

**TROUBLING DOMINANT DISCOURSES: DEVELOPING A
FRAMEWORK OF SUBVERSION AND APPLYING IT TO
AUTONOMOUS ACTIVISM**

by

Julieanne C. James

A thesis submitted to the Department of Sociology
In conformity with the requirements for
the degree Doctor of Philosophy

Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

(July, 2014)

Copyright © Julieanne C. James, 2014

Abstract

My dissertation conducts a conceptual investigation into Judith Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) theory of performativity and Julia Kristeva's (1982) theorizing on the abject. I use the concepts gleaned from my theoretical exploration to construct an analytical framework that offers ways of explaining the subversion of dominant discourses in the context of autonomous activism. The purpose of this endeavour is to develop a framework for how activist practices can be both more fully autonomous from – and more effectively subversive to – dominant discourses. I apply my framework to the autonomous elements within the *Idle No More Movement* in order to elucidate the subversive potential of this type of activism for subverting dominant discourses and how it can be strengthened. This application does not seek to define or analyze the movement itself, but rather to offer an explanation for the repression of autonomous-based activism within mainstream Canada. Overall, I find that activism within Western society is caught up in a discursive struggle whereby the suppression of social movements is enacted, in part, through a multitude of abjection processes that are executed through such practices as social interactions, psychological mechanisms, written text, and visual representations. In order to work against this abjection, I develop and present a subversive strategy that calls for the performative repetition of what is abject to dominant discourses.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Catherine Krull. She has stayed with me through countless theoretical explorations (tangents), family concerns, and health issues. She consistently supported me in each of these areas and always looked out for my well-being. There is no doubt that I would not be at this point in my degree without her. I am grateful to Dr. Annette Burfoot who has been my second reader and now acts as co-supervisor. Her wisdom, kindness, and unique ability to hone in on the conceptually important material in my work have been tremendously valuable to me. I want to thank Dr. Lauren Snider for being a part of my committee until I took one of my analytical investigations in another direction. She has always been (since my undergraduate years) a scholar that I admire, look up to, set my own standards for achievement by, and a kind, approachable, welcoming individual. I am grateful for Dr. Vincent Sacco, who started me on this journey several years ago. From my undergraduate years, Dr. Sacco has been an inspiration and a valued mentor to me. I remain somewhat sad that I could not foster a stronger passion for his areas of interest nor could I coax him into my theoretical musings. Thank-you to Dr. Scott Morgensen for agreeing to be on (and remain on) my committee – his comments made in my proposal defense guided me through the writing of my dissertation. As well, I find his perspectives on cultivating responsible allied settler activism deeply influential. I very much appreciate Dr. Magda Lewis's close reading of my dissertation and detailed comments. Her guidance helped me grow as a writer. I want to thank Dr. Lynda Jessup, for agreeing to come onto my committee and for her supportive words. Her impressive scholarship has helped shape my thinking in important ways. I am thrilled that Dr. Carla

Taunton agreed to also be on my committee – her scholarship and activism are an inspiration to me.

I very much appreciate the entire Sociology Department for always being so wonderful, supportive, and welcoming. Dr. Robert Beamish has always been so kind to me. His passion for scholarship is contagious – I still think about my paper on Hegel and his comments. The contents of this dissertation make clear that what Dr. Richard Day taught me continues to have an important impact on my own academic and activist pursuits. He might be happy to know that I (usually) no longer hold back my thoughts in situations I find intimidating. Michelle and Wendy have always been so wonderful and accommodating to me. The entire department has given me a second home while I am in Kingston and I am grateful for the on-going supportive environment I find there.

I cannot express how valuable my Kingston community has been to me throughout these years. The social gatherings, the talks with the Feminist Discussion Group, the late-night theoretical debates, the in-depth conversations on the many car rides back and forth from Toronto, and the laughter got me through much more than this thesis. There are way too many wonderful Kingston and ex-pat individuals to mention here but the amazing activism, kind hearts, and intelligence of all of these people have set the bar high for my own life. Julie G., is the best peer editor I could ask for. I have no idea how she managed to deal with me but I am really, really happy she found a way. There are particular graduate students (past and present) that were (and are) repeatedly subjected to me in my stressed, tired, and theoretical states. They have listened, they have offered sound wisdom, they have danced with me, and they have stayed up way too late with me more times than they care to remember. Daniel,

Amanda, Lucia, Scott, Anne-Marie, Krystal, Paulina, Melissa, Dave, Dave M., Adam, Sylvia, Nick, and Andrew – you are all now stuck with me for the rest of your lives.

I also have tremendous support from my Toronto community. There is no doubt that I would not have made it through this degree without the constant encouragement of my mother. She has looked after her granddaughter more times than I can count, listened to numerous worry-filled ramblings, and provided tons of meals. She is a fiercely intelligent, strong woman and an amazing role model. My extended families – both blood-related and inherited – are outstanding. Each of them has always been so supportive to me during this process – listening to me, providing places for me to work, and offering to help out with my little one. The Davies and the Sobies are all amazing people who have patiently waited for the completion of my degree. Treena, Selina, Grace, Alena, Reza, Karin, Shanthi, Anthony, Dan, Dave, Ryan, Jenny, and Michelle, thank-you for being such wonderful, supportive, close friends and for always listening to my school-related endeavors. I am deeply grateful to my partner in life, Michael for being more supportive than I have paper to express. He has listened to endless analytical musings, he has let me explain Judith Butler's work to him more times than he would care to remember, and he has always been there when I needed him. I could not ask for a more loving and encouraging person to be my rock. Finally, I am deeply grateful for my wonderful daughter Ava. She is empathetic, smart, caring, and funny. She was and continues to be the inspiration for all of my work.

Statement of Originality

(Required only for Division IV Ph.D.)

I hereby certify that all of the work described within this thesis is the original work of the author.

Any published (or unpublished) ideas and/or techniques from the work of others are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices.

