practice in Canadian and Western juridical settings.

Testimony is intrinsically tied to witnessing. The etymological roots of the word conflate the two. Testimony is defined as evidence delivered by a third party, but it is not always delivered by a third party, so this description is not entirely helpful here. What is helpful, is the idea that testimony is given by one who witnesses the act that is being alleged or investigated, but also one who experiences the act. Survivors both experience and witness simultaneously. Those who bear witness to the testimony also experience and witness simultaneously. Both parties are matched in the connection between being inside AND outside of the act. This study examines both ends of that connection. To explore witnessing I will clarify the two definitions of witnessing I am using: Kelly Oliver’s witnessing model, and Indigenous understandings of witnessing and, specifically, the role of the honourary witness in the TRC. By unpacking these two modes of witnessing, I am offering a way to decolonize testimony to maximize the potential for healing in disclosures of trauma in legal settings. As explained on the TRC website:
The term witness is in reference to the Aboriginal principle of witnessing, which varies among First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. Generally speaking, witnesses are called to be the keepers of history when an event of historic significance occurs. Partly because of the oral traditions of Aboriginal peoples, but also to recognize the importance of conducting business, building and maintaining relationships in person and face to face. (TRC website)

This definition is significant in this study as it speaks to the special and important nature of live, in person, observance. Listening to speech is different than reading the text, for example. The site goes on to explain that “Through witnessing the event or work that is undertaken is validated and provided legitimacy. The work could not take place without honoured and respected guests to witness it” (TRC website). This brings us back to the question of truth telling and truth finding. I find Parmienter’s understanding of the South African TRC’s four modes of truth useful: forensic or factual truth (arguably, the kind of truth conventionally sought in legal settings); personal or narrative truth; social or dialogical truth; and healing or restorative truth (Parmienter 2003, Boraine and Valentine 2006, Lambourne 2014). These four pillars allow for a more specific understanding of testimony given, in that the witnesses to testimony are given a variety of approaches to receive the testimony. These multiple truths also indirectly explain that there is no single truth and those speaking are expressing their own perspectives which are equally as true as any other. By accepting the premise that truth comes in multiple forms, each framed by a different agenda, we can identify a reasonable goal for witnesses. It may not be necessary for the audience to discern the forensic facts. A narrative truth may be what is appropriate, or a healing truth. These differing dimensions of truth are found in the differing
dimensions of speech: what is said, what is not said, what sounds occur between words, what happens in the silence. These distinctions matter. They are how we know how to process what we are saying or witnessing. The communication has an intention: to share a particular kind of truth. But this also creates a responsibility to seek the truth, at least that is expected within the context of the TRC. Is finding the truth the responsibility of the speaker or the listener? I would argue it is the purview of both. Truth is a relative and evolving thing. It shifts and moves over time, transmuted by memory and expanded by each retelling. To share the knowledge of what happened is to make it known and therefore make it true in some way. A validation or response is required. This is not to say that without a witness the trauma narrative is essentially untrue, but the witness is what makes the disclosure a living thing, with a weight and power that can only be held by two (or more) people. Kelly Oliver’s witnessing becomes useful here, because it insists that (while truth is not the main objective of witnessing) we share the burden of truth, that we have an ethical obligation to respond, or be response-able as she puts it. Referring back to acoustics, this relational response is necessitated by the modality of sound. As Gallagher puts it, “There is no sound that does not affect bodies of some kind. Equally, bodies also affect sound. Their material characteristics modulate its amplitude, frequency spectrum, timing and so on, which in turn alters its capacities to affect other bodies” (Gallagher 2016, pg. 43). This sound/body exchange can be constituted as response-ability if it is recognized and acted upon by the bodies involved. How can we become more in tune with the bodily affect of sound in testimony spaces? What ways can we employ to draw attention to the subtle intricacies of hearing testimony?
Turning back to testimony for a moment, we can break down the basic mechanics of oral testimony to move beyond the conveyance of facts. Giving voice to an experience is more than finding the words to relate an event, it is a chance for the testifier to come to knowledge. Testimony is not just a rehearsal of known facts (Felman 1992). This enhanced definition of testimony asks us to look more carefully at the power dynamics at play in juridical and quasi-juridical settings. Gallagher briefly references Foucault to assist in this understanding, “If sound is understood as kinetic motion that affects bodies, shaping their capacities, it fits Foucault's definition of power as actions whose effect is to shape other actions (Foucault, 1983)” (Gallagher 2016, pg. 46). Now testimony becomes a very deliberate act. Not just expressing information for others to learn, it is an effort to change the listener in some way, an exertion of power. This is particularly significant in the case of the TRC which gave space for voices that had been systemically silenced for more than a hundred years. The hearings carved a trail across Canada, opening up old wounds to make visible something that had been hidden. To accomplish this “revelation”, the Commission let loose the sound of a thousand stories. Suddenly, along with the pictures of old buildings and the neutral faces of nameless indigenous children, there were voices to contend with. Actual living, breathing survivors opened up their bodies and let out a history long ignored or unnoticed by settlers in Canada. By unleashing the sound of every wavering voice, every sobbing elder, every sentence broken by the silence that follows choking up on your own pain, the TRC engaged the nation in an ongoing relationship that continues beyond the hearings. Reconciliation has become a phrase that average Canadians recognize. Settlers who had never heard of Residential Schools began debating their value. The TRC did not immediately solve the relational problems; instead it did what voice
often does: it started a conversation. In some ways it amplified the systemic and social racism toward Indigenous people in Canada. Alternatively, some people and institution have already taken the opportunity to implement some of the Calls to Action. Responses have varied, but responses have occurred and continue to occur. Once a body is changed it cannot be changed back. It can be changed again, but every iteration contains the sum of past versions. The body is constantly becoming a new version of itself.
“...How about you?
Do you have enough bone-broken limbs to cover the sun?
Hand me over your dead and give me the list of their names in one thousand two hundred word limits.
Today, my body was a TV’d massacre that had to it into sound-bites and word limits and move those that are desensitized to terrorist blood...”

(Excerpt from “We Teach Life, Sir” by Rafeef Ziadah)

“...so we must meet silence with the same level of noise that the parents of dying nine year old boys make when they take liberties in talking with heaven
We must shout until we shatter in our own vibrations then let our lives echo and grow...”

(Excerpt from “The Crickets Have Arthritis" by Shane Koyczan)
Voice – Performing Engagement

The literature explored in the previous chapter lays the groundwork for my study by opening up the question of voice and its materiality using sonic studies, trauma theory, and performing arts theories. The field of the arts is where I begin, in order to understand a possible context of reception that is perhaps more familiar: audience of art. In this chapter, I will introduce several conceptions of voice in an effort to consider the many ways we already think about speaking and listening to painful stories. This consideration leads to the specific vulnerable space I am arguing is an essential component of witnessing oral disclosures. I will also introduce several instances of the transformative potential the vulnerable space can nurture. Here we begin to understand the concepts necessary to answer my first question: What is the nature of the experience between speaker and listener during oral disclosures of trauma?

Spoken word artists use their particular skills and training to create space in a predesigned arena of vulnerable encounters. By creating the space, an artist summons the audience to come into close contact with the story of trauma. In contrast, survivors testifying are invited to be part of the story of trauma, a voice that will be contested, considered, debated, and judged. The audience has little choice but to experience the vulnerability in their own way. There is also no choice about the engagement with the speaker that vulnerability imposes. As a spoken word artist I am familiar with that space. It is cultivated by design in this art form. Poets use voice as a tool, carefully selecting their cadence, volume, and other technical qualities to convey their meaning. As poets, we choose to enter into a sensitive agreement to give something of ourselves in the hope that our audience will take it and give
something else. However, there is still the same aspect of uncertainty found in first-hand disclosure in other settings such as judicial testimony and rituals. While the language has been selected in advance, the poem is already written, the experience for both the speaker and the listener within the vulnerable space is still unpredictable. The key similarity is in the spectatorship. As author Robert Leach says in his book *Theatre Studies: The Basics*,

> The special potency of the theatrical performance lies precisely in the fact that it is watched, or overlooked. In other words, it is designed to be read. This is the reason, by the way, that no matter how ‘naturalistic’ any performance may be, it can never be a true replication of life. For life is not designed to be overlooked. (Leach 2008, 16)

Leach identifies the distinction between performance and daily life as the speaker-listener relationship. Testimony in non-performance settings operates the same way. It is a watched act, and any speech act of testimony functions as a public encounter. Performance of voice is not just watched, but heard.

**The Poetic Voice**

Performance is a way to communicate stories. Memories are often the foundation of fictional stories. In spoken word, this is arguably more common. Artists translate fragments of their own stories or observations to create poems they can perform with authenticity. Stanislavski found that reflecting on the past in art was a way to respond to pain, "Time is a splendid filter for our remembered feelings. Besides, it is a great artist. It not only purifies, it also transmutes even painfully realistic memories into poetry," (Stanislavki 1989, 173). Stanislavski’s assertion that there is a temporal association to healing, also references the way
in which trauma transmutes memories. His use of poetry to describe memory lends itself to my contention that trauma expressions exceed simple and factual prose. There is an emotionality that is woven into such disclosures that makes virtually any word choice ring with a sense of poetry.

Spoken word artist Rafeef Ziadah, who performs poetry about her struggles as a Palestinian refugee, uses the poetry of disclosure with her voice for protest. She recites deeply personal poems about the trauma she has experienced being a member of a community that is being persecuted and occupied, and that is the oldest refugee population on earth. In the preamble for “Shades of Anger” she explains:

I wrote this poem when we were doing a direct action at my University. And there were Palestinian citizens and Israeli soldiers. And I’m very petty about these things so I said ‘I will only be a Palestinian, I refuse to be a settler or a soldier.’ So I was lying on the ground and this guy came and kicked me in the guts and said ‘You deserve to be raped before you have your terrorist children.’ At the time I said nothing, but then I wrote this poem for this young gentleman. (Ziadah 2011)

Having been assaulted, Ziadah said nothing in the moment. Perhaps she was scared or in shock. Perhaps she was too angry or chose to stay in the character of the performance to achieve maximum impact of the direct action. Regardless of the reasons for staying quiet, it is noteworthy that her silence then and the resulting poem are so significant to her recollection of the source trauma. She writes a poem ‘for this young gentleman’ instead of saying something at the time. She finds her voice later, after the traumatic event is over, but while the traumatic
experience still affects her. This can be interpreted as a conscious choice to disclose a past trauma for the purposes of healing, but also for a response in the audience. She is an activist and her voice is her tool for change. By speaking out about these issues, largely to audiences who would find her content unrecognizable, she is performing an act of resistance. She is deliberately politicizing her voice. As a result, every time she performs she invites the audience into her own pain so that they will understand it and join, or at least find sympathy with, her cause. She is knowingly sharing graphic and disturbing stories, and so risks further trauma to both herself and the audience more so perhaps that just survival stories of personal pain. Such was the case with the direct action (though there was no vocalization described) when she made a non-vocal statement by lying on the ground and was responded to with violence and hostility from an audience member. She didn’t speak up then. She waits until she is standing, holding space of her own on stage. She waits until she is ready. Then she has some measure of control over how the vulnerable space is created and shared. Further, in her description of the traumatic event, she diminishes herself by describing herself as petty. She is creating a picture for the audience of a before so they can compare it to the after they are about to witness. By doing this, she creates room for her perceived power to expand. This may have the effect of manipulating the audience response to the vulnerable space. Do they feel empowered and united with her, or intimidated, or something else altogether? Are they sympathetic or indignant or angered or impressed? The vulnerable space leaves room for many potential responses.

