Introduction

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> **recover** *v.* **I.** *trans.* **1.a.** To get (occasionally, to take) back again into one's hands or possession; to regain possession of (something lost or taken away). **b.** To regain (country, territory, etc.) by conquest or main force; to win back (ground lost in fighting).

If life is a bowl of cherries, why does it seem that "third wave" feminism has congealed around a politics of empathy, with healing and the prevention of individual trauma taking over as the central projects?[1] That is admittedly an oversimplification for the sake of a turn of phrase; however, there is a disturbing grain of accuracy in those popular representations which cast feminism as a single-issue movement, picking up on the central place of "violation," "raw experience," and "authentic voices" in the currently louder strains of the discourse. Now that "feminism" makes regular appearances in the popular media, we need to account for those mirror-effects which do not simply return a false image but enter into the realm of feminist explanation as they explain feminism. Feminist identity was the "paranormal" subject of a recent episode of *The Outer Limits*, in which a sexually assaulted girl turned feminist science professor discovers a method of travelling backwards in time (using the "pretemporal lobes" of aborted fœtuses) in order to slay the men who are destined to become the rapists of the future. The path from raped girl to righteous feminist serial killer is as natural and inevitable in this story as the connection between the project of feminism and the fantasy of time travel. This is because, outside of this particular text, sexual violation has already, and widely, been assigned the singular status of an absolutely determining event. *The Outer Limits* can thus imagine the ultimate feminist project as an alteration of the past, a return to confront the violator on the verge of acting, with a phrase from the future: "You stole my life!" Such tv feminism provides a sympathetic but pathologizing narrativization of the feminist subject position as a stamp of personal trauma. The mutilated and obsessed time-traveller

may be the subject of "authenticity" but her quest has nothing to do with a larger analysis of systemic, routine violences. As the conclusion to this episode of *The Outer Limits* indicates, the quest will simply be passed on from one damaged avenger to another.

As a representation of feminism, the *Outer Limits* narrative is no more ahistorical and caricaturizing than those profferred by writers such as Camille Paglia and Canada's own Donna Laframboise, who dismiss so-called "victim feminism" in attempts to win the speaking positions of the "radical" and the "reasonable" respectively. Far riskier is the question, How do we oppose that in which we are implicated?—the sort of immanent critique, without disidentification from a feminist "we," which would trouble the therapeutic inclination of recent feminist discourse on power and violence. It is risky because, for the audience of the feminist-identified critic, even the suggestion that other forms of knowledge need to be brought to bear upon these questions may seem to be a dangerous undercutting of the political value of brave speech acts. But to leave the critique of the poverty of certain feminist knowledge forms to those who position themselves as "postfeminists" is to miss an opportunity to find new critical ground for feminism. One kind of critique which returns to feminism the possibility of enduring as a "political front that causes 'trouble' culturally" is the genealogical one: in a recent essay in *differences*, for example, Pamela Haag undertakes a genealogy of second-wave American feminism in an attempt to recover some of 1960s feminism's "violent flamboyance" (62, 42). In this earlier, militant feminist strain—which learned lessons from the new left and black power—violence, instead of being reduced to a singular, sacralized act of "violation," was understood in relation to a pervasive dehumanization. What is important to retrieve from this earlier feminist politics, Haag suggests, is its analysis of an order of violence which includes the *constitutive* alienations of a system of sexual difference. From this perspective, the female subject is fractured and mutilated prior to any act of violation, which act is then only ever a reiteration of the always anterior, alienating, constitutive violence of gendering. As a reiteration, a redundancy, violence is not the opposite of non-violence and neither does it belong to those who "have power": it can have a transformative value, can be enlisted as a part of a "process of 'becoming' through learning 'effective,' insurrectionary" habits (41). Militant feminism valued physical force as a technique of self-transformation, a means for women to reintegrate their fractured selves: self-defense training, for instance, promised to be a means of embodying political will and inscribing anger "into the muscles" (36). Haag argues that this earlier vision has been displaced by an anti-violation politics of confessing/reporting, empathetic listening and advocacy, which mobilizes around the figure of the essentially

vulnerable woman, instead of the guerilla *in potentia*. While the *Outer Limits* episode does give us the picture of a woman deploying violence (after all, she travels back in time with a gun in order to exterminate rapists-in-the-making), it is not very difficult to see that her actions are proposed as the pathological re-actions of a victim. *Xena*'s display of fighting skill is a better reminder of the momentary, exhilirating sense of physical agency I experienced with the surprising realization that my hand had smashed through a piece of wood in an early 1980s self-defence class in Montreal, taught by feminists of the 1960s. So are those lines on the last page of Gail Scott's novel, *Main Brides*, which imagine a collective gesture of self-defence in the after-math of the École polytechnique: "C. leans over and takes something gleaming from her boot. Kicking back her chair, with an impatient flick of her foot. Like Lydia, now, in the bar. Nous autres, nous continuerons à vivre" (230).