Julieanne C. James

(May, 2014)

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Statement of Originality	vi
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 The Framework of Subversion	5
1.2 The Discursive Threat to Autonomous Activism	9
1.3 The Silenced <i>Journey of the Nishyuu</i>	12
1.4 Dissertation Outline	18
Chapter 2 Lawn Keeping: Performativity and the Vulnerability of Dominant Discourses	21
2.1 The Vulnerability of Dominant Discourses	26
2.1.i Vulnerabilities in <i>Gender Trouble</i>	27
2.1.ii Vulnerabilities in <i>Bodies That Matter</i>	32
2.2 Discursive Vulnerability and Subversion	36
2.2.i Dominant Discursive Failure	36
2.2.ii Discursive Repetition	38
2.2.iii The Subject	40
2.3 Autonomy and Subverting Dominant Discourses	42
2.4 The Emerging Framework of Subversion	45
2.5 Analysis and Critique	46
Chapter 3 Weeding Through Abjection: The Subject and Dominant Discourses	50
3.1 The Subject and Dominant Discourses	54
3.2 Subversive Repetitions	68
Chapter 4 Cultivating Autonomous Gardens: Autonomous Activism and Subverting Dominant Discourses	75
4.1 The Threat of Autonomous Activism to Dominant Discourses	79
4.2 The Discursive Battle	89
4.3 Subversive Repetitions and Autonomous Activism	93
Chapter 5 Indigenous Roots: The <i>Idle No More Movement</i> and Autonomous Gardens	98
5.1 Autonomy and the <i>Idle No More Movement</i>	101
5.2 The Colonial Shape-Shifter	108
5.3 Subverting the Colonial Shape-Shifter	112

5.3.i The Journey of the Nishyuu - Troubling Abject Depictions.....	113
5.3.ii The Hunger Strike of Theresa Spence - Sustaining the Abject	115
5.3.iii Flash Mobs - Inter-connections.....	118
5.4 Conclusion - Subverting Silence.....	123
References	129

Chapter 1

Introduction

I am lucky enough to live in a house nestled on a large piece of land. In the back of our house is a long backyard, leading up to a tree-lined fence. We have a resident groundhog, a pear tree, and lots of grass. Cultivating the perfect green lawn is my partner Michael's goal in life. He spends hours and works tirelessly trying to make the backyard a perfectly uniform green haven. He rakes, cuts the grass, seeds, fertilizes, cleans up after the puppy, and weeds. He is intent on rooting out everything that is not grass on a regular basis. To Michael's horror, a few years ago, regulations were put in place to ban the pesticides that were used to control weeds – especially dandelions. As a result, dandelions became a problem. Ava, our nine-year-old daughter, was thrilled. She loves dandelions: She makes headbands, necklaces, bouquets, and even a special tea with them. She thinks they're beautiful; Michael thinks they are the bane of his existence. To counteract this flower "infestation" Michael went to the following lengths: He up-rooted about three hundred of them by hand, using a special long-stick tool that broke from over-use; he looked for a chemical-free way to subvert the yellow tide – boiling water, herbal mixes, and challenging Ava to see how many flower friends she can gather in an afternoon; he made a suspicious trip across the border; and, when somewhat defeated, he simply cut the lawn – all the time – to keep the dandelions trimmed low enough to look like grass. Ava

found Michael's assault on the dandelions exclusionary; she wondered why only grass is allowed to grow on the lawn.

Michael's plight is an apt metaphor for how I understand dominant discursive practices through Judith Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) and Julia Kristeva's (1982) work. In my reading of Butler and Kristeva I comprehend that, in order for dominant discourses to appear uniform and stable, a lot of work is necessary. Like Michael's lawn, these discourses need constant attention; dominant discourses have to be relentlessly repeated, similar to how grass needs to constantly be re-seeded and re-fertilized. Ideas and behaviours that are not part of dominant discourses, and which disrupt their appearance of continuity, require repression, similar to Michael's need to weed out all that is not grass. However, dominant discursive repression (and the grass on our lawn) is constantly being subverted. What is cast out – or abjected, to use Kristeva's term – may be only temporarily inhibited, only appear to be eradicated; these repressed entities are always present, just like the dandelion roots in the ground or the seeds in the air, and what is suppressed inevitably resurfaces, causing disruption (and a very frustrated Michael). It is my curiosity about how to be more subversive to dominant discourses that motivates me to investigate more deeply Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) and Kristeva's (1982) work.

I want to know how to subvert dominant discourses because I am an activist who is disheartened by the silencing of activism within mainstream society. I spent many years on the front line – organizing events, marching, and taking back the night. I also left the front line. It seemed to me that each time a

movement erupted and gained momentum, it was somewhat inevitably crushed by mainstream influences, leaving protestors a little beat up. Worse, I was never sure of the impact of the movement itself beyond the valuable connections between participants; the demands of my fellow protesters never seemed to be meaningfully met – oppression continued. So I am searching for another way. As a social worker, I try to operate within the social service system subversively by working against punitive interventions. As a white settler seeking to cultivate an ally practice that does not unwittingly reinforce oppressive colonial relationships, I am interested in the silencing of Indigenous activism within mainstream Canada and how to work against this type of repression. As a graduate student interested in critical social theory and resistance, I see promise in autonomous activism. Therefore, I am curious about how the subversive potential of autonomous activism might be strengthened.

To this end, my dissertation conducts a conceptual investigation into Judith Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) theory of performativity and Julia Kristeva's (1982) theorizing on the abject. From this inquiry I construct an analytical framework that offers ways of explaining the subversion of dominant discourses in the context of autonomous activism. The purpose of this theoretical exploration is to develop a framework for how activist practices can be both more subversive to and autonomous from dominant discourses. I apply my framework to the *Idle No More Movement* in order to explicate the subversive potential of autonomous activism for subverting dominant discourses and how this can be strengthened.

There are four interrelated reasons I undertake this conceptual investigation. First, my dissertation aims to address the silencing of activism within mainstream society. I am particularly concerned about the repression of First Nations' voices by the Canadian government and the national media. I am also interested in the large-scale apathy of the mainstream population regarding the oppression of First Nations' communities. For example, I want to know why there is not more allied support and outrage within Canadian society regarding the on-going human rights violations of First Nations' people. Second, my work aims to analyze and explain the operation of dominant discourses that continue to repress First Nations' organizing within mainstream Canada. That is, I want to understand how to subvert the discursive practices that oppress, that justify oppression, and that silence the oppressed. Third, I sense that if these discourses are not analyzed and challenged, they will continue to pose a threat, not just to First Nations organizing but, more generally, to all autonomous activism. Taken together, these three reasons highlight the urgency of scholarly interventions in current silences around autonomous activism.

My fourth reason for embarking on this analytical exploration is to tap into the subversive potential within Judith Butler's (1990/1999,1993) and Julia Kristeva's (1982) thinking. In order to deal with the three concerns outlined above, I first draw on the ideas of Judith Butler (1990/1999,1993) as found in her theory of performativity. Despite a wide consensus that her theory is predicated on politically subversive objectives, there is almost no critical academic work that deeply addresses Butler's subversive thinking (Chambers and Carver 2007). As

well, and related to this issue, Butler's subversive theorizing is criticized as being too abstract to be socially applicable (Chambers and Carver 2007; Jagger 2008; Lloyd 2007; McNay 1999). My conceptual investigation into Butler's theory helps to address this critique by clarifying her subversive thinking and rendering it useful for sociological enquiry. I do this primarily through two strategies. First, I address her work as dealing with the operation of dominant discourses – not all discourses. Second, I link her concepts with Kristeva's (1982) work thereby offering a pathway for social applicability. Linking Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) and Kristeva's (1982) concepts also provides insights into how to think about Kristeva's theorizing in relation to subversion. These efforts fill in a literary gap I see as important for realizing the dissident potential of Butler's and Kristeva's work.