In an interview at World Village Festival when asked how she finds the power for her performances, Ziadah says she grounds herself in the stories of her people. She invokes the
spirit of the women who fought and died before her and uses their sacrifices and convictions to bolster herself. After the violence of being kicked in the stomach, she felt strongly that she needed to speak up. Speaking up is a way to break out of cyclical suffering that survivors often experience by *letting out* the story, which allows the trauma to pass through the survivor. In this way, survivors can continue a process of *working through* (Oliver 2001) trauma in order to learn to live with the change that trauma has made to their body and identity. Here I notice sharing this process of working through in a disclosure setting, as Ziadah does with her poetry, can create the vulnerable space. Witnesses to the performance can acknowledge her trauma story and enact their own response-ability. Ziadah continues to repeat the basic facts of her pain and then uses the poems to dive deeper and open up the vulnerable space for the audience, essentially making room for them inside her pain. Making this space for another is a way of sharing some of that trauma. Doing so invites the audience to consider something they may not recognize from their own experience or understanding. As Oliver asserts, recognition is not essential, or even necessary for witnessing. Ziadah offers her own trauma as a perspective to consider, but also (by performing it out loud) as access to the vulnerable space. To set the stage in the preamble for the poem “We Teach Life, Sir” Ziadah gives the following context:

One of the journalists asked me ‘Don’t you think it would all be fine if you just stopped teaching your children to hate?’ I did not insult the person, I was very polite. But I wrote this poem as a response to these types of questions we Palestinians always get.

Again, she states what she didn’t do, in this case insult the person. She didn’t vocalize her pain at the time, instead holding on to it and releasing it in some way through a poem. In the poem
itself she reflects that “patience is not at the tip of my tongue”, suggesting she continually has to close her mouth and pause and smile because vocalizing what is actually inside her requires a specific setting. “I wish I could wail over their bodies” is a line delivered as part of a rise in tempo and volume. As she uses her poem to state what she feels she cannot vocalize in life she begins to breathe faster and harder. At the end of the poem, you can see she retreats inward slightly by backing away from the microphone, lowering her head, and returning to quietly say thank you. This is the moment she enters the vulnerable space. Having let out so much power she is now exposed to the audience. Why does she do this? That is an excellent question to ask any performer. My own experience is that offering up my own vulnerability is the best, if not only, way to assure a connection with strangers who are there to ‘see something’. Simply seeing something seems like the least an audience can walk away with. Regardless of whether I hope to convince or persuade my audience of my message, I always hope to change them in some way. Each witness is responsible for how they approach the experience, and so for the results to some degree. Even if the witness doesn’t have a profound experience, or chooses to decline the offer of connection, by witnessing the exchange in the space they are exposed to new energy and information that may affect them later in life.

In my own practice I have experienced the vulnerable space as a healing release and as mild form of trauma. In 2011 I presented a poem called “The Ring” about a moment in my life when something of great value to me was lost. In the poem, I ask the audience to open their minds to recall a specific feeling in the past. When I first performed this poem, I felt a release. As I stood in front of 70 people, I felt my body relax and my heart calm as I shared this personal moment. I received feedback that audience members felt a sense of nostalgia as they warmly
recalled moments of things lost and found. Conversely, I performed the same poem early in 2015 and felt a new and painful tension. Four years after first writing and learning the poem, I had changed and had a new view on the loss because I have lost so much more since that first performance. Upon finishing the poem more recently I felt flushed and anxious. I had difficulty delivery the poem because I couldn’t catch my breath. When I started breathing again after the poem, when I had stopped vocalizing, I became aware that I had closed my body by crossing my arms and lowering my head. The vocal recitation of the poem was not a release in my healing process as it had been previously. Instead, it was a kind of trauma or rather a reliving of trauma. The audience was more divided in their response as well. Some members shared that they felt discomfort and a sense of guilt for all the times they had taken something form someone else and a renewed sense of pain for what they had lost. Others still maintained a feeling of release and healing, stating that they felt ‘tapped into something’ they didn’t know was inside them. They experienced an opening up in response to the opening up I offered in my performance. The vulnerable space was significant in different ways for each of us.

The key characteristic of performing arts that differentiates it from other enunciations of trauma is the agency inherent in public performance. By virtue of occupying space on a stage, the performing artist has an agency agreed upon by the audience. The audience acknowledges that what is said by the performer has some authority, some significance. This does not presuppose an automatic understanding of what the performer articulates or the vulnerable space that is subsequently created. However, it calls into question for me the availability of the vulnerable space in situations when the person disclosing has no agency or whose authority is unreliable. In these situations, perhaps the space is only available to the
speaker. This may be relevant in examining the outcomes of the vulnerable space, be they healing or traumatic. The work of Rochman and Amir can be an interesting intervention here because of the differentiation it draws between expressing emotions that are personal (sharing your own trauma) as opposed to speaking text that is not personal. In addition to identifying vocal qualities that can be measured, the research highlights that much of the previous research into the field of speech/vocal acoustical analysis uses inauthentic examples that are contrived in studies employing actors instead of real people expressing their own emotive voices (Rochman and Amir 2013). This illuminates a gap in the field that the bridge I am building between performing arts and testimony may address. If the audience believes the performance (or testimony) is an authentic narration of the speaker’s vulnerability then they may be more inclined to engage in the vulnerable space. In a performance event, the audience suspends its disbelief in order to enjoy the performance. They volunteer for access to the vulnerable space. The proximity to the performer assists in this engagement. Still, the depth of access is dictated by the witness’s ability to be open. In some cases this is not a conscious choice, but rather a compulsion based on being moved by a performance. If the process of access the vulnerable space was clearer, perhaps it would be easier to participate and allow the process to affect witnesses. I wonder what can be changed to offer more transparent access to the vulnerable space for all those in geographic proximity to it.

Let’s consider a different poet for a moment to consider the possibility transparent access. Shane Koyczan is a Canadian spoken word artist, perhaps best known for his content on the subject of bullying. I had the pleasure of seeing Koyczan perform live in December 2017 in a small performance venue. During the one-man show, Koyczan shared anecdotal stories that
gave context to the poems and built rapport with the audience. One such story involved an ill young woman, stranger to the audience members, to whom he dedicated his poem ‘The Crickets Have Arthritis’ after describing the story of his encounter with her. Already moved by the initial true story, the audience (myself included) was inclined to believe the poem to be a true story as well. Many audience members were moved to tears. When he finished the poem, he struggled to compose himself, asking the audience if anyone had a tissue he could have because he was then crying as well. People quickly jumped to search their pockets to assist him.

This response is interesting to me for two reasons: the first is that a performance such as this requires the artist to move back and forth across the ‘fourth wall’, a conceptual barrier between performers and audience that prevent the artist from ‘seeing’ or responding to the audience in favour of staying focussed and committed to their own created world; the second is that the audience was willing to express their own vulnerability in front of a room full of strangers by acknowledging their tears and rushing to the aid of the distressed performer. To better understand the first reason, we can look to Antonin Artaud’s ‘theatre of cruelty’ for guidance. Spoken word as an art form combines the literary with live performance. Instead of merely reading the text, spoken word artists endeavor to bring it to life by embodying the text, acting it out, performing it in order to assist the audience in meaning making. This effort to connect the text to the audience by translating it through their body is complicated by several factors. First, we live in a time that encourages efficiency by digitizing aspects of life, thereby disconnecting us from the experience. Spoken word attempts to reverse this efficiency. Artaud’s efforts are similar, “The theatre Artaud longs for is deeply connected with life” (Fortier
I bring up theatre of cruelty, not because spoken word is similar, but because both attempt to move beyond the fourth wall to a closer connection to the audience.

Spoken word poets are trying to breathe life into words by embodying them. Such an act serves to engage the audience in a more intimate way than simply reading the words on the page. Artaud, on the other hand, thought words were too limiting entirely, instead using non-verbal sound to make meaning. This visceral employment of the body’s vocal tool unsettled the audience, as Artaud had hoped, but didn’t necessarily evoke a profound experience for them (Volk 2013). Still, even with the limitations of language, Koyczan used his voice to evoke a visceral response, one that included embodied experiences and active responses to the speaker. What compelled audience members to reach for tissues for the man they paid to entertain them? How is this different from those listening to a friend tell their traumatic story or a stranger giving their testimony? In both of these examples, there is an expectation of the listener to respond, but no guidelines for an ethical response. In the case of the audience witnessing a difficult poem about trauma, the audience has unspoken guidelines: respond positively, or not at all. Discomfort at the discomfort of others may be part of the reason why other forms of witnessing are so difficult.

Despite Artaud’s challenges in making the audience feel his work in a different way than the traditional Western theatre demanded at the time, his attempt offers us something to consider in testimony. If spoken word attempts to move the artist outside of the theatre ‘box’ by continually moving behind and beyond the fourth wall, and theatre of cruelty attempts to move the audience outside the technologically enforced laziness of modern life, then these
mobilities place the speaker and listener in a new, shared space. This unsettling creates the vulnerable space to which I am referring. Performers offering a predetermined unexpected, disturbing, or unique experience open the audience, and the performers themselves, to uncertainty and the potential for response-ability. Similarly, testimony is a speech delivered using emotional recall (as in some theatre) and witnessing is receiving that speech and making meaning of it (as in all art). These similarities afford us new possibilities in our approach to the vulnerable space, by applying some of the awareness of performers and audiences to speakers and witnesses in testimony settings.

**The Community Voice**

The 2018 production *Weaving Reconciliation: Our Way* by Vancouver Moving Theatre in collaboration with partners across Canada offers a point of encounter between disclosure of trauma and artistic performance. The production I witnessed (and ‘witness’ is what the audience is explicitly asked to do) took place in June 2018, in partnership with Native Earth Performing Arts and Jumblies Theatre. The company created the 90 minute piece from stories gathered over 15 years and assembled in Coast Salish Territory. Vancouver Moving Theatre works in a community arts practice that provides space for a diverse array of people to create and perform collectively. This practice privileges voices that are not always well represented in mainstream art forms.

Voice was utilized as a tool in several interesting ways. I will focus on two: inclusion of diverse voices, and inclusion of multiple languages. Diverse voices were clearly an important part of the process for the production company. Community members were interviewed and in
some cases performed. In each new territory that the show was toured to, local knowledge keepers and youth were invited to share their perspectives as part of the opening and closing protocol and also as part of the show itself. The local knowledge keeper was a cultural representative in the arts, who sang a song as part of her opening greeting. She was also asked to be a witness and reflect on the experience of watching the show. This is noteworthy because the program handed out included many messages from various people, and could easily have included messages from the local knowledge keepers. Instead, the company asked for an oral message, asked the youth to physically participate in the show. Both of these participants had the opportunity to share their ideas and identities themselves in their own way. The choice to give them space to use their own bodies and mouths to state their own experiences and minds is a powerful one. Removing the hierarchy of only allowing performers or administrators speak disrupts the colonial practice of speaking on behalf of others. I suggest this is also an example of inviting people to embrace the vulnerable space by offering audiences a glimpse at an unscripted encounter. This dissolves the power dynamic of the stage space holding the voices of authority by bringing in someone from ‘the other side’. While these participants were deliberately chosen, they were already established as part of the audience by their location in the space, making them “one of us”. But they have a shared knowledge and history that many audience members do not. This distinction is relevant because the social relationship between the speaker and listener has a profound impact on the accessibility of the vulnerable space. This impact is difficult to perceive, let alone measure. Does familiarity increase the comfort of the vulnerability or decrease it? What relationships create or exacerbate shame? How do relationships impact the ability to listen carefully? What is the effect of social relationships on
response-ability in testimony contexts? These questions are necessary and urgent. I do not know the answers, but I am confident uncovering these effects would greatly increase our ability to engage with our own vulnerability and that of others more ethically.