> **c.** To get back, regain (some non-material thing which may be spoken of as *lost* or *taken away*). **d.** To find again, come upon a second time. **2.** To regain, acquire again, resume, return to: **a.** a quality, state, or condition; **b.** health or strength; **c.** a faculty of body or mind.

The fracturing of the self which the louder strains of "third wave" feminism tend to ascribe to a single event of violation, an invasion of psychic and physical space which mutilates a previously coherent and unified self, might be differently understood as the effect of earlier, or more diffuse, processes of *subjectification* through which one is "made up" as subject. The idea of an inescapable, constitutive violence at the heart of subjectivity is developed in various ways in poststructuralist theories of subject-formation, often in an argument with ego-psychology's prescription of a normative unity which, these theorists point out, can only be maintained in a relation to social "others" who carry the displaced burden of fragmentation. From this perspective, not only is the recovery of a lost wholeness which is held out by many healing programmes primarily defensive but the promise itself is downright dishonest. The poststructuralist valorization of multiplicity, however, stands in an uneasy relation to psychological work on trauma which claims to locate the specific, historical causes of the incoherent self (in an experience of sexual abuse, for example) and points to the overdetermined content of the resulting identity fragments of a "multiple personality." In a critique of what she sees as the celebratory tendency of postructuralist thinking about multiplicity, Lynne Layton (a feminist therapist) argues that "the pain of th[e] fragmented subject is forgotten or bracketed [as] she is [...] figured [in the work of Jacques

Lacan, Judith Butler, E. Ann Kaplan, Constance Penley, and Kathy Acker] as able to subvert the system by enjoying, rearranging, and playing with her fragments" (108). The "fragments" of a "multiple personality," furthermore, are not contentless but "usually reflect extreme cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity"—the sadistic and abusive male and the vulnerable and compliant little girl (112-13). Layton's move to confront poststructuralist theory with "pain"—with "what it feels like to experience fragmentation" (109)—replays an unnecessary opposition of "theory" and "raw experience." The therapist's posture of empathy for those in pain also entails a normative diagnosis of their "gender identity conflict[s]" and the "atypicality" of their waking fantasies (113, 116). Nevertheless, by putting poststructuralist thinking in contact with therapeutic understandings of "multiple personality" and the defensive, rather than transformative, uses of fragmentation in practices of self-representation, Layton points to the remainder of *anguish* left behind by theory's figurative fragmentations, as well as by the kind of argument which only goes so far as to point out (rightly) that the "disorder" in question is a medico-psychiatric construct. Perhaps we do not have to (cannot, in fact) choose between explanatory models privileging constitutive violence and those privileging traumas locatable in individual life narratives. What if, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests, we "assume for a moment the near-inevitability of any child's being 'seduced' in the sense of being inducted into, and more or less implanted with, one or more adult sexualities whose congruence with the child's felt desires will necessarily leave at least many painful gaps" (64)?

That the experience of non-identity is neither one of illness nor freedom, that individual agency is not the opposite of subjection, but rather conditional upon some submission to power—these are the sorts of openings which become possible when the "violation" model is questioned in a form of analysis that does not simply bracket anguish. Judith Butler's move to extend the widely circulating theme of the child's fundamental vulnerability to subordination and exploitation, to a consideration of how adult subjects are regulated through their desires and attachments in repetitions of that early vulnerability, is predicated on a refusal of the terms of the debate about child sexual abuse. This debate, she argues, "tend[s] to mistake the character of the exploitation. It is not simply that a sexuality is unilaterally imposed by the adult, nor that a sexuality is unilaterally fantasized by the child, but that the child's love, a love that is necessary for its existence, is exploited and a passionate attachment abused" (7-8). Butler goes on to propose that the subject achieves its emergence as such only by denying its primary dependency, its existence at the mercy of others

upon whom it is "passionately attached." The denial of this early, necessary submission condemns the subject to neurotically seek out repeated relations of subjection. But out of this denial and re-enactment of a primary submission to power comes agency. When we seek social recognition in an attempt to *oppose* subordination, for example, we reiterate that primary, necessary subjection, by identifying with "indifferent and dominant" categories (20). The small opening in this picture, considerably smaller than the final "getting free" promised by recovery programmes, is the possibility of risking a bit of social "death" (non-recognition) in one's modalities of repetition and in the forms of self-reflexivity through which one internalizes social norms.[2]