1.1 The Framework of Subversion

I start my conceptual investigation with Butler's theory of performativity because I understand that Butler initiates her theory with political subversive goals in mind. I also believe that she focuses her analysis on dominant discourses. In the preface to her revised edition of *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990/1999), Butler talks about being motivated to develop her theory after witnessing violence based on identity and experiencing oppression as a lesbian. She explains that her specific goal is to construct a way of thinking that "render[s] abject lives, livable" (1999:iv). She then lays out her theory of performativity first in *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) and then with more

clarity in *Bodies That Matter* (1993). For my purposes, I hone in on how the theory of performativity offers an explanation of how dominant discourses operate to maintain normative identities through the exclusion of the abject.

More than just an explanation for the operation of dominant discourses, in my reading of Butler's theory, I find concepts aimed at subverting this operation throughout. I am not alone in this reading as several scholars agree that subversion is a central feature of Butler's work (ie. Chambers 2007; Chambers and Carver 2008; Deutcher 2005; Lloyd, 2007). The theory of performativity is also deeply influential – an extraordinary number of academics and activists engage with it: *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993) are cited thousands of times, hundreds of journal articles are written that use or critique the theory of performativity, research projects are shaped by her ideas, and multiple disciplines use her concepts (Chambers and Carver 2008; Lloyd 1999; Sedgwick 1993; Seidman 1996).

Despite Butler's subversive objectives and the massive influence of her (1990/1999) work, a critical and creative engagement with Butler's ideas on subversion is largely overlooked within academic literatures. For example, Penelope Deutcher (1997) highlights the importance of subversion in Butler's theory but does not critically explore the concept. Likewise, Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) discussions of acts and tactics such as parody and re-signification are explored to some degree by scholars such as Moya Lloyd (2007), and yet still no deep and critical review of subversion is offered. Chambers and Carver (2007, 2008) attempt to fill this gap by offering a

genealogical account of Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) engagement with the notion of subversion. Although, at the same time as they offer an important opening for thinking about relationships between subversion, resistance, and performativity, I don't think they go far enough. In particular, they note two areas that currently require development: Butler's insistence that subversion takes place within culture and her argument that the repetition of performative acts renders them vulnerable to disruption. As well, Chambers and Carver (2007) focus on the subversion of heteronormativity – I argue that Butler's ideas can be used to understand how to subvert other regimes of oppression as well.

Chambers and Carver (2007) argue, and I agree, that Butler does not offer an explicit theory of subversion that is immediately applicable to social contexts. As a result, conceptual work needs to be done in relation to performativity in order to use her subversive thinking for sociological analysis. I do two things to render Butler's subversive ideas useful for my purposes. In Chapter Two, I first overview Butler's work in order to provide an explicit account of her subversive concepts. The value of this particular task – apart from the objectives of the dissertation itself – is to help clarify Butler's subversive thinking from these formative works. As detailed above, a review of the academic literature indicates that this type of clarity appears to be very much lacking. Therefore, this overview, while building a framework useful for my purposes, also works to help fill in this literary gap.

Next, in Chapter Three, I link Butler's subversive concepts to Julia Kristeva's (1982) work on the abject. The abject is a consistent concept emerging

in relation to subversion in Butler's work. Kristeva defines the abject as a powerful subversive entity that needs to be excluded – but can never be excluded – in order for dominant discursive meaning to appear stable and coherent. The abject forms a constitutive 'outside' for dominant discourses and is, therefore, an important concept to grapple with when dealing with questions of autonomy and subversion. This comprehension leads me to see that a deeper understanding of the concept of the abject is useful for being able to subvert dominant discourses. In particular, Kristeva's (1982) theorizing helps to concretely identify and work with the subversive concepts in relation to dominant discourses that I find in Butler's (1990/1999,1993) work. Therefore, it is important to also draw on Kristeva's (1982) ideas regarding the abject in order to render Butler's thinking useful for understanding autonomous subversion. That is, while Samuel Chambers (2007) argues that we must understand Butler's implicit theory of hetero-normativity in order to comprehend her thinking on subversion, I believe that we must ascertain the subversive importance of the abject if we are to render Butler's ideas on subversion coherent and applicable to autonomous activism. Linking my reading of Butler's (1990/1999,1993) and Kristeva's(1982) work offers a way to concretely use both of their theorizing to build a framework of subversion that addresses how to use autonomous activism to subvert dominant discourses.

1.2 The Discursive Threat to Autonomous Activism

Realizing the dissident potential within Butler's and Kristeva's work in order to theorize how to strengthen autonomous activist practices is important as this type of activism is currently facing some significant challenges. Richard Day (2004, 2005) offers a way of understanding autonomous activism by detailing two divergent frameworks of social protest – a 'politics of demand' framework and a 'politics of the act' framework. Actions based on a 'politics of demand' request certain things from state structures, such as the demand for equal rights amongst the sexes or the appeal for political representation. In contrast, actions based on a 'politics of the act' seek to work outside the state and related structures – including but not limited to legal systems and dominant culture – so as to alleviate what is perceived as state-led oppression. Autonomous activists engage in the latter set of practices. They understand the state as inherently repressive and therefore seek to distance themselves from its structures.

Unfortunately, dominant discourses threaten the subversive potential of autonomous activism. A key challenge is that there appears to be little allied support within mainstream society. The messages of social injustice and oppression that autonomous activists convey appear to be largely silenced. As well, the argument that these communities should be able to exist free from outside erosive intervention seems to be, for the most part, disputed or dismissed by the mainstream public. As Jenny Pickerill (2010) points out, (and which I pick up on in Chapter Four) there are increased efforts from mainstream institutions to marginalize or work to eradicate autonomous communities. I argue, and unpack

further in my dissertation, that dominant discourses lead to justification and acceptance of these eradication efforts within dominant Western society. Therefore, understanding how to subvert dominant discourses is important in order to work against the silencing and erosion of autonomous activism within mainstream realms. As well, without practices that seek to disrupt dominant discourses in locations that are identified as autonomous zones, there is a risk that autonomy from mainstream society is not fully achieved but rather, in many ways, recreated in these communities. Strengthening practices that work to be more autonomous from – and subversive to – the operation of dominant discourses is the central goal of my dissertation. Therefore, in Chapter Four I apply the framework that I developed in Chapters Two and Three to autonomous activism in order to understand how to strengthen this activism's subversion.