These divisions are further dismantled by the choice to include many languages. The company scripted in English and French as well as several Indigenous languages. At one moment during the closing protocol, the audience was given a word in Squamish: Huy chexw. We were asked to repeat it together, immediately bringing us together by embodying a joint acting using our voices in unison. Additionally, this vocal act in itself is a form of resistance. Squamish is a language that with fewer than 20 fluent speakers (Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages 2010). This means the company successfully created a space that more than 50 people simultaneously spoke an endangered language of people who have been systematically silenced.

The space we shared was also specifically designed in a unique way. In a traditional blackbox theatre space (an empty and adaptable room for creation), the company arranged the audience in concentric circles. Upon arrival, each audience member was personally greeted and escorted to a seat. The space included a series of additional materials dispersed among several tables and art books that were passed around. Concerted effort was made to include audience in the experience through physically coming in contact with artifacts by touching, sharing, and passing them around. Additionally, there were two people in the space identified as emotional support people with various medicines to help anyone who felt distress due to the content of the evening. Again, this decision invited audience members witnessing the show to speak out
loud to someone regarding their own vulnerability. This offers an opportunity to normalize vulnerability, perhaps making it more possible to embrace it.

During the show itself, audience members were further drawn into the vocal space by hearing the voices of performers come from all directions, including from behind them, effectively surrounding them in the oral storytelling. In addition to the regular acoustic envelopment of sound as it resonates throughout a geographical location, the presence of bodies surrounding the audience offers a possible connection that is greater than many performances. The show created an environment ripe for vulnerable space by exploring trauma and pain in an intimate and open way, encouraging ethical responses of care for one another. The creation of this environment made the use of voice particularly noticeable. At times, voices were layered on top of one another, forcing the audience to try to navigate the noise to hear something with clarity. In these moments, each audience member heard something different from the person next to them. Each experience was different. At other times, a voice would seem to sneak up from behind, whispering only to me. I was caught off guard and my own physical vulnerability was emphasized by something startling me from behind. I felt simultaneously participatory in the space, but also uncertain and unsettled. This feeling was immediately followed by moments of vulnerability for the characters onstage. The juxtaposition of audience discomfort and performer vulnerability allowed us to engage in the vulnerable space by physically affecting us. The discomfort and uncertainty caused by the voices coming from unexpected places, and the sound of someone’s voice breaking during a painful disclosure caused people to shift in their seats and nod or shake their heads. This suggests there were physical responses that reflect response-ability.
The Joyful Voice

After multiple examples of expressions of trauma that are painful and dark, let’s look at a more joyful example. On November 2017, Tomson Highway took the stage at the First Ontario Performing Arts Centre. For 45 minutes, he shared stories, jokes, songs, and moments with a captivated audience. Here we can examine a case that helps us understand the effects of acoustics. Early in the performance, he engaged the audience by having everyone say “I love you” in their respective languages. This was one moment when the audience and speaker were connected. By inviting the audience to open their mouths and make sound in unison, Highway insisted on a room full of strangers sharing with each other. We were all immersed in the vibrations of our voices, saying something intimate with strangers. Despite having shared space in the lobby prior to the show, in our seats before curtain time, we had all done our Canadian duty to stay out of each other’s way and act as though we were each alone with our own party of people. We apologized for accidentally brushing up against each other while shuffling to our seats, we avoided eye contact and tried to distract ourselves by reading the program if we suddenly found ourselves able to overhear an entire conversation not meant for our ears. Instead, we found ourselves connected by the acoustics in the space. The geography we were bound in was filled with the waves and vibrations of the sounds we made saying ‘I love you’ in our various languages with our various voices. Within three minutes, Highway managed to set a tone that would stay with us for the remainder of the performance. He put us at ease and connected us through a process of sharing and learning that took no more than a few minutes. This was the first of many moments that elicited both physical and emotional responses from many audience members. Key in this moment is the way we experienced the space differently.
In the processes of connecting us through acoustic geography, Highway removed the barrier between the stage and the audience, thereby creating a more equitable role for himself as an authority on ‘a’ truth, not ‘the’ truth. This unsettling creates opportunity for audiences to take notice of their own vulnerability and engage with it by invitation of the speaker, potentially more comfortably than one does in isolation. The sense of being in something together addresses the need for connection that Hemsworth so rigorously explored in prisons. Vulnerability in isolation only increases the need to connect and respond to others. Sharing a space is only one piece of the vulnerable space puzzle. There must also be someone willing to initiate vulnerability.

Amongst the many tales he told, Highway took several moments to remember his deceased brother, Rene Highway, who would have celebrated a birthday that day. Rene passed away in 1990 from AIDS related illness. In his memorial tributes to his brother that evening, Highway evoked vivid images by describing memories. The words seemed to come easily to him at this part of the evening. Having made such statements as “I can’t do it right now, because I don’t have the voice for it”, and “the English that I speak is hard won; I worked very hard for it”, his eloquent and compelling command of words in the reflections on his brother suggest he has contemplated those ideas before. The more spontaneous speaking included giggling, and pauses to clarify. Remembering the loss of his brother and what he learned from him had no such inclusions. Highway’s use of a conversational style to engage the audience is not unique in live performance. However, I was struck by the simultaneous depth and casualness of the evening. Not so much interchanging moment by moment, but always both light and irreverent
AND sombre and reflective. It seemed to me that Highway had managed to make hundreds of strangers feel like friends in less than 45 minutes.

I include this example to offer an alternative perspective to what I am proposing: the vulnerable space I am identifying needn’t always be pain-centred, but can potentially be joyful and commemorative. There are moments of vulnerability that come from pain but are driven by joy or other experiences. In this case the connection was ushered in by a sense of familiarity with nostalgia and love. By relating the stories he told to the audience in a way that made them feel like an important part of his narrative, Highway managed to create a vulnerable space centered on common memories and the mutual need for love. This opened the audience to vulnerability in much the same way as trauma narratives. There are multiple ways to access the vulnerable space.
I was the commission’s own captive,
Its anonymous after-hours scribe
Professional blank slate.
Word by word by word
From winding tape to hieroglyphic key,
From sign to sign, I listened and wrote.
Like bricks for a kiln or tiles for a roof
Or the sweeping of leaves into a pile for burning:
I don’t know which:
Word upon word upon word.
At first unpunctuated
Apart from quotations and full stops.
But how to transcribe silence from tape?
Is weeping a pause or a word?
What written sign for a strangled throat?
And a witness pointing? That I described,
When officials identified direction and name.
But what if she stared?
And if the silence seemed to stretch
Past the police guard, into the street
Away to a door or a grave or a child,
Was it my job to conclude:
“The witness was silent. There was nothing left to say”?

(“The Transcriber Speaks” by Ingrid de Kok)
Sound – Testimony as Relationship

So far, I have outlined a description of the vulnerable space and some of the conditions that create such a space in performing arts: physical proximity, perceived authenticity, and familiarity with some aspect of the narrative. Sound itself is an additional criterion. The sound of an oral expression is acoustically transmitted in space. So the sound is a relevant factor in the shared experience of performance. Two key factors are important to discuss as they relate to sound, in order to respond to my second question: How is the experience between speaker and listener of oral disclosures of trauma affected by spatial arrangements and existing power dynamics? These two factors are space and power dynamics. Both of these factors are carefully considered in performance settings. That is not necessarily the case in traditional testimony settings. So the study of sonic qualities is essential to move forward with this line of questioning.

To better understand the embodiment of voice, and how acoustic geographies place our bodies in an unavoidable relationship with sound, resonance is a useful quality to consider. I have insisted that the vulnerable space has transformative possibilities (which I will discuss further in later sections), but the consideration of criteria for creating and maintaining the vulnerable space is required. Voice is the sound that connects the speaker and the listener, opening up the possibility of vulnerable space. Sound becomes embodied and so becomes part of the transformative equation. Bruce Smith’s analysis (Smith 1999) of Shakespearean era theatre highlights the significance of resonance. He insisted that resonance is what connected people to their environment. Extending that initial claim, I would suggest sound connects people to others within the environment in much the same way. Since resonance is not
dependant on the presence of a multitude of people, it can be understood that the experience of embodying resonance can occur to a single individual. As Maarten Walraven argues,

> A sound uttered is, albeit not necessarily, a sound heard. In other words, every sound invites a response, and it does so by resonating. The first resonances of the spoken word arise from within the body of the one who speaks. The sounds produced by the body are thus related to that body via its internal resonances. (Walraven 2013)

The speaker is the first to interact with the sound they make. This is a unique position, because it is both cause and effect. Consider the cracking of a voice, or spontaneous sobbing, or the blurting out of something unplanned, unexpected. The speaker is the first listener, because they are the first *feeler* of their own resonant vibrations.

Let’s now turn to the vulnerable nature of speaker/witness relationship in testimony settings. I will start with examples of sexual assault and misconduct cases to help identify some of the limitations of the current judicial system. Then, I will highlight some of the TRC hearings to demonstrate some useful interventions for consideration. The significant challenge in testimony is that it is currently set up to be adversarial. Canadian lawyer and Senator, Renée Dupuis states the adversarial nature of winner/loser dynamics in courts prevents the possibility of relating better with one another (Dupuis 2001). Testimony needs to be approached as a relationship, part of the communication between people who are endeavoring to understand each other. To even begin to do this, acknowledgement of the power dynamic between speaker and witnesses is critical (Smith 1997).
Testifying

As indicated at the top of this chapter, resonance is first experienced by the speaker. In the case of the performer of spoken word poetry, each aspect of the delivery is carefully planned by an expert at speech. In testimony, one may be coached, one may have practice, but one is rarely an ‘expert’ at speaking about their own trauma. So resonance here creates a mode of reliving the trauma in some ways. Vibrations force an embodied experience when speaking out loud. This is then intensified by the response of the witness. The entanglement of speaker and witness is clearly embodied by its nature. Even without a prior relationship, a visceral exchange is taking place. The potential for ethical exchange, however, is limited by the power dynamics at play.

In the example of the 2016 Jian Ghomeshi case in Canada, we have ample sites of entanglement to study. The CBC host, faced with multiple charges of sexual assault, was acquitted of all but one charge. The four acquittals were dismissed by a judge because he found the women who testified "... demonstrated, to some degree, a willingness to ignore their oath to tell the truth on more than one occasion. It is this aspect of their evidence that is most troubling to the court" (Gollom, 2016). First, let us take a moment to consider voice versus silence in testimony settings. While testifying exposed the accusers to attack from the defense counsel, Ghomeshi exercised the right to remain silent, and so was protected. In addition to placing ourselves in a physically vulnerable situation, speaking leaves a record inside us, a memory, available for continual attack. Silence is important to consider because it contrasts sounds yet surrounds us materially as sounds does. As Dénommé-Welch and Rowsell remind us, silence can also convey meaning, though it is likely just as difficult if not more difficult to
interpret as sound. As with voice, the listener is interpreting through their own lens. Varying epistemologies come into play with this interpretation. In this case, the defense counsel took advantage of inconsistencies (not uncommon in traumatic experiences) to discredit the accusers. This highlights a significant failure in legal settings. There is an expectation that victims will recite the events as evidence in a manner devoid of emotion so they can be believed; listeners focus on the constative dimension of testimony for this evidence. This expectation has demonstrated time and again that we are less interested in the experience of the victim than the ‘facts’ of the case. However, I contend it is negligent to suggest those things are at all separable. Still, the words we choose are the crux of the testimony. What we say can be held against us, but how we say it can be more damaging. It can also work in our favor.