> **3.a.** To get back, or find again (one who has been lost or absent). **b.** To bring, draw, or win back (a person) to friendship or willing obedience; to reconcile. **c.** To recapture, get hold of (an escaped person) again. **4.** To get in place of, or in return for, something else. **5.** *Law.* **a.** To get back or gain by judgement in a court of law; to obtain possession of, or a right to, by legal process. **b.** To have (a judgement or verdict) given in one's favour. **6. a.** To get or obtain; to get hold of.

For Freud, what distinguished the traumatic neurosis from other neuroses was the immediacy and literality of the dreams and flashbacks in which the event returned to haunt the subject. The traumatized person thus "carries an impossible history," a collapse of witnessing and understanding which can only be reconstructed through another's ability to "*listen to departure*" (Caruth 1991a 4, 11). Cathy Caruth stresses the impossibility of a narrativization or translation of traumatic experience into comprehensibility, into what is already understandable (1991b 420), but the questions of who listens to such attempts at narrativization, to what end, and of how received cultural forms of "listening" shape what is said in the first place, must be asked nevertheless. What is "recovered" when a traumatized subject is restored to social normality? This issue relates to the transitive (rather than reflexive) sense of recovery, as an action performed on an other.[3] How does a society "represen[t] return to the survivor, [...] stipulate the conditions of renormalization and pursu[e] its own interest in that act of stipulation" (Breitweiser 128)? The language of clinical psychology, as Mitchell Robert Breitweiser points out, "tends to establish reunion as an indubitable value, and therefore to consign the survivor's resistance to categories of the 'psychological,' the traumatized, the mentally ill, at which point noncompliance is a

pitiable derangement rather than a critical reflection on the renewed world" (128).[4] It is important, then, to consider the rhetoric of recovery and self-help as practical technologies aiming at particular outcomes, as human technologies which both capacitate and govern human conduct, "combining persons, truths, judgments, devices and actions into a stable, reproducible, and durable form" (Rose 26-27, 88).

> **II.** *refl.* **16.a.** To regain one's natural position or balance. **b.** To return to life or consciousness. **c.** To get over a loss or misfortune; to recoup oneself. **d.** To get over fatigue or illness.

It is with the reflexive sense of recovery—as in, recovering one's own deepest core, true self, inner child—that we arrive at the historically-contingent types of interiority or self-relation which we are now encouraged to produce and maintain. Nikolas Rose argues that the psychological-psychiatric disciplines have come to play a constitutive role in our current subjectification or "infolding" of an "ontology" with pre-given characteristics. The "human" aspect which this "psy ontology" presupposes is the desire for self-realization, which it *im*poses as a *practice* of subjectivity that entails a continual self-monitoring in relation to a regulatory ideal of *freedom*. This ideal, Rose argues, "imposes as many burdens, anxieties, and divisions as it inspires projects of emancipation, and in [its] name [...] we have come to authorize so many authorities to assist us in the project of being free from any authority but our own": social workers, therapists, guidance counsellors, managers, organizational consultants, and self-help experts, to name just a few (197). Perhaps the most widespread technique elaborated in relation to this particular "ontology" is what Barbara Cruikshank calls the "literary technology" of self-esteem (329). Self-esteem programmes produce selves through "the telling and writing of personal narratives" which "bring people to see that the details of their personal lives and their chances for improving [...] are inextricably linked to what is good for all of society" (329). The most intimate self-expression and -evaluation takes place, in such practices, in relation to received social norms and goals. The ideally self-esteeming subject thus governs herself "for the good of society" in place of the police, the courts, the doctors.

> **17. a.** To retreat, retire *into* a place; to fall back *on* one as an authority. **b.** To withdraw or escape *from* or *out of*, to return *to*, a position, state or condition.