In Chapter Five, I use the *Idle No More Movement* as an example my framework can be applied to since I understand this movement as being based on autonomous activist principals. The vision of this movement is three-pronged: to build sovereignty and restore nationhood to First Nations; to pressure the Canadian government to protect the environment; and to develop allies in order to reframe a nation-to-nation relationship (www.idlenomore.com). Building sovereignty and restoring nationhood involves revitalizing Indigenous knowledge, practices, and traditions autonomous from the Canadian state. As I will explain further in my dissertation, protection of the land is integral to Indigenous ways of being. Re-framing a nation-to-nation relationship means reinstating a Treaty relationship between First Nations' communities and the Canadian government.

A relationship built on Treaty principals does not recognize the authority of the Canadian government over First Nations' communities, or vice versa (www.idlenomore.com). A Treaty relationship understands that First Nations' communities and the Canadian settler-state are equal and separate but also residing on shared land. In this relationship, both are to respect the others' sovereignty. However, the Canadian government has repeatedly violated this Treaty relationship and the *Idle No More Movement* intends to hold the Canadian state to account and re-establish Treaty principals (www.idlenomore.com).

Revitalizing Indigenous ways of being is an autonomous practice that takes place outside of mainstream society and apart from the Canadian government. Re-establishing a Treaty relationship with the Canadian government can also be understood as an autonomous practice in the sense that the authority of the Canadian government is not recognized. The demands that are placed on the Canadian government by the *Idle No More Movement* can be considered as part of a 'politics of demand' framework. Although this consideration is complicated by the Treaty stance through which these demands are approached. I am focusing on the autonomous practices within the movement as I see them as having significant subversive potential. Strengthening this potential is important as autonomous-based activism by First Nations' communities is pervasively silenced within mainstream Canada.

1.3 The Silenced *Journey of the Nishiyuu*

The silencing of First Nations' organizing within Canada is exemplified by one of the events within the *Idle No More Movement*. On January 16th, 2013, 17-year-old David Kawapit, a Cree youth, woke up in Whapmagoostui, a First Nation community in northern Quebec. He got ready and set out to walk 1,600 kilometres south to Ottawa, Canada. Several weeks earlier, David had watched Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence launch a hunger strike in support of the *Idle No More Movement*. Upon reflecting on Spence's hunger strike, David had a vision of a pack of wolves taking down a bear. He interpreted his vision as representing the unity needed amongst First Nations' people – the wolves – in order to dismantle the oppression experienced at the hands of the Canadian government – the bear. Inspired by Spence and guided by his vision, young David decides to take action, explaining: "It really touched me to see how much she put herself through for her people, and I started thinking about how I [could] help", he said "I decided to go on a journey" (Watatey WRN, April 3, 2013; APTN, March 14th, 2013).

Joining David that morning are five more youth from his community: Stanley George Jr., Johnny Abraham, Raymond Kawapit, Geordie Rupert, and Travis George. David's uncle, Isaac Kawapit, 46 years old and affectionately called "the White Wizard," is the seventh trekker. He offers to guide the walkers through traditional Cree practices and teachings as they travel. For the most part, the participants barely know each other; however, they all feel a connection to David's vision. The trek comes to be called the 'Journey of the Nishiyuu' – a

complex Cree term that represents human beings, interconnectedness, and the oneness of time (<http://nishiyuujourney.ca>). Like Chief Spence, David dedicates the journey to the *Idle No More Movement*.

The 1,600 kilometre trek is about strengthening the *Idle No More* vision, especially in terms of building sovereignty and restoring nationhood by developing unity amongst First Nations people through revitalizing their traditional ways. The walk takes the trekkers through “traditional trade routes with the Algonquin, Mohawk, and other First Nations” (www.nishiyuujourney.ca). These routes bring David and his companions in direct contact with many First Nations communities along the way. In these stopovers, traditional teachings are shared, support is offered, and more trekkers join the journey. The walk that started as seven determined individuals swelled to a community of over two hundred people; as they trek, they connect over stories and shared experiences.

On March 25th, 2013, after over two and a half months of winter walking, the trekkers arrive in Ottawa. They meet with the fasting Chief Theresa Spence, then march to Parliament Hill where approximately five thousand supporters greet them. While the walk itself focuses on unity and the teachings of the ancestors, the entire Journey of the Nishiyuu is about the full vision of the *Idle No More Movement*, which includes re-instating a Treaty relationship with the Canadian government. It is with this stance that the trekkers greet the Canadian government. With the arrival of the trekkers in Ottawa, the time had come for the wolves to meet the bear.

Disappointingly, mainstream Canadian media largely ignored the trekkers and their underlying political agenda. As alternative media reporter, Catherine Atikson, notes: “There was little attention shown to these young people quietly walking through the forests. At the time of writing [two months into the trek], I can't find much in the mainstream national press, nothing in the *Globe and Mail* about it, nothing in the *National Post*, a couple of stories on *CBC North*, one story in the *Toronto Star* – but nothing for the whole country to see” (Rabble, March 18th, 2013). However, the trekkers' official website does reveal some media attention on the day the trekkers arrived in Ottawa and two follow-up stories on the release of a documentary of the journey.

Adding to the lack of mainstream media coverage is the almost complete refusal of the Canadian government to engage with these youth. Upon arrival in Ottawa, the weary yet triumphant trekkers seek out Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper in order to share their visions and to discuss what is important to First Nations youth. However, Harper, despite knowing about the journey for months, was not in Ottawa when the walkers arrived; he was greeting two pandas flown in from China at the Toronto International Airport (APTN 2013). In his absence, the trekkers met with Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Bernard Valcourt; the meeting lasted only twenty minutes during which time Valcourt agreed to continue to connect with First Nations youth about issues that impact them (APTN 2013). Nevertheless, no subsequent plans for the youth to meet with the Prime Minister are made, and no further meetings with governmental representatives are scheduled.

Harper's absence contributed to the silencing of the *Journey of the Nishiyuu* within mainstream Canadian society. The walk itself can be seen as a great success because First Nations communities came to build alliances, heal, and revitalize traditional ways of being. However, at the point of contact with the Canadian government and media, the walkers were largely ignored. As a result, this beautiful story, the knowledge it brings with it, and its political objectives were cast out, excluded, and marginalized from mainstream Canadian narratives.

It is at this point that my curiosity is piqued. I have questions. I wonder if there are ways to understand better why activism is so pervasively ignored, repressed, feared, and silenced within mainstream Canadian society. Why is it that the voices of activists, even obviously peaceful ones, need to be almost immediately silenced and eradicated quickly, swiftly, and effectively from mainstream awareness? What is so threatening about autonomous activism that it needs to be so immediately repressed – never engaged with or heard out? How does this silencing work and why is it so immediately successful? And, most importantly, how can we work against silencing?