Kathryn Borel, the final accuser, witnessed the decimation of the credibility of previous accusers and chose a different and surprising route. Instead of going to trial, she accepted Ghomeshi’s counsel’s request to find an alternate route, and instead requested a peace bond and a formal apology. She used her voice and Ghomeshi’s voice (and silence) to her advantage. When she followed her appearance in court for the peace bond with a press conference on the courthouse steps, she constructed a new venue, power dynamic, and relationship to her audience. These changes are essential to understanding how her voice was heard so differently than those who had told similar stories previously. She perhaps persuaded her listeners to cease any attempt to know her pain and instead asked that they take responsibility for the flaws in the system that prevents victims from being truly heard. Let’s compare the speech act of the accusers who testified to that of Borel’s. The accusers gave their testimony in a courtroom. This has specific implications for acoustics. Within the confines of a structure,
sounds waves will bounce off surfaces and return to the speaker, listener and any other surface. This resonance has vibrational potency. The more volume used by lawyers, the greater the resonance. The more silence invoked by unanswerable questions, the more tangible the lack of resonance becomes. Outside, the sounds waves carried until dissipating. This is acoustically significant, but also metaphorically so. Her voice went out into the world with far wider range and was not interrupted or inhibited by the structure of the courtroom or the constraints of legal protocols. It also allows a potentially more comfortable experience of feeling the resonance, but not being overwhelmed by it as one may be in a courtroom. The next point of comparison is the position of the speaker. The accusers giving testimony were seated. This compresses the anatomy responsible for voice, essentially constricting sound. Borel was standing, allowing full use of her vocal anatomy. By giving her statement to the press, Borel ensured a speaker/witness relationship that was more collegial than any relationship she could hope for within the courtroom. So, exposing herself by speaking became a mitigated risk for her. She arguably managed her situation better by controlling more aspects of her circumstance in order to communicate her message more effectively. This choice reduced the opportunities for her account to be discredited. Borel was able to express her statement the way she chose, rather than responding to questions or being cross-examined. Why was this control so effective? And how did it directly impact her voice as she disclosed her trauma? These questions are examples of the importance of understanding the vocal experience in these settings. In both the scenarios described above, survivors of similar trauma by the same perpetrator gave their account of what happened out loud for an audience to witness.
However, the statements were heard very differently based on the circumstances of the speech act.

The Borel-Ghomeshi case can offer us helpful clues as to what aspects of juridical procedure might benefit from closer examination. Can the layout of courtrooms be redesigned? Can the seating be considered differently? Might we offer survivors the opportunity to tell their story as they see fit, rather than respond to questions? Could it be a conversation with a jury as opposed to a lawyer? Must it take place in the courtroom at all? Could a jury take a fieldtrip to a reasonable location of the victim’s choosing? Is a microphone helpful or a hindrance? Does the time of day matter? Indoors or outdoors? What kind of introduction should be made before a victim speaks? Will that alter the reception of context cues? There are so many ways to reconsider how things are done. Without asking these questions, the silence leads to the minimization and disregard of the vulnerable space the site of entanglement creates. Such valuable communication is then wasted.

These very questions are being asked again in the wake of the #metoo movement and in particular the case against Canadian director Albert Schultz. Four women came forward to accuse Schultz of inappropriate conduct during their time working for him at Soulpepper Theatre, a company Schultz helped found. As in many other cases during this watershed moment of survivor empowerment, droves of people have come out in support of the accusers. There may be a culture of believing survivors slowly emerging. This case also illuminates some of the criticisms I have about our criminal justice process, in particular, its treatment of survivors, by highlighting the fact that the four women chose to pursue justice in a civil case,
rather than a criminal one, allowing them to speak more freely and express themselves in a way with which they feel comfortable.

Why might these women choose this avenue instead of others available to them? One reason may be that a civil suit gives them more control over the narrative they share. Criminal cases have a burden of proof that can seem challenging when evidence is largely based on the testimony of the survivor or victim. Criminal cases are engaged with violations against society as a whole and so individual voices can get lost. Civil cases are focussed on the conflict between parties, so individuals may be offered more credibility than in criminal cases because the nature of civil court is to address disputes of particular parties. As in the Ghomeshi case, the four accusers are approaching this search for justice outside of the courtroom (at least the criminal court) and defending their ‘truth’ in the public sphere and civilly. Does that mean that the criminal courtroom is not safe for survivors? What kind of space is needed to voice one’s trauma?

Oliver argues for moving beyond recognition to find a way to make the testifier who has been objectified or dehumanized a subject again. Acknowledging ethical obligations that bear upon us so that we can act upon those obligations by being response-able and responsible is part of redefining the relationships between those involved in testimony. This obligation goes way beyond just the facts, even though they are important. Here the primacy of sight as the most significant way of knowing (Sui 2000; Smith 1997) is an important epistemology to challenge. The way current Western practice identifies ‘truth’ requires truth in sight to be understood and known. In this context, seeing is believing. If we avoid giving visual knowledge
supremacy, we are forced to consider all that voice conveys outside of words. Privileging sight, speech, and language limits our ability to access the full range of expression and understanding of which our bodies are capable (Smith 1997; O’Connor 2008). We are bound to our own bodies and experience testimony in an embodied way. Can embodiment be considered when testimony is given? We must find ways to consider the testimony holistically. I discuss some ways this might be done in the final chapter of this thesis, but initially, I am calling for more investigation of the questions I am raising about testimony and voice. This study does not present an ultimate solution, but rather possible considerations.

The TRC included many practices to attempt healing approach. In addition to public hearings, survivors could give private statements, there were sharing circles, and large public and ceremonial events. Many of the statements gathered were archived for the public to help bridge the gap between survivors and settler Canadians as part of the process of reconciliation. Some testimony was kept private at the request of survivors to protect their privacy. In the Thunder Bay hearings, one survivor said “I’m gonna be umm... making some private statements that I really don’t want to say a lot of things here in front of the public. I really... there are things that... to me I want to hold private. And maybe that’s my problem.” (Thunder Bay hearings 1:53:22). His statement came at the end of his testimony, indicating that he had shared all he was comfortable sharing in the public hearing. This survivor articulated the hesitation to engage in the vulnerable space. He was resistant to it, as I imagine many are in the context of testimony. He also acknowledges that there is something problematic in keeping some things private. He seems to have a sense that he is depriving himself of an opportunity, but can’t quite open himself up. Perhaps he is unwilling to share some details in front of
community members or his family and friends. He may not want to engage in the ongoing response-ability that comes with being witnessed. To do so would require him to remain engaged in the same process, as it is ongoing for both speaker and listener. Once one has been heard, one cannot remain anonymous in silence. The vulnerable space is challenging in this way; some might not be ready to fully participate. But more than an opportunity, I suggest the vulnerable space exists in all situations where one person discloses a trauma and another person (or persons) hears that disclosure. Hemsworth’s assertion that being heard is significant reminds us that the emergence of acoustical geographic connection is a way to help a survivor feel human. I contend it can do the same for the listener who bears witness to that humanity. The vulnerability occurs, but may not be embraced, accepted, or utilized to the full capacity of healing or learning. Still, by virtue of having the shared experience, both parties were made vulnerable, and so changed in some way. If nothing else, they both have a memory of new knowledge: their own perceptions of each other during the encounter.

Felman insists there isn’t one absolute knowledge, and that testimony is a process of knowledge sharing that is dependant on both parties. Different understandings may emerge at different times with different people. She questions the notion that testimony is just the recitation of facts. In the above cited passage from the Thunder Bay hearings, the survivor expresses his own reflections on the experience of testifying, and demonstrates a series of complex emotions in his words and in between his words. His voice wavers, his breathing can be heard on the microphone. He is expressing aspects of his experience without words at all. Felman’s process of knowing could include those expressions, in addition to any facts recited. Oliver, building explicitly on the work of Felman and Laub, goes on to say there is an ethical
component as well. I am saying there is access to the ethical obligation within the sonic experience. If, as Felman and Oliver insist, testimony is a sharing of knowledge that brings with it ethical obligations, I suggest voice is the mechanism that allows speakers and witnesses to access that process. While the idea of singular or ultimate ‘truth’ in TRCs is contra to trauma theory (Scarry 1985, Felman 1992), there is a notion of understanding that is intended in testimony. Sharing testimony is done to expand the perspective of others, to share the wisdom and the burden. TRCs expand the public archives, but also the frame of reference of the witnesses. I argue the vulnerable space makes the spoken histories more intense narratives than written accounts and so lend themselves to being remembered and recalled in the act of infinite response.

The vulnerable space I have been pointing to all along is constituted of the physical vulnerability that accompanies the cognitive knowledge that recognizing someone else’s trauma causes our “illusions about [our] own safety and control over [our] own lives to crumble” (Brison 2002, pg. 9). Butler suggests that by experiencing a loss, even of an abstraction such as ‘safety’, “the possibility of making different kinds of ties emerges” (Butler 2004, pg. 40). While some may resist the uncontrollable feelings that can come from being submerged in the vulnerable space, the possibilities are endless. Pain, however, is consistently held as an experience to avoid at all costs. Butler contends that vulnerability is something to be embraced, not resisted (2004). Cook reminds us, via Million, that disruption and emotion are valuable aspects of testimony (2016). Even in my efforts to find healing and restorative pathways, I must still acknowledge that those outcomes may require discomfort or pain. Still, if we will not allow ourselves to be open to the pain of others, how can we ever expect to heal
from our own? Butler insists there is the possibility of removing the companionship of violence from vulnerability. I agree and propose we are at a time in Canada when it is necessary to demand “a world in which bodily vulnerability is protected without therefore being eradicated” (Butler 2004, pg. 42). Vulnerable space should be about safely engaging with the unknown, without threat of violence. The TRC and the ongoing processes of reconciliation and decolonization are just a few examples of the systemic influences affecting the tenuous relations between individuals and groups in Canada. Butler’s vision of a world allowing protected vulnerability is incredibly important. Can you imagine judicial spaces where survivors could tell their stories without the risk of almost certain retraumatization? Imagine knowing when the story of personal trauma is told, there is a distinct possibility, if not guarantee, that the audience of that story has some understanding and capacity for empathetic response-ability. The full spectrum of expression could be used, without punishment or derision. Already marginalized voices could be heard at times of crises. Vulnerability helps us be fully human in our fragile bodies. It isn’t something to be avoided, but instead experienced fully and safely. Space is needed to negotiate this vulnerability. There is risk, so much risk. I am using the notion of vulnerability because there is no guarantee the space will offer healing. That uncertainty does not negate the necessity of it.

Michaëlle Jean spoke of the need to give space to these voices during a speech regarding the TRC.