In *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional*, Wendy Kraminer

describes a letter-writing exercise which she observed in the course of her infiltration of the self-help and recovery movements:

> She concludes the workshop by having people write love letters to themselves, or, rather, to their inner children. After ten minutes or so of silent writing, people share their letters, reading them out loud to the group. Women are crying, reading letters to their inner kids, like this: "Dear Honey-bunch, I love your wide-eyed innocence. I have to get to know you better." Or "Sweetheart, I am very happy that I have begun to know you. You have been lost to me for such a long time. I'm looking forward to your teaching me how to play." A few use the language of romance novels: "Your passion sets me on fire," they say to themselves. (97)

At what price do women identify themselves in relation to an experience which blocked the realization of inner potential and which gave birth to a small, wounded being inside the self, a being waiting for recovery? At what price do they speak the truth about themselves as codependents, addicts, hurt children, victims of a single vector of oppression who are in the process of healing, once and for all? What is at stake in an identification with the subject-position of "inner child"? The composition of letters to an inner addressee is a form of address which makes the romance an *intra*subjective speech genre, enlisting the convention of fascination with and idealization of the other in the service of a renewed attachment to self. It asks subjects to imagine a split within themselves, a split that is based on the generational difference between an earlier, lost self and the present, adult self, articulated with an opposition of truth and falsity. The attraction of such a tropological move may be its potential to anaesthetize the subject against the pain of being constituted across a number of historically-produced and sometimes contradictory material sites. Radically simplifying and internalizing difference and encoding it in terms of such a binary, it promises a permanent freedom from pain and adversity, an arrival "home" to an identity that can be fully and finally inhabited. This promise of a home, as Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have argued, can only be fulfilled through "the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance and the repression of differences even within oneself" (qtd in de Lauretis 135).[5] But the differences *within* the self that are part of every personal history—the product of geographical, social, political, intellectual dislocations—are here reduced to the difference between adulthood

and childhood, a difference which overlays the complex interactions between the subject and the social with the comforting privacy of familial relations. Whereas the trope of travel in this discourse refers to an "inward voyaging," a "journey back to a lost child" (Steinem 160-61), back home to a truth constructed as pre-existent and interior, in an alternate usage of this trope, travel might refer to an intellectual displacement between truths produced in different relations of power and knowledge. This would be a journey from one way of apprehending the world to another, a form of travel that would also reconfigure the relation to the self.

Notes

Many thanks to Julie Murray for her comments on a draft of this essay.

[1] I follow Pamela Haag's periodization of twentieth-century North American feminisms here, as well as her characterization of the "third wave," which, she argues, emerges with the social practices on university and college campuses in the 1980s, organized by women who came of age when the feminist analysis of violence had already contracted into a focus on the singularity of "violation" (60).

[2] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, more concerned with the technical side of negotiating with the "enabling violence" of inherited political languages and regimes of signs tied to particular organizations of power, describes this risk-taking in terms of "realiz[ing] the responsibility of playing with or working with fire [rather] than pretend[ing] that what gives light and warmth does not also destroy" (283). Spivak is discussing the "idiom of constitutions" in relation to the teaching of "woman's history" and transnational culture studies in the university, but her warnings about the effects of a constitutional law coding of women's bodies, "this defining of ourselves into part of a General Will by way of articles of 'foreign'—that is to say gender-alienated manufacture" (284)—seems relevant here. What these conditions require is a "persistent critique" of those structures "one cannot not (wish to) inhabit" (284).

[3] The legal definition of recovery, the recuperation of a debt through a recourse to the authority of law, suggests that something is being paid out in the narrativization of trauma, and that that self-narrativization, furthermore, occurs from a position of indebtedness. I find it fascinating that Canada's best-known female captivity narratives—the first-person accounts of trauma by Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, captured during the North-West rebellion—present themselves as repayments of a debt to the nation.

[4] Breitweiser is criticizing a "symptomatic" reading of the seventeenth-century captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson in terms of the late-twentieth century "survivor syndrome," a reading which, he argues, only repeats "in the mode of therapeutic solicitousness" the Puritan typological exiling of excessive significances to the wilderness of irrationality (127-29).

[5] de Lauretis proposes a mode of feminist theorizing that would "begin when the

feminist critique of socio-cultural formations (discourses, forms of representation, ideologies) becomes conscious of itself and turns inward... in pursuit of consciousness—to question its own relation to or possible complicity with those ideologies, its own heterogeneous body of writing and interpretations, their basic assumptions and terms, and the practices which they enable and from which they emerge" (138).

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