One way I have come to think about these questions is to understand the silencing of activists within mainstream society as part of a discursive struggle. More specifically, I comprehend that a key part of the overall battle is about the viability, legitimacy, and dominance of certain discourses. When I refer to discourse, I am taking my definition of the term from Michel Foucault (1969), who characterizes discourse as various narratives that constitute 'knowledge' (such as the texts emanating from legal, scientific, literary, and cinematic disciplines)

together with social practices (such as speech, bodily movement, and behaviours) that form a variety of subjectivities that are both enacted socially and internalized psychically. In terms of how particular discourses come to be dominant, I derive my understanding from my reading of Judith Butler (1990/1999, 1993). Butler discusses the exclusionary practices of discourses that exclude or repress what is considered non-viable, rendering certain things – discourses – viable. In this I read Butler as explaining that while there is a wide array of narratives, knowledge structures, and social practices, the repetition of discourses that emanate from dominant social, legal, and political arenas renders these discourses viable and dominant at the exclusion of other discourses, rendering them non-dominant.

However, I argue that these non-dominant discourses do not necessarily operate through the acts of exclusion that dominant discourses work from; in fact, such a claim appears counter-intuitive. As I explain in greater detail in Chapter Two, I comprehend Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) theory as one that outlines the operation of dominant discourses and therefore, Butler's theorizing can only be viably applied to the operation of these discourses. In order to offer a distinction between the operations of dominant discourses and non-dominant discourses, throughout my dissertation I refer to non-dominant discourses as non-dominant ways of being. Included in the term 'ways of being' are the narratives, practices, social enactments, and psychological processes that make up the term discourse. However, I use a distinction here because the term discourse, as used in my work, refers to specific ways of operating as described through Foucault

(1969), Butler (1990/1999,1993), and Kristeva (1982). I want to make sure that it is clear that I do not conflate the operation of dominant discourses with non-dominant ways of being.

Taken from this perspective, the almost complete casting out of the story of the *Journey of the Nishiyuu* from mainstream Canadian society can be understood as a conflict between non-dominant ways of being and dominant discourses. It therefore makes sense why mainstream media and Canadian government officials largely ignored these walkers. First, the knowledge of the trekkers represents non-dominant ways of being that are often excluded from mainstream Canadian society and therefore are not easily recognized, understood, or accepted as viable and legitimate by dominant discourses. Second, acknowledgement of, engagement with, or attention to these non-dominant ways of being may challenge the dominance, coherence, and viability of current dominant discourses.

More than just silencing, I understand through Butler's thinking that there are important links between dominant discourses and oppression. This link pervasively rests on the privileging of differences within society that impacts multiple forms of social life (Krull 2011). For example, in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*, Butler (2009) argues that violence toward – and even death of – marginalized individuals is legitimized through dominant discourses that frame these lives as either threatening or already lost. Included in these types of discourses are the colonial narratives that assert that First Nations' ways of being need to be inevitably replaced by Western practices and therefore the only

options available for Indigenous people are to either assimilate or to face eradication (Mohawk 2002, Wiggin 1993). Currently, First Nations communities in Canada are dealing with several significant challenges that include but are not limited to extreme poverty, remote living conditions, erosion of inherent rights, human rights violations, removal from their land, and an increasing number of murdered and missing women (Alfred 2003, 2005, 2013; Lawrence 2003). For the most part, the mainstream Canadian public appears to be complicit with this situation. That is, the majority of people within dominant Canadian society seem to accept the conditions that First Nations people live with because there is no evident large-scale outrage from the general Canadian public. Drawing on Butler (2009), I understand that this type of acceptance occurs because of the pervasiveness of particular dominant discourses that not only blame First Nations individuals for their current situation but also justify oppression, violence, and death. Considering this powerful and dangerous narrative and the above-mentioned present conditions, challenging these discourses is quite an important part of a larger struggle.

1.4 Dissertation Outline

In order to draw on Butler's concepts to develop an analytical framework that provides insights into subversion and autonomous activism, I must first detail her dissident concepts. While there is much academic debate on Butler's ideas on agency and what acts she considers subversive, I understand that there is little work done that critically outlines and engages with her subversive thinking

(Chambers and Carver 2007). Therefore, my first task in Chapter Two, is to specify Butler's subversive ideas. I do this via a close reading of two of her works, *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993); these books are chosen because they outline her theory of performativity. I then group similar conceptual chains together in order to construct the foundations for my framework of subversion.

At this point in my project, however, I argue that Butler's ideas continue to be too abstract to be fully useful for my purposes. To deal with this issue and render Butler's thinking more socially applicable, in Chapter Three, I link her concepts with the work done by Julia Kristeva (1982) on the abject. What results is a framework of subversion according to which effective disruption of dominant discourses can be achieved through the performative repetition of that which is repressed: the abject and/or non-dominant ways of being. Kristeva's thinking assists with understanding the abject, and Butler's ideas produce ways of comprehending how to subversively repeat what has been repressed.

With this conceptual exploration mapped out, I am then able, in Chapter Four, to apply my framework of subversion to autonomous activism. Through this lens I understand that a key subversive feature of autonomous practices is their occupation and celebration of what dominant discourses repress. I consider the implications the framework has for understanding autonomous tactics both in relation to autonomous spaces and in interactions with mainstream culture. Through the perspective of the framework I am able to offer ideas on how to

strengthen the vital role that autonomous actions have in subverting dominant discourses.

After applying my framework to an analysis of autonomous practices, I then use these insights to offer an interpretation of the *Idle No More Movement* and the silencing of activism within mainstream society. In my concluding chapter, I present this movement as one that both challenges dominant discourses and is met with strong counter-resistance. Comprehending the movement from this perspective allows for an interpretation of various events that have occurred within the movement as a struggle over re-inserting into mainstream culture, that which has been repressed. I conclude with a discussion of the silencing of activism within dominant society and how this silencing can be subverted.

Chapter 2

Lawn Keeping: Performativity and the Vulnerability of Dominant Discourses

Watching Michael try and maintain a viable lawn makes me realize the amount of continual effort required to keep-out weeds – it seems as though lawns are quite vulnerable. He has to constantly nurture and re-plant grass, while also uprooting all that is not grass, in order for our yard to appear uniform. Butler's (1990/1999,1993) theorizing leads me to a similar realization regarding dominant discourses. She helps me understand that dominant discourses need to be continually repeated – while also repressing non-dominant ways of being – in order to appear stable, viable, coherent, and to maintain their dominance. Just like tending to a lawn, these requirements make dominant discourses persistently at risk for disruption (dandelions). I am therefore motivated to understand these vulnerabilities and how one might use them subversively – how might Michael's viable lawn become more difficult to maintain for example.