On June 11 2008 in front of millions of Canadians, contrition and deep regret were expressed [by Prime Minister Stephen Harper] within parliament. They were words borne
of indignation. Caused by the tragic history of forced assimilation and violence against thousands of aboriginal youth who had been ripped from their families. (translated from French) (Witnessing the Future 13:58)

Jean’s interpretation and response to the government’s apology positions the nation state as ethical in its response to Residential School history, which is problematic to begin with. But interestingly, she simultaneously sets the stage for a reflection on her experience of witnessing. She refers to resonance which I have read as the vulnerability about which I am speculating. Perhaps more importantly, she describes the effect the resonance had on her: to evoke images in her mind.

I was there on June 11, 2008 when words of sorrow and profound regret resonated in the heart of parliament. And I remember quite vividly the images brought to mind by those words. Those words borne of indignation, brought about the tragic history of the measure imposed to force assimilation. And the violence wrought upon aboriginal children torn from their families. I thought about the devastating archival photos that I saw for the first time in the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in first nation cultural centre which welcomed me in June 2007 in Dawson City Yukon. Those photos were heart breaking, infinitely sad. (Witnessing the Future 14:30)

Jean both describes the timeline of her memory and the impact of the memory. She gives the words she speaks of a life of their own. The words have an origin (indignation) and a purpose (evocation of images and thoughts). She also entangles Canadians in the process of historical archiving by presupposing the connection we have to our collective history in this geographical
location. “But beyond the images and archives, beyond those silent witnesses, we need to consider just what all Canadians lost. Because in one way or another, we have all been deprived” (Witnessing the Future 16:58). Jean invites all those hearing her speech to consider their own vulnerability, to ask themselves what they may have lost without their notice. This is one way witnesses can engage in the speaker/listener relationship when they hear a history of violence given voice. Both parties have responsibility for meeting at a metaphorical location to which they agree. This is tremendously challenging, precisely because of the individual lens of perspective each person possesses. Once there is a commitment to engage in deep communication, both parties can work to undo their own perspectives to allow themselves to be changed by the other.

**Witnessing**

Oliver investigates witnessing in relation to subjectivity and recognition. Oliver comes close to asking some of the questions I am asking here. In particular, she makes note of the observations of Felman and Laub regarding the necessity of oral testimony being live and in person:

What does it mean that the testimony cannot be simply reported, or narrated by another in its role as testimony?... What does testimony mean, if it is the uniqueness of the *performance* of a story which is constituted by the fact that, like an oath, it cannot be carried out by anybody else? (Felman and Laub 1992, pg. 205-6)

The oral performance of testimony by the individual to whom the narrative refers is necessary. While third-party testimony is possible, first person accounts are preferred, and I believe
required for the vulnerable space. That necessity is key to my argument that the sonic experience is essential and neglected as core to the testimony experience. The performance is recognized and assessed by those witnessing it, but the acoustic component is conflated with the rest of the performance (expression, gesture, confidence, content). There is a kind of authority afforded to testimony because it comes from the original source. That standard both asserts that the testimony is more authentic by being the sworn testimony of the ‘owner’ of that testimony, and denies its authenticity by subjecting it to questioning, examination, and, ultimately, judgement.

The TRC utilized an Indigenous concept of Honorary Witnesses, those who would bear witness to the hearings and reflect based on their unique perspective. These roles are used as knowledge-keepers to mark significant historic occasions, a practice that invites the kind of response-ability for which Oliver advocates. They also serve to reinforce the importance of face-to-face, in-person witnessing. Many Witnesses were called to bear witness, including previously cited Renée Dupuis and Michaëlle Jean, each witnessing and reflecting on the proceedings. One such Witness, Holocaust survivor Robert Weisman, shared the following: “I’m used to telling my story etc., but to report to you what I have witnessed today is something new for me” (Northern National Event 11:45). This is contrary to Western judicial practice, in that the sharing of truth could be retold by someone who didn’t ‘own’ the story or experience trauma first-hand. Unlike a lawyer (for example) representing the acts on behalf of a survivor, Weisman reflects on the significance of contributing the *perspective* of the witness. In this way, he is also invoking the vulnerable space by acknowledging that there is an aspect of testimony that actively engages an audience. A back-and-forth relationship occurs. Weisman alludes to
the broader witnessing that is occurring during the hearings. He describes the act of hearing as a healing process. This reference draws attention to the possibility of healing that is supposed to be present in the TRC. Problematizing the process of TRCs is not a new endeavor, but the problems of testimony are not exclusive to the TRC. Testimony, by its nature, is a giving of evidence. The giving is often at a great cost to the survivor, and is in some ways an unjust request of any court or government: the survivor is not positioned as the beneficiary of testimony. The testimony itself may not be healing on its own, but the greater process of witnessing (with the infinite response-ability Oliver asserts) can have healing properties. Weisman observes,

I was really pleased to hear Reverend Flemming from the Anglican Church, that he’s ready to listen and admitted the failure of the church. That I think was huge to hear somebody from the church to admit of the past failures and to see what can be done to remedy the situation. That in itself is a healing process. (Northern National Event 12:36)

Weisman suggests that the public admission of Reverend Flemming created an opportunity for witnesses to listen to a voice that might assist in the grieving and healing that are commonly expected of reconciliation. The opportunity is focused on the voice, the admission that could be heard. Hearing is a key element of Weisman’s witnessing experience. He uses the word ‘hear’ frequently and connects that hearing to a specific action or emotional result.

I was devastated to hear, I thought I knew Terry Brown, because she was the one to invite me to come the first time a couple years ago. And she seems so well adjusted and so wonderful a human being as she is. And then I heard this afternoon some of the
horrors that she went through. And I was saddened by it. And I still ask myself how can people with good morals do the kind of things that they did to these kids? I can’t reconcile it in my mind. (Northern National Event 13:22)

The sonic experience to which Weisman refers in his role as witness reinforces the notion that significant learning comes from more than just seeing, but also hearing communicates details and nuances lost in the text (Gershon 2013). Weisman makes a direct connection to hearing the stories of a colleague and experiencing a feeling of sadness. Despite already knowing a person, the witnessing of the oral narration affected him differently.

This difference is specific to the oral experience. By being in proximity to the speaker and hearing the voice in the same space, Weisman was exposed to a physical connection to the speaker that is absent in all silent expressions. As in the performance by Highway, the testimony shared asked the witness to be open to a different kind of encounter than usually felt on a day-to-day basis. The uniqueness of the oral narration and the physical proximity provided the possibility of finding the vulnerable space. In this case, the acoustic geography allowed Weisman to know his colleague’s story in a new way. He was changed by the experience and induced to think new thoughts and ask new questions.

**Responding**

Finally, the last piece of this communication puzzle is the possibility of an ethical response. Oliver’s sense of response-ability situates the body in an engaged relationship of intersubjectivity. Responses are impacted by several criteria, as I have outlined. Social conventions, expectations of responsibilities, venue set-up; these all contribute to the kind of
responses that are possible. Witnesses take in information and process it through whatever lens they are equipped with based on their own life experiences. In the examples I have discussed in this chapter, responses varied. Noteworthy observations suggest that more empathetic responses (weeping, a hand on a shoulder, nodding) occurred in spaces that allowed for close proximity, level seating, or direct eye contact.

The hearings that occurred in Hay River are a good example of possible responses. Among the many processes put in place, in this particular set of hearings, each survivor was asked to turn around and face the audience to acknowledge the support of the room while everyone applauded. This did not happen at every hearing across Canada, and in this community it was led by the Commissioner. However, the audience was not asked to stand or applaud. That came organically, or as organically as anything can be in such a prescribed situation. The survivor was asked to stand and face the room. Early in the day, a few people stood, slowly watching as others did as well. It was a group response to being face to face with someone’s pain. Staying seated and silent seemed unbearable in response to such intimate sharing and such profound pain.

Government relations with oppressed populations are inherently violent and heavily policed. Challenging the systemic injustices and moving towards reconciliation is a complex and lengthy process. Jaime Amparo Alves explores this dynamic process in Brazil by isolating a spatial praxis led by women activists. Plagued by the murderous violence of the Military Police and death squads in São Paolo, a group of women disrupted the oppressive norms of anti-blackness by organizing to search for the remains of their murdered children. Specifically, they
organized in a public square, which had previously commemorated a male political leader, and claimed the space for themselves and anyone else who had lost family to police violence. Amparo Alves writes, “This alternative spatiality – expressed through speeches, weeping, poems, singing, mourning, performance, and occupation of strategic locations in São Paulo – appears to be an effective means of challenging the state’s fantasies…” (Amparo Alves 2013). He writes of the ways these women intervened in the streets of an urban centre dominated by police forces that threatened their lives. The resistance of these women was heavily challenged by the government, who attempted to maintain an international reputation of having reduced crime and enacted peace. This reputation was disputed by the survivors of the murdered young men. Reconciliation is an active process among both the state and individuals. Amparo Alves draws on Butler’s argument that some lives are deemed by society to be “ungrievable” by systemic processes that dictate who is worthy of public sympathy (Butler 2004, Amparo Alves 2013), and this line of thinking lends itself to an assertion that the process of reconciliation must start with an equalization of lives as grievable and so valuable. The Canadian government’s failure to continually engage settler populations in the ongoing mission of reconciliation leaves the responsibility on survivors to continually tear themselves apart to demonstrate their own trauma. Like infinite response-ability, reconciliation must be an ongoing process that engages more than just survivors.

Governmental interventions with Indigenous populations have historically been violent, destructive, and problematic. As the TRC emerged in the media and political spheres, the uncomfortable relationship between the nation state and Indigenous inhabitants has become more scrutinized and perhaps even more uncomfortable for the previously ignorant settler
population. Willie Ermine, a scholar of Indigenous studies, refers to this situation in trying to understand the friction between both populations regarding law:

A schism still exists in understanding between Indigenous peoples and Western society. It is a time-lagged issue because the protracted matter of divergence and mal-adaptation had its genesis in first contact and the ensuing time span of relations has not alleviated the condition to any perceptible degree of comfort on either side. (Ermine 2007, pg. 196)

With this in mind, I would suggest it is virtually impossible to achieve reconciliation through the TRC as it was enacted. Without the vulnerable space encounter, there is little possibility for an ethical response to the archived narratives. While it may be possible for some kind of empathic response viewing the videos (I certainly felt a visceral reactions to them), it is limited by the spatial barrier of a screen. Still, even with these limitations, some voices called out beyond the chasm and those that heard the call responded by joining search for justice. #IdleNoMore is an example of the narrative of injustice sparking a desire to engage in the vulnerable space even when not required to do so by geography. Or perhaps it is that social media extends geography in new dimensions. Either way, there is evidence in protest movements that the vulnerable space is achieved in many ways, and the response is just as visceral if one comes to the space by their own volition. Historian Ken Coates described the Idle No More movement and its relationship to speech an opportunity to speak directly to the nation without the normal obstacles of traditional communication methods (Coates 2015). This example demonstrates that the need to communicate outside of the traditional constraints of power and regulation is growing and taking the reins. It is evident that the current systems don’t work, especially for
those who are most marginalized and victimized. Popular resistance is rising and becoming a part of everyday conversation in ways it hasn’t in Canada and the US since the civil rights movement. These sites of resistance are fueled by the energy and drive of survivors. The opportunity for conversation that includes the vulnerable space is ever-present and growing.