As just outlined in the introduction, my dissertation conducts a conceptual investigation into Judith Butler's (1990/1999,1993) theory of performativity and Julia Kristeva's (1982) work on abjection in order to construct an analytical framework of subversion. The purpose of my theoretical exploration is to yield insights into how to be both more autonomous from – and subversive to – the operation of dominant discourses. In this chapter, I initiate my conceptual investigation by focusing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity in order to

understand the vulnerabilities of dominant discourses. I first outline the concepts that I use for my framework as found in Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993). I concentrate on Butler's theory of performativity as I understand it to be aimed at subverting dominant discourses; I review the two above-mentioned books because they detail this theory. Once I specify the subversive concepts that I use, I group together like ideas that make up the foundations of my overall framework.

The performative social enactments that Butler addresses are discursive practices. As overviewed in the introduction, Foucault (1969) defines discourse as narratives and practices that constitute knowledge, forming various socially enacted and psychically internalized subjectivities. A central element in this definition is that discourses are generated through disciplinary fields of power – governmental, legal, and scientific institutions, for example – that work, through various technologies, to produce a range of subjectivities. Key aspects of psychically internalized subjectivities are what people come to think of as their identities. Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) theory of performativity seeks to understand this type of social power in the areas of normative gender, sex, sexuality, and conceptions of the human body. Butler addresses the operation of discourse differently than Foucault in that she hones in on how discourse produces normative identities and related ontology through repetitive performative enactments. Both theorists share the viewpoint that discourses produce the subjects they claim to reveal inner truths about and, in so doing, enact constraints on the human being; for example, discourses come to define what is

viable and non-viable. Viability circumscribes what is considered meaningful in relation to a topic as understood within mainstream societal contexts. For example, Butler asserts that an individual is not considered viably human without a recognized normative gender identity.

However, when discussing issues of viability in relation to Butler's work, it is important to consider the question of recognition. As I delve into Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), I find that she is describing the recognition of identities, ontology, social practices, and ways of being as viable within the specific context of dominant discourses as they operate within Western, colonial, mainstream society. That is, it is clear that Butler is addressing the operation of dominant discourses – not all discourses. I argue that this is the case based on three points. First, Butler (1990/1999, 1993) discusses how norms function in the performative achievement of normative gender, sex, sexuality, and the body. With her focus on norms and normative identities, she is choosing to address the operation of particular discourses – ones that are dominant within mainstream society. Second, Butler argues that the basis of this operation is a continual and repetitive practice of repression. That is, these norms and normative identities appear cogent through constant repetition of norms and repression of all that challenges, is antithetical to, or not congruent with the dominant discourses. This means that a wide variety of social practices, knowledge, and identities are repressed.

Finally, Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) theory is derived from Western thinkers – that include but are not limited to Michel Foucault, John Searle, Sigmund

Freud, Julia Kristeva, Monique Wittig, and Jacques Lacan – who themselves focus their analyses on Western society and related discourses. For example, scholars have pointed out that although Foucault does not make it continually explicit, he addresses the rise of Western, colonial institutions (Braidotti 1986, Stoler 1995). Therefore, the above-mentioned governmental, legal, and scientific institutions that Foucault studies are Western and colonial and the operation of power that Foucault explicates belongs to the knowledge, practices, and technologies of those institutions. Foucault's ideas regarding the operation of power cannot therefore be easily universalized to social practices that are outside of dominant institutions. Likewise, Butler's ideas in her theory of performativity, which draw on Foucault's theorizing, cannot be universally applied to all social practices, forms of knowledge, and identities.

I comprehend Butler's theory of performativity as only explicating the operations of dominant discourses and not all discourses. This limitation is particularly important for the framework I develop that outlines the subversive potential of autonomous activism for at least two reasons. First, this standpoint allows for an understanding that the operation of dominant discourses necessarily involves actions against a wide variety of social practices, knowledge, and identities. This operation appears to take place despite efforts of autonomous activists to maintain a distance from dominant discourses. In fact, a distancing from dominant discourses that focuses on physical or social location – instead of a discursive-based approach – may unwittingly reinforce dominant discourses through strengthening a constitutive outside for them. This possibility

of unwittingly reinforcing dominant discourses through attempts to remain distant from them implies that it's possible for practices within autonomous activism to be counter-productive. The second reason for grasping that the theory of performativity applies to the operation of dominant discourses is important for understanding autonomous activism is that such a perspective allows for the possibility that not all discourses operate through the discursive mechanisms that Butler (1990/1999, 1993) describes. This opens up room for seeing that discourses repressed by the operation of dominant discourses may involve expressions of internal realities. In this context, the subversive work for autonomous activism then becomes to leverage that which is repressed by dominant discourses in order to allow non-dominant ways of being opportunities to thrive.

To be clear: I understand that dominant discourses likely explicate, in some ways, internal realities and that non-dominant ways of being may operate, to some degree, in ways similar to the processes that Butler describes. However, I am making two specific points. First, I argue that we can only apply Butler's ideas and concepts to the operation of dominant discourses and not necessarily universalize her thinking for the reasons just stated. Second, my concern is with the exclusionary practices of dominant discourses that render certain knowledge, social practices, and identities viable within mainstream society by repressing other ways of being. Therefore, I explicitly address Butler's work as one that deals with the operation of Western colonial dominant discourses, and I make this standpoint continuously explicit throughout my dissertation by adding the

term “dominant” whenever I discuss her ideas in relation to the operation of discourses. The addition of the term dominant in relation to my discussions of Butler’s and Kristeva’s work is my specification and does not belong to these authors.

Butler does not present a theory of subversion in either *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) or *Bodies That Matter* (1993). Samuel Chambers explains: “Butler puts forward no theory of subversion . . . and she provides little (if any) explicit conceptualisation of the term; nor does she define it” (2007: 658).

Despite, the absence of an explicit theory of subversion, I consider Butler’s work valuable for understanding how to be both more autonomous from and subversive to dominant discourses for three reasons. First, in the two books reviewed here, Butler details the operation of dominant discourses and, in so doing, she also reveals the vulnerabilities therein; second, she offers some ideas regarding subversive tactics in relation to the vulnerabilities she describes; finally, she offers a valuable discussion of the idea that subversion can take place from a position that is outside or autonomous from dominant discourses. While these are not Butler’s explicit objectives in forming her theory, these are the ways I am using her work in order to construct my framework.

2.1 The Vulnerabilities of Dominant Discourses

Judith Butler first presents her theory of performativity in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990/1999) and then builds on her theory in *Bodies That Matter* (1993). Butler’s theory posits that normative gender

is a discursive performative achievement that appears coherent and stable as a result of repetitive social enactments. Importantly, certain normative expressions of gender are expected and considered viable (grass), while others are repressed and considered non-viable (dandelions). Throughout *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler starts to apply her theory of performativity to the categories of sex, sexuality, and the human body.