**Vulnerable Space**

Response-ability is situated as an ethical imperative by Oliver, as I agree it should be. The TRC offers a beautiful example of the need and necessity for empathetic approaches to inter-cultural relationships. The need for this kind of empathetic intervention exceeds the TRC or even the judicial system. Disclosures of trauma come in many forms and at many different times, each creating their own small vulnerable space. Oliver defines the possibilities of vulnerability so clearly that it can seem as though it may occur naturally at some point. It does not. That is why the intentional approach to testimony witnessing is so essential. There is an active role for witnesses to play. Testimony is a relationship, with the speaker and listener playing a part in its success. The speaker should offer their best effort at narrating their truth in a way that might be understood and the witness should listen carefully and with a strong intention to understand what is *between the words* of the narration they have been gifted. These two duties performed in a space created to maintain safety are powerful. In the unseeable world of acoustics, emotions, and change, these three pillars hold the weight of the human world. Each person has an obligation, as Oliver asserts, to attempt to witness in an ethical and empathetic way, but the social role of education to make these realizations possible and nurtured cannot be overstated. We are all in this together, and as Butler indentifies, we are
 undone by one another. Our intersubjectivity makes physical spaces of disclosure sites of entanglement, and potentially vulnerable spaces.

Space is an essential component of the speaker/listener relationship, and it can take many forms. McLuhan’s notions of acoustic space called upon the multi-sensory nature of our environment (McLuhan and Powers, 1989). Spatial relations must be addressed in testimony settings. I have analysed several video accounts and several live accounts. Each of these scenarios has a different significance to the speaker and the listener. The variety of spatial relations can help us understand what may be happening in these encounters. If we look at the encounters as a spectrum, from text or screen (no contact) to live and in-person (close proximity) we can start to imagine how the spatial relationship influences the encounter.

Research suggests that humans orient themselves through a proprioceptive sense (sense of the body in space) and so understand spatial positioning in a bodily way as opposed to a visual way (Massumi 2002). This helps us find our way without having a visual memory of a space. It can also help us find our way around the spatial elements of the vulnerable space.

Performers consider space explicitly, as it has a profound impact on the experience. Size, proximity of audience, capacity, height, acoustics, light, these are all elements a performer might consider before taking the stage. It is reasonable to suggest the space is important in all communication endeavors, particularly as it relates to acoustics. If we accept my offering that acoustical geography significantly affects witnesses (through connection and imposed vulnerability), then it is logical to assume the architecture of a given space matters. And the setup of that space matters too. Is the speaker raised above the witnesses on a podium of some
kind? Are they speaking into a microphone, and if so, where are the speakers located? Do they face the witnesses who make decisions, such as a jury or a judge? Are there other witnesses in the space? Where are they positioned? These seemingly minuscule details potentially have a major impact on proceedings by affecting how sound is experienced by present parties.

Space as it pertains to disclosure immediately becomes about ‘safe space’ and what that entails. We can extend that to many, if not most, spaces. Garneau discusses this as it pertains to the TRC, “Some have not and will not speak of such things even within the safety of autonomous Indigenous spaces” (Garneau 2016, 29). The audiences may be a mix of those who are willing and those who are unwilling to experience vulnerability by listening to the disclosure of another person. The geographical location may be familiar, which in some ways can be welcoming, but also intimidating in the new kind of exposure vulnerability brings to the experience.

Let’s look at a traditional performance space – a theatre. The two performing arts centres hosting Shane Koyczan and Tomson Highway, respectively, used two different kinds of spaces to host one-man shows. Koyczan was in a small, intimate studio space. Round, four-person tables were set up before a stage that was approximately three feet away from the first row and two feet high. Highway was on a traditional proscenium stage in a large auditorium. While the opportunity never presented itself, I find it difficult to imagine an audience member in the 17th row offering a tissue to Highway in his most vulnerable and distressed moments. The distance created a different experience than that of the studio space. Both storytelling true and often painful events of their lives, each performer had a different relationship with the
audience, in part because of the space itself. In “Weaving Reconciliation” the space was small, like the studio space Koyczan performed in, and the arrangement I described earlier again created intimacy among strangers. With a larger cast, the performers were challenged to engage audiences without always speaking directly to them. So proximity became even more important in developing a close relationship with the audience.

Lastly, consider testimony spaces. In Canada, there are standards that guide court facilities. In Ontario, several reports in the last 40 years have found that court spaces are inadequate and inflexible to progress or change (Ontario Attorney General website). Typically, a court room will have a set of standard features: witness stand, judge’s bench, counsel desks, jury box, public gallery (British Colombia website). These standards are limiting, and those who work and engage in court spaces would likely benefit from improvements in standards. The basic components could be rearranged or altered altogether to position the witness (survivor) in a more inclusive, less alienating location than a stand that isolates them in an unsupported way. Also, there is little literature regarding the room construction. Are acoustics considered carefully? In what way? Who is privileged?

The TRC in Canada took care to locate hearings in communities and community spaces to increase accessibility. Additional steps were taken within the structure in order to support survivors. This can be observed in the Hay River hearings video (see link in References). A considerable amount of time is spent allowing the speaker to get comfortable, giving the support person or family member time to encourage the speaker, and waiting for the speaker to exit with dignity and the acknowledgment of support in the room. These are all attempt to
make the space more ethical. The room set up in Hay River was standard for the TRC hearings nation-wide. Chief Lamalice Complex in Hay River Dene Reserve was equipped with a table and microphone in the middle of the room for the speaker and their support person(s). The Commissioner sat at one end facing the survivor on a slightly raised platform. Rows of chairs were lined up behind the speaker. This arrangement can give the impression that the speaker is at all times part of the community, facing the Commissioner (representing the Canadian government). This oppositional positioning is important as it has implications for the responsibility of witnesses other than the Commissioner. By being positioned face to face in an already tense scenario, like a hearing, there is more opportunity to feel conflict, resistance, and isolation. Positioned behind the speaker, the audience in the hall is engaged with the speaker by being on the same side as the speaker, also in opposition to the Commissioner. The invitation to acknowledge each speaker when they finished their testimony served to extend that connection. In this regard, the TRC strengthened the communication between community members by building a moment of connection at the moment of silence breaking. This moment of connection was a gateway to the vulnerable space, though not the first in the hearing process. Others include the moment the room comes to silence to hear the testimony (an invitation to listen and be heard), and the duration of testimony itself (an invitation to bear witness and be witnessed). These entry points each issue an obligation to the people sharing the space to engage and respond to one another. It is not merely an act of conversation; it is an exchange more akin to ritual. Each step of the sharing of testimony is delivered and repeated with a sense of import that assists each participant in understanding their own responsibility. Oliver’s response-ability is cultivated in the ceremony of the proceedings: the call to order, the
silence, the oral narrative, the acknowledgement, the standing and facing the community, the eye contact and applause. Both speaker and witness were participating in a series of steps that encouraged a visceral experience. That experience has resonance that continues long after the witnessing moment.

If the visceral experience is acknowledged by both parties, then the vulnerable space becomes an active site of potential empathy. Oliver’s infinite response-ability is activated. The ongoing opportunity to recall the vulnerability of the testimony experience and evolve responses as time goes on. I have identified several components in the above discussed scenarios that could potentially have impacts on the possibility of ethical response. To review, these influential components are levels of space, location of speaker in relation to the witness, and instructions (coded or explicit) of engagement. A unique approach to shared space is required. Ermine, in his explorations of Indigenous and colonial relations, describes an ‘ethical space’ that has potential to address this spatial need:

Since there is no God’s eye view to be claimed by any society of people, the idea of the ethical space, produced by contrasting perspectives of the world, entertains the notion of a meeting place, or initial thinking about a neutral zone between entities or cultures. The space offers a venue to step out of our allegiances, to detach from the cages of our mental worlds and assume a position where human-to-human dialogue can occur. The ethical space offers itself as the theatre for cross-cultural conversation in pursuit of ethically engaging diversity and disperses claims to the human order. (Ermine 2007, pg. 202)
Ermine’s assertion that cross-cultural conversation is essential to reconciliation is also transferable to the vulnerable space. One could resist such conversations, especially now that the TRC is over. One could simply say the work is done. However, there is a compelling reason to engage in ongoing response-ability: hope. This may seem overly saccharin, but it is at the core of reconciliation, and I would argue also at the core of witnessing. The vulnerable space is made possible by voice, but it isn’t the end result. Oliver’s notion of infinite response-ability reminds us that the working through of trauma is ongoing, so is the intersubjectivity of vulnerability (2001). Recognizing the colonial nature of a process like the TRC, hope may seem like a one-sided aspiration. Reconciliation may not serve as the best possible outcome for Indigenous people; there are often no satisfactory outcomes after experiencing mass violence. Many theorists (Nagy 2012; Roper, Barria 2009) have explored the development and aftermath of TRCs around the world, and found that problematic notions of reconciliation plague the process and call the efficacy of the outcomes into question. Garneau challenges the narrative that the TRC is a static and healing event that should allow Indigenous people to shut up and move on (Garneau 2016), and offers ways that artists can embrace what I read as Oliver’s sense of ongoing response-ability. Garneau posits that non-Indigenous folks who enter spaces of conciliation for reasons of their own healing may experience transformation. I agree and further offer the concept of the vulnerable space as the access point for such hope.

I would argue testimony is derived from hope. Here, hope is not solely a desire for good outcomes in the future. Instead it is a present thing, an urgent thing that alters the present. I referenced Brian Massumi earlier in relation to bodily orientation and movement. His work in movement also extends to manoeuvrability, a helpful notion in my argument about hope in
testimony. In “Navigating Movements” Massumi says, “In my own work I use the concept of ‘affect’ as a way of talking about that margin of manoeuvrability, the ‘where we might be able to go and what we might be able to do’ in every present situation. I guess ‘affect’ is the word I use for ‘hope’” (Massumi 2002). Mussumi opens the door for hope as something other than optimism. Instead, it can be construed as a kind of freedom to explore potentials. The TRC, problematic as it was, was a response to the call by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people for acknowledgement of the Canadian government’s role in the horrors of residential schools. A small part of that call was likely based on hope for change of some kind – a way to move through trauma; some kind of manoeuvrability. The nation state is perhaps incapable of producing the kind of hope it espouses in TRCs. Asma Abbas refers to the liberal state as “constructed to fail” in her essay “Voice Lessons: Suffering and the Liberal Sensorium”. She goes on to say, “The liberal state’s own affected burden of autonomy masks its comfort with, nay reliance on, departure and betrayal—stories that keep the state, and us, coming back, and forgetting the past in the desperate fluster and promise of contrived new beginnings” (Abbas 2010). Abbas explores the state (and church, and justice system) in terms of the ability to acknowledge and work through suffering. TRCs depend on the players accepting that the machinery of the hearings is the appropriate mode of healing and moving forward. Canada acknowledged the suffering of Residential School survivors through a highly orchestrated government issued public apology and a TRC process that was marred by controversy. The official outcome of the TRC is the 94 Calls to Action, which is centred on practical ways to move forward. Absent is the ongoing response-ability of those involved in the actual hearings. Do those who spoke feel heard? Abbas suggests, “Ways of treating suffering that define the terms
of a disaster and the terms in which a disaster is read can also dysfunctionalize sense and mute other voices. One eventually just forgets to speak, or speaks only to affirm or negate” (Abbas 2010). Is that, ultimately, the flaw in TRCs? The process itself imposes a definition of the trauma experienced in a broad sense, negating the individual experiences? Perhaps that does more to exacerbate the silencing the hearings were supposed to end. If Million’s felt theory was not fully realized in the TRC (Cook 2016, 2017), at the very least the process laid the groundwork for the possibility in the future by making a large scale attempt at implementing Indigenous traditions and other ethical practices. At least part of the response-ability of witnesses is the hope of understanding. This hope offers the potential for connection, a chance to hear and also be heard. There is risk. Taking that risk offers a way to reap the rewards of deep connection and ethical response.
so here we are

at the end again, as always

in the silence that waits for sound

i can hear you breath

and whisper

‘what’s next?’

(another ending by Shannon Kitchings)
Echo – Ways to Move Forward

In considering what might be possible, I would like to propose a few alternatives based on my research. The first comes from an example at the University of Regina. There a new healing lodge and wellness clinic was created using Indigenous Cultural Responsiveness Theory. The theory was applied to decolonize the space and establish a space that allows for a different kind of engagement (Education News). The space was designed through a consultative process. Ceremony was held to name the space. The design includes elements of nature such as natural wood and stone. Every design decision was carefully considered to ensure the result of the two-year development project reflected decolonizing concepts. This approach to spatial configuration has extensive potential in setting the tone for open dialogue and deep connection, both of which can be contributing factors to healing. More importantly, this example of spatial design implicates all institutions in the process of creating safe spaces. If architectural or design concepts deliberately include criteria about healing and response-ability, then there can be options for spaces that are conducive to ethical interactions. Consider the use of circular spaces, symmetrical spaces that eliminate the assumption of authority within a space. Spaces can be built to make spaces equitable by design.

The second suggestion is to reconsider how we think about these spaces. Ermine shares a similar challenge when discussing reconciliation prior to the TRC:

How do we reconcile worldviews? For example, how do we reconcile the oral tradition with the writing tradition, the two embedded traditions that we confront and must reconcile? That is the fundamental problem of cultural encounters. Shifting our
perspectives to recognize that the Indigenous-West encounter is about thought worlds may also remind us that frameworks or paradigms are required to reconcile these solitudes. (Ermine 2007, pg.201)

He proposes something called the ethical space of engagement. As Roger Poole describes this space as constituted by intention (Poole 1972). Space is imbued with the intentions of those who participate in it. It is also constituted from the experiences occurring within it. Our approach to space matters. This suggests a paradigm shift in spaces that have traditionally been oppressive. This is where the TRC missed some opportunities, and indeed the entire justice system we have frequently misses the mark. Instructions on appropriate intentions are needed. Instead of asking witnesses to look for the truth, which is elusive at best, why not ask them to look for something embodied, something they understand to be the authentic experience of the speaker. For example, they could be instructed to try to understand their own response to what they witness as a method of understanding what is communicated. Intention is essential and witnessing should be intentionally active rather than passive. The circumstances of speech may seem to dictate the intention, but that is not set in stone. Abbas tells us,

In the realm of emancipatory politics uncomfortable with and for liberal capitalism, the undifferentiated romance of voice needs to be interrogated for the clues it can provide to the forms of suffering and relations to it that deem voice fundamental to a just and democratic ethos. Speech that frees, and free speech, are very different; but only in part because of whose call they are answering: that, say, of a poet of radical dissent, or of
the accommodating, inclusive, neutering liberal state and its imperialist patrons. (Abbas, 2010)

Carefully attending to voices and those who use them, distinguishing between free speech and speech that frees, sets us on a path that can exceed the desire of the state and instead serve the needs of the suffering population. With additional support to guide the intentions of those tasked with trying to understand ‘what is true’ there are more potentials for ethical responses instead of reactive responses based on discomfort.

There are multiple dimensions of space to consider. Vertical and horizontal spaces have distinct opportunities for improvement in most testimony settings. Spatial design can offer some solutions. Beyond the physical space, there are elements to the space that are more internal to the people who inhabit it. Intentional approach is an example of an internal element essential to improving witnessing spaces. This kind of intentionality is rare and awareness of the complexities of the vulnerable space is perhaps too much to expect from people. Still, the vulnerable space represents a risky and uncomfortable moment, and any efforts to make it safer for all involved is an effort to assure ethical responses. I do not suggest that safety negates the vulnerable space. In fact, I propose it can encourage it. The vulnerable space as I have described it, does not require true danger for either party. Instead, the space I allude to is centred on self-reflection compelled by the oral disclosure. The self-reflection is often unnoticed, or unwanted, but is also sought out in the performance experience. I say unnoticed or unwanted because the feelings provoked in these scenarios can be painful and uncontrolled. These kinds of feelings are often avoided whenever possible, as Uta Hagen so clearly indicated.
In performance, I make myself vulnerable (through training and practice) and accept whatever I get back from my audience. This is risky, emotionally, but hardly dangerous.

The stakes are considerably higher in testimony settings than in performances. Recognizing that testimony brings the speaker a risk of outcomes that exceeds the vulnerable space, such as a negative verdict or public humiliation, it is necessary to approach the vulnerable space as an essential component, but not the only component, of the testimony experience. The vulnerable space is a powerful pathway to empathetic response, but the same criteria that support the vulnerable space are also ingredients for less desirable exchanges. I have made a case for learning about and encouraging the vulnerable space in testimony settings in the hopes of eliciting an empathetic response similar to that of performance spaces, but the vulnerable space cannot occur in isolation. I have also outlined how voice engages speaker and listener in a physical relationship through sonic resonance and that the relationship has increased potential over other non-vocal modes of receiving testimony due to that physical relationship. It is naïve to assume that a deep connection will always happen or that healing is a readily available or immediate outcome. The vulnerable space is expansive and infinite, like response-ability. Once accessed, it unfolds in unpredictable and continual ways. The potential is what is critical. Potentiality is where we can find new and innovative ways to make the connections in juridical and quasi-juridical settings more empathetic, more human.

Performing Arts

I have asserted that there is a cultural understanding of how to receive performances. Broadly stated, there is an unspoken agreement that the audience will listen, watch, and
acknowledge (clap or otherwise) the completion. There is also a sense about when that moment occurs. Typically, an audience recognizes the end of a work and responds accordingly. This may be due to the relationship built in the space, the audience understands when it is time to leave the way one might understand when it is time to leave a friend’s house after tea. It doesn’t always happen this way. I have been in many audiences who misread the ending and applaud too early, breaking the scene momentarily or permanently. Every time I have experienced this failure to read the signs the performers gave us, I have felt a sense of discomfort for disrupting the show and not fully understanding what was happening. I don’t take all the responsibility for that discomfort; a good performer should keep their audience with them until the very end, not let them wander off distracted and confused. The concept of the vulnerable space is specific language that can be used to facilitate this ongoing connection between performer and audience. By clearly identifying the vulnerability as a shared experience, there is a foundation to engage in the art form fully.

**Testimony**

Key challenges to the experience of giving testimony in Canadian courtrooms stem from the adversarial nature of the justice system predominantly utilized. There are some methods emerging in North American cities that favour alternative approaches, which could potentially offer safer spaces for the exchange of vulnerability I have identified in my argument. Therapeutic Justice is a good example of alternative routes that players in our justice system can investigate. Therapeutic justice focuses less on determination of guilt and more on supportive rehabilitation. This problem-solving approach was introduced into Indigenous cases in Nunavut during Ferrazzi’s and Krupa’s study of mental health and criminal justice in Inuit
communities (Ferrazzi and Krupa 2016). The results of this study concluded that there was opportunity to further explore how Inuit culture affects the vulnerability of Nunavut communities to the pitfalls of various justice interventions and how non-punitive approaches can better serve communities. These results are relevant to my inquiry because they make a case for understanding the trauma experienced by court participants, and I contend that voice is a possibly useful indicator of the layers of trauma narratives beyond words. The ongoing outcries of injustice in Canadian justice systems make any investigation into better solutions a worthy undertaking.

Alternative forms of justice help me understand that there are practices that are more likely to embrace the notion that voice is essentially informative in testimony. Restorative justice, a practice that focuses on reparation and harm reduction, often has community at the core the practice and many Indigenous communities are engaged in this mode of justice as an alternative to the more alienating Canadian justice system (Linklater, 2014). A prime example is a case study (Schwarts et al, 2003) about a restorative justice experiment in San Francisco. This experiment introduced a restorative justice project to a jail, resulting in an integrated approach to crime prevention rather than solely focussing on punitive justice. The local sheriffs’ department implemented the new project designed to include prisoners, victims, and community members in restitution and healing. In the jail case study there is a direct comparison between traditional justice methods, in this case jail as punishment followed by release after a prescribed amount of time compared to an alternative. Due to this comparison, the distinct effects of an alternative form of justice were clearly visible against the control group. The core of this program was involving the community in the process to encourage
healing amongst the victims, perpetrators, and community. Bringing these parties into conversation is integral to the process (Linklater, 2014). In these interactions amongst community members, could better understanding of voice as I have described it, help those involved to get to a just resolution more empathetically? I suggest it is possible, if not probable.

In this case study the authors allowed for a clear, almost instructional, dissemination of learnings from the project. Understanding of voice and the embodied responses to voice could be part of learnings of future studies.

**Pedagogy**

Developing a teaching technique that is inclusive and connective is an enormous undertaking for which I am not qualified. I can, however, posit some ideas that extend my research into potential pedagogical practice using the adult learning and facilitation principles I utilize in my own work. In this study, I have emphasized the inevitability and necessity of the vulnerable space. Upon deeper understanding it can be easily recognized in some other scenarios, such as classrooms. To that end, there are multiple ways to transfer this analysis of performance and testimony into the educational sphere. There are two areas in which I wish to intervene.

The first is how to position the learning objectives. Many learning spaces are constructed to deliver information and have it memorized and understood by participants. Felman suggests in the chapter of *Testimony* called “Education in Crisis or the Vicissitudes of Teaching” that in the era of testimony “teaching must itself be viewed not merely as *transmitting*, but as *accessing*: as accessing the crises or the critical dimension...” (Felman 1992,
pg. 54). If the *intention* of these spaces was adapted to be a kind of ‘truth-seeking’ space, then the learners would have an obligation to *find* a truth that resonates with them, learning at a bodily level. The speaker or instructor would be compelled to invest considerable energy in making an opportunity for vulnerability to occur in order to facilitate the learning process. This requires significant sensitivity to the responses of learner in order to maintain a safe space. Felman addresses this necessity by saying,

> There is a parallel between this kind of teaching (in its reliance on the testimonial process) and psychoanalysis (in its reliance on the psychoanalytic process), insofar as both this teaching and psychoanalysis have, in fact, to live through a crisis. Both are called upon to be performative, and not just cognitive, insofar as they both strive to produce, and to enable, change. Both this kind of teaching and psychoanalysis are interested not merely in new information, but, primarily, in the capacity of their recipients to transform themselves in function of the newness of that information (Felman 1992, pg. 53)

Transformation is also an outcome of infinite response-ability. The kind of teaching Felman advocates for has similarities to the vulnerable space I contend is a result of witnessing oral testimony. The advantage of witnessing in pedagogy is greater potential for learning. Knowledge retention is the surface level of education, in the same way that the constative is only the surface of speech acts. Learning is about transformation and the vulnerable space is ideal for learning environments to include transformation as an objective. Voice provides access to vulnerability that can create the paradigm shifts needed for learning. The trend towards
online learning creates troubling challenges in this regard. Without the in-person encounter, engaged discussion and debate are limited, if possible at all. There is little possibility of overhearing the conversations of fellow students trying to figure out a problem or compare notes. The accidental realizations that come in the few minutes before class begins and after it ends are all but lost. Learning is altered, perhaps stifled, by the distance and time delays of technology. In-person learning promotes ongoing exchange, a kind of response-ability.