2.1.i Vulnerabilities in *Gender Trouble*

In order to argue her theoretical claims, Butler attacks the authority and validity of dominant discourses in the context of normative identity; in so doing, she exposes how these discourses operate and vulnerabilities within this operation. Vitaly, Butler's theoretical assault on dominant discourses reveals that the dominance of these discourses is achieved through practices of repression, not legitimacy; claims about the need to expose and be critical of repressive ontology are recurring in *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990/1999). In fact, Butler begins her book with an assertion about the need to deconstruct the category of women as a suitable subject for feminist political objectives. In this regard, Butler advises that uncritical use of the stable category of women perpetuates tautological political ends that rely on problematic assumptions about a shared and static reality (1990: 2). Butler explains that the declaration of a stable category of women reproduces domains of exclusion - for example, that which is not 'womanly' - thereby pointing to the coercive and regulatory implications of that categorization (1999: 3). She therefore initiates her work by disputing the

notion of a cohesive identity category of women that is enacted through exclusion. While, in this part of her discussion, Butler specifically addresses the classification of women, she then applies the same ideas to further normative ontological categories.

Butler (1990/1999) continues her argument regarding the discursive imposition of exclusionary identity categories by reviewing philosophical works. To this end, she conducts a critical genealogy of selected philosophical texts by scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969), Michel Foucault (1978), Luce Irigaray (1985), Julia Kristeva (1982), Monique Wittig (1978), Simone De Beauvoir (1951), and Sigmund Freud (1905). A central goal of this exercise is to reveal the exclusionary elements implicated in discursive claims made about the ontological coherence of the gendered human subject. This genealogical reading centrally consists of using the above-noted philosophers' works to call into question the presumed internal coherence of normative binary identity categories, for example, male/female, and to expose the dominant discursive expectation that sex, gender, and desire map onto one another in limited and obvious ways: that is, the expectation that male sex leads to male gender and a desire for women, and female sex leads to female gender and a desire for men. Butler's main position in this regard is that this presumed order is not an inherently natural state of being but rather is represented as such by dominant discourses that work to consolidate certain forms of social power over others. It is in this way that certain identities and related expressions are produced as viable

while other, non-dominant ways of being are cast as non-viable within mainstream contexts.

In keeping with this line of argumentation, Butler (1990/1999) holds that normative gender and sex are categories discursively produced as natural 'facts' by various mainstream scientific discourses. She further argues that normative gender and sex categorizations often are put to use in the service of political and social interests; for example, supporting binary genders normatively performed that continually reinforce male privilege. From this perspective, she writes: "Gender as a multiple interpretation of sex is an externally imposed cultural construction" (1999:9) and "Sex by definition will be shown to have been gender all along"(1999: 11). Therefore, not only is the category of women seen as problematic, but also Butler opens up her argument to include the normalized identities and related discourses involved in gender, sex, and sexuality.

Given that the dominant discursive production of normative identity involves continual repression of what is cast as 'non-viable', Butler points out that these identities are impossible to consistently embody. Even the appearance of this type of personification, according to Butler, cannot be smoothly maintained. In this regard consider the following insights offered by Butler, "Heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality as a compulsory and inevitable comedy – a constant parody of itself"(1999: 167). While in this statement Butler is pointing out the discursive nature of normative sexual positions, she also explains that they are

inevitably open to failure. Building on this idea, consider Butler's statement (1999: 56) that "attempts to conceal the repressed produced by the symbolic is both its grounding and the perpetual possibility of its un-grounding." What I take away from Butler's theorization is that what has been repressed can be used to subvert – un-ground - dominant discourses.

In order to further explain how dominant discourses operate to render the appearance of normative identities as stable and coherent, Butler (1990/1999) outlines her theory of performativity. More specifically, Butler's theory of performativity is premised on the claim that "gender is always a doing . . . there is no 'being' behind the doing, effecting, becoming, the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed. The deed is everything"(1999: 31). Again, following this logic, Butler asserts: "There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender . . . identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results"(1999: 31). In other words, she states that: "gender is the repeated stylization of the body; [it is a] set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, a natural sort of being"(1999: 45). Following this explanation, Butler (1990/1999) situates normative identity categories – for example, gender, sex, and sexuality – as discursively repeated practices that are performed externally within social arenas. This aspect of repetition is central to Butler's work, and she makes the importance of repetition for a performative identity achievement clear by stating that (emphasis added) "the act of gender *requires* a performance that is repeated"(1999: 192). She continues: "There are temporal and collective

dimensions to these actions, and their public character is not inconsequential . . . gender [is] an identity tenuously constituted in time [and] instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (1999: 192).

It is important to note that this performatively constituted gender is a normative one that is produced by dominant discourses. Therefore, the repressive and repetitive elements described by Butler are in relation to these discourses that require these features and continuous repetitions in order to appear viable. There are two points that I want to make explicit from this understanding. First, the discursive tricks that Butler (1990/1999) describes belong to the operation of dominant discourses – she is not addressing non-dominant ways of being repressed by dominant discourses. Second, Butler (1990/1999) applies these lines of thinking to normative identity categories beyond gender, hinting that this is a predominant feature of how dominant discourses operate more generally. As I will show later, this is particularly relevant in areas of normative ontology where binaries and/or rigid boundaries are asserted.

To summarize the points so far, in *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999), Butler offers an account of how dominant discourses work to produce normative identities. Dominant discourses are argued to operate through repression and not through expressions of internal realities. Due to the inevitable return of what has been repressed, normative identities are impossible to consistently embody or appear to personify – and therefore are bound to fail. Finally, Butler asserts her theory of performativity in which repetition of performative acts works to render

normative identities with the appearance of stability. All in all, dominant discourses come to be understood to operate through various illusions that render them vulnerable to subversion.

2.1.ii Vulnerabilities in *Bodies That Matter*

In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler further develops an understanding of the vulnerabilities of dominant discourses. In this book, Butler attempts to offer a more coherent theory of performativity by seeking to rectify some misconceptions and by addressing the question of materiality. She also continues to explore the concepts found in *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) regarding the vulnerable operation of dominant discourses. In particular Butler addresses that a particular type of repetition is important – a citational one, and that the key entity that is continually repressed by dominant discourses is the abject.

An important development in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) is the claim that performativity is a citational and reiterated practice: “Performativity as citationality... performativity, a reiteration, present-like status conceals this repetition, apparent theatricity, concedes its historicity. Citation is a repeated citation, a recognized norm. This practice remains unmarked”(1993: 12). Here, Butler details a particular type of repetition as vital; this is a type of repetitive performance that has a concealed normative history. In particular, Butler links citationality to various aspects of dominant discursive identity formation, including those discussed earlier in this chapter related to gender, sex, and sexual desire. In this regard, consider Butler’s assertion that “performativity is a reiterative and

citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (1993: 2). It is in this context that Butler revisits the importance of repetition as a key feature of performativity.