The second site of intervention is space. Learning environments need to be healing spaces, not just for individuals, but for the greater social good. Education can not only mobilize knowledge in an academic sense, but also foster the kinds of skills that prepare people for response-ability. Building appropriate spaces to explore the larger ideas and questions in life (as good education should) can create or perhaps re-create a social interest in the challenge of life-long learning. I suggest this because learning is an ongoing process of tearing apart the previous understanding of the world in order to introduce new perspectives. This act is potentially uncomfortable or even painful and would benefit from a space that is soothing and can support repeated reconfiguring of thought patterns. For this I turn to the various kinds of architecture and set ups that are conducive to equitable learning practices and multiple kinds of learning. An example is circular architecture and design, giving the space a cyclical nature. Smaller spaces that increase the potential connection between speaker and listener through the proximity of acoustics are useful models to examine. Level spaces with clear sightlines between learners and instructors offer equity between parties and facilitate the mutual communication occurring in the vulnerable space.
Both of these interventions require the creation and management of a safe space. This can be particularly challenging as the players in learning environments are constantly changing. Additionally, there is a push to increase profit and accommodate more students through larger class sizes and online tools, removing the face-to-face experience altogether. Some possible strategies to consider are setting up the physical environment to be warm and supportive, include learning tools in a variety of languages, and carefully addressing accessibility needs. The primary goal, however, should be creating an adaptable space that can be adjusted according to the expressed needs of the students. Opening up a strong channel of communication that allows students to understand and then articulate their sense of safety is necessary to both ensure the correct needs are being met instead of a one-size-fits-all solution, but also to provide a more balanced power structure where everyone has a role in the safe space.

A safe space is not necessarily a space where one might avoid feelings of vulnerability entirely, or “foreclose the crises” in Felman’s words, but rather a space one can expect to provide fair, positive, responsive support. This balance is not customary in public spaces such as classrooms. Often, as in judicial settings, vulnerability is encouraged for the already vulnerable (students), and discouraged for those in power (i.e. teachers). Existing spaces and systems fail to illuminate these inequities, leaving those involved ill equipped to respond. Because teachers, professors, and facilitators are often unprepared for, and uncomfortable with, expressions of vulnerability, a shift in social dynamics of public space would be required. Learning must happen for all participants. Progress must be made to teach and encourage active listening and deep connections by discussing and accepting the vulnerable space as necessary and useful.
Self-care

This is arguably the most useful possibility because it has potential to support anyone and everyone. Self-care is an important consideration for both performers and survivors, as it responds to the immense energy relinquished in the act of speaking for an audience. It is also essential for witnesses, as secondary trauma and even the vulnerable space itself can be just as draining as speaking. The work of oral disclosures of trauma is body work, so self-care is a natural extension of this research. Earlier in this thesis I referred to the breath work that performers practice. Breathing is core voice work, and necessary for survival. Self-care is as essential as breathing. Those who are already struggling to survive, those living in the margins, are already challenged in their own care. Resisting one’s own oppression or the oppression of others is difficult labour. Sara Ahmed, author of the blog Feminist Killjoys, discusses the need for care in social justice work in her book On Being Included. “To recognize diversity requires that time, energy, and labor be given to diversity. Recognition is thus material as well as symbolic…” (Ahmed 2012, pg. 29). Ahmed identifies the bodily effect of the work of challenging oppression. This is the same effect as the work of testifying, insofar as testimony is an act of challenging one’s own oppression.

Testifying as someone who is marginalized often serves to further oppress by exploiting one’s pain, taking away from employment hours to testify, and potentially retraumatizing the survivor. As I have said, speaking out isn’t always beneficial to the speaker. Voice can be a fragile thing. Trauma, both physical and emotional, can damage our voices. Brison discusses repeatedly losing her voice in the aftermath of her rape. (Brison 2002) This is such a clear example of the physical manifestation of the unspeakable nature of trauma, that one might
wonder how anyone comes to disclose their trauma narrative. Perhaps surviving is such a powerful mode of resistance that the healing process brings with it a kind of recovery that allows survivors to reclaim their voice. Careful attention to the visceral experience of speaking or hearing a traumatic disclosure is a life skill I suggest we could all benefit from, recognizing that some already do it and do it well.

**Finally, Let’s Exhale**

I am not pretending to offer answers to all of my questions. However, I hope that this inquiry will open up a new thread in the discourse that puts victims at the centre of their own stories and gives speakers and witnesses space to be deferentially connected at the moment of disclosure. Avoiding the kind of silencing Abbas warns us against, the kind that is promoted by liberal practices of recognition and accommodation, we are left to find a way to “feel” speech without co-opting it ourselves. To that end, this study seeks to discover possibilities to ameliorate responses to victim testimony by suggesting new ways to elicit the testimony and prepare the speaker and witness for the impending experience. Perhaps a cultural shift towards vocal sensitivity is due. Those who testify can make efforts to consider what I have proposed in this thesis. For example, as performers do, those who testify might chose to be specific and deliberate about who they direct their voice to at certain points of testimony in order to maximize the vibrational resonance experienced by particular listeners. A survivor might prepare by utilizing breathing techniques to help mitigate their own vulnerability. A listener to testimony could reflect on how hearing the testimony made them feel, physically. Standard practices could include attuning witnesses to the response-ability they have in testimony. This study winds through a complicated labyrinth of theory and reflection and data to offer
alternate perspectives on speech, testimony, and the vulnerable connection between speaker and listener. I realize I have offered a wild imagining as possibility, but that is what comes of whispers in the void. Small signals, from the TRC and sexual violence cases, from #metoo and artistic interventions, from deeply felt sighs and loudly heard screams, small signals help us see what might be possible. The clear imperative is to remember. Remember their names, their faces, remember what happened here. These appeals, common among these activist movements, strike at the heart of ignorance and denial. By memorializing the histories of trauma, survivors and resistors create a material force that cannot be erased easily. As Michael Rothberg contends:

> Emphasizing the dimension of imagination involved in acts of remembrance should not lead to assumptions of memory's insubstantiality. Remembrance and imagination are material forces as well as fundamentally human ones. They cannot be wished away, nor, I believe, should they be. (Rothberg 2009, pg. 19)

Memory of a traumatic event, especially of mass trauma suffered by many strangers and loved ones, is like an infinite journey in and out of oneself. To share it out loud is a monumental thing. A monument to pain, and also to hope.

As I examine the potentials created through vocalized disclosure and the vulnerable space, further possibilities emerge. Speaking out is a challenging and powerful action and happens in a variety of vastly diverse settings. In vocalization of trauma both the speaker and the listener embark on a personal journey through that action. The physical act of speaking out stimulates an emotional response from everyone involved that is distinct in embodiment from
the stimulation of a written disclosure or third-hand account. These artistic interpretations illustrate some of the ways the vulnerable space is manifested, but leave some room for fully exploring the distinct cause and effect of the space I am highlighting and beginning to investigate further. The human vocal abilities engaged in these interpretations are multi-layered and broad in scope. There is more being communicated than just language and ideas. There are elements of spirit and energy without finite definition being transmitted in the act of speaking out. Voice is the tool for the creating of incomparable exchanges. Those who use voice as a tool to share traumatic experiences with others elicit a shared response that, in many ways, is not an end result, but simply a new beginning.

I argue that the nature of the experience between speaker and listener in oral disclosures of trauma is best described as vulnerable space. I further argue that the vulnerable space is simultaneously created and limited by the acoustic geography of the location and the intentions set by those who hold the most power in that location. Finally, I suggest that the vulnerable space benefits from explicitly addressing the spatial arrangement of the room and vocalizing a clear empathetic intention at the start and throughout the proceedings in testimony settings. My argument is centred on the hypothesis that ethical responsibility and response-ability are necessary considerations in testimony settings. Applying Oliver’s conceptualization of witnessing, those who enter into a space and hear someone disclose a trauma narrative enter into a kind of agreement with the speaker. The terms of the agreement are less defined than those of more recognized relationship. We know what to do as employer/employee or merchant/customer, or, as this thesis has explored: performer/audience. The speaker/listener relationship is made more complex in the scenario of
trauma disclosure perhaps *because* it is less defined. In TRCs, the intent is national catharsis as a means to reconcile. Such catharsis is risky as it exposes vulnerabilities without solid ongoing support. The players are left lost and confused, forced to make meaning without sufficient guidance. The speaker shares their testimony with no guarantee of how it will be received. The listener receives the testimony, with the most basic direction (as in many court settings) to decide if it is true. This direction is problematic in any hearing of testimony, and can minimize the experience of both the speaker and the listener. Truth comes in many different forms, and, I would say, cannot be determined by anyone other than those who experience it for themselves. I hope I have been able to illuminate alternative forms of relationships between narrator and witness. These alternatives can be introduced into testimony spaces in a variety of ways. These alternatives demonstrate that there is a deep connection that comes from sharing in the disclosure of a trauma. What could this mean for testimony? How can this form of relationship be applied in juridical and quasi-juridical spaces?

Some theorists propose that ethical practices of listening are possible by reconsidering the dynamics of testimony. As Hemsworth did in carceral environments, Taylor, Sollange & Rwigema explore being heard as a means to regain dignity. Speaking and listening are parts of an interaction that needs careful attention.

We need to seek complexity, not simplicity... testimony is a personal experience that one shares in order to connect with other human beings. Each connection is unique, and the receiver of the account has an obligation to hold this interaction with respect... (Taylor, Sollange, & Rwigema, 2015, p. 101)
Like Oliver, Taylor et al support a response-ability approach to testimony that exceeds the pass fail process of delivering a verdict. If the testimony process was designed to be a transformative and ethical sharing of lived experience, the possibility of re-traumatizing participants may be greatly diminished.

In the previous chapter I offered several methods of shifting the culture of testimony and its reception by making changes to the space testimony occurs in. Methods that include dismantling colonial frameworks are available and discussed in abundance at this moment in Canadian history. These approaches are challenged by (among other things) the attempt to integrate decolonial methods into colonial structures. Negotiating this journey towards a more wholistic justice approach is a massive undertaking (Linklater 2014). While there are certainly many possible ways to modify our current justice system for the better, the ones I have described speak directly to the experience of giving voice to personal trauma narratives and hearing those narratives in a live setting of relatively close proximity. These spaces, be they vulnerable, ethical, or even empty in some ways, are critical to the process of witnessing. Let us imagine a world where all are encouraged and supported in their efforts to actively practice empathy. Practice, and improve. We can grow together throughout our lives to be stronger speakers and braver listeners. We can reach into the pain of trauma and pull from it the means to understand one another better. We can hold space in our bodies to acknowledge and address the other bodies we encounter. The vulnerable space exists in more than just theatres and courtrooms. Every time we make contact with it, we have another chance to be better versions of ourselves. I invite you to consider your own capacity for vulnerability. Drop this
document and abandon the written word for awhile. Practice engaging with the sonic space of another person. Try to inhabit your moments of speaking and witnessing as best you can.

Go. Now.
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