Furthermore, Butler contends that the practice of citationality is “ground[ed]...[in an] authority [that] is constituted as a perpetual deferral”(1993: 107). In this, I understand Butler to be claiming that this authority is legitimized through a referral and is misperceived as if the actual authority is present. In these arguments, authority is a myth that is grounded in constant references to the past. This past reference assumes that authority was legitimized at that time; however, even in those moments, a reference to a past is made. Hence, a constant deferral and appearance of authority is produced by dominant discourses.

However, the authority of citational norms is continual threatened by the abject. In *Gender Trouble* Butler (1990/1999) only hints at the subversive possibilities in the return of what has been repressed. However, the subversive potential of the abject is more focused on in *Bodies That Matter* where Butler asserts that the “spectre of abjection” is best conceptualized as “a violent exclusion, the haunting border of hegemonic normative constructions, and the persistent possibility of disruption” (1993: 101). Therefore, what Butler suggests needs to be repressed through the exclusionary practices of dominant discourses is the abject, which she describes as having powerful subversive potential.

The concept of the abject not only adds clarity regarding what requires repression but also assists in comprehensions of when this repression has failed.

For example, an important concept in Butler's (1993) *Bodies That Matter* is constraint. The main position Butler puts forth regarding constraint is that one must challenge understandings of constraint as a naturalized construction (1993: 94). Specifically, she represents constraint as the very condition of performativity; performativity for Butler cannot be "understood outside of iterability, a regularized and constrained set of norms" (1993: 95). Butler directs readers to understand the ways in which constraints highlight the limits of normative discourses; that is to say, that a subject must enact particular norms – for example, normative gender performances – in order to appear viable. However, here Butler challenges us to understand these constraints as not reflective of particular truths but rather only as that which distinguishes 'viable' from 'non-viable'. Again, this 'viable/non-viable' constraint, for Butler (1990/1999, 1993), does not rest on legitimized claims but rather an enactment of particular forces of social power.

Importantly, Butler then conceives of the idea that these constraints can be transgressed and transgression is continually threatened by what requires repression. That is, she conceives of the notion that the abject, which is cast as 'non-viable' by dominant discourses, is not merely continually repressed but also potentially disruptive. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler discusses ways in which particular conceptions of the body are repressed from viability within dominant discourses. It is in this context that Butler (1993) re-engages her earlier discussion of the role of exclusion in the production of subjects. Butler (1993) asks: "What is excluded from the body for the body's boundary to form? And how does that exclusion haunt that boundary as an internal ghost of sorts?" (1993:

65). This haunting feature, the one that requires repression by dominant discourses, that constitutes the boundaries of dominant meaning, and can threaten the coherence and viability of this meaning, is as described previously by Butler, the abject. From this perspective, the return of the abject, in relation to both normative identities and dominant conceptions of the human body indicates a subversive moment, a breaking of constraint. Butler describes this breaking of constraint by the abject in threatening terms, indicating that it can do some subversive harm and not easily be continually repressed.

As the above review indicates, in *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999), Butler explains that dominant discourses operate through acts of repetition and repression. For example, in order to project coherence and stability of normative identity categories, norms are continually repeated while anything that would disrupt normative meaning is constantly repressed. Adding onto these ideas, in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler argues that it is not just the normative categories of identity that are discursively produced in this way, but also, dominant understandings of the human body. Importantly, in this latter book, Butler discusses with more frequency the abject and its subversive potential. Specifically, she illustrates that the return of the abject can mark a transgression of discursive constraint that disturbs normalized meaning. All of this leads to an understanding that because dominant discourses operate through repression and not through legitimacy, they continually and inevitably fail. These failures can be observed through the return of what has been repressed. Directly below, I

discuss the subversive possibilities in relation to the repressive processes involved in the operation of dominant discourses.

2.2 Discursive Vulnerability and Subversion

Having mapped out the various vulnerabilities in the operation of dominant discourses found in Butler's (1990/1999,1993) work, I consider how to use these vulnerabilities subversively. I start this consideration by specifying Butler's ideas on possible tactics of subversion in relation to broad areas of vulnerability: failure, repetition, and the abject. I then extrapolate on her ideas and suggest areas in need of further conceptual exploration and clarity.

2.2.i Dominant Discursive Failures

Through my reading of Butler (1990/1999,1993) I understand that both normative identities and configurations of the human body are bound to fail due to the return of what has been repressed. Repressive practices and performativity of norms indicate that normative identities are based on a fiction. Butler discusses the notion that perhaps this fiction can be used against itself. She (1990/1999: 42) suggests that "[i]f identities can be exposed as phantasmatic, then it must be possible to enact an identification that exposes [their] phantasmatic nature." Butler develops this line of thinking by posing questions about how this phantasmatic feature may be used subversively. Here, Butler seeks to understand various ways that the fictional nature of normative identification can be exposed. A useful example of this type of subversion is

Butler's famous drag illustration that highlights the performative nature of gender by having a presumed male-sexed body perform a female gender or vice versa.

One way that Butler discusses subversion in relation to the practices of dominant discursive repression is to call for acts that expose these processes. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler asserts that, "[a] political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct [both] the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts . . . and [the] forces that police those acts" (1990/1999: 52). Such a genealogy, in other words, highlights the constitutive processes involved in normative identity categories. Moreover, it exposes the extent to which "[t]he subject is intelligible only through its appearance as gendered . . . [and] omits possibilities that have been forcibly foreclosed by the various reifications of gender that have constituted its contingent ontologies" (52). In other words, genealogical research is offered by Butler as a key analytic tool to be used in efforts to call attention to and challenge the violence enacted by repressive normative knowledge claims. More to the point, the main aim of such genealogical work is to uncover the social forces that shape dominant discourses. In fact, I interpret Butler's work in *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) as one that offers such a genealogical account, which seeks to expose the repressive practices of dominant discourses. Therefore, similar academic work can be understood as a subversive tactic from this perspective.

While these lines of thinking offer starting points regarding subversion and dominant discourses, it still remains somewhat unclear how one might go about this subversive action. That is, notwithstanding the importance of this type of

academic work that Butler describes and does, it still remains elusive how Butler's ideas can be used subversively. For example, it is hard to imagine how one might expose the fictional aspects of identity beyond genealogical research and this type of work is not necessarily easily accessible to a wide population. Therefore, I wonder if it is valuable to consider what other tasks might be helpful that can also be taken up more pervasively. Specifically, I am curious if there are further strategies that can take advantage of the inevitable failures of dominant discourses. To this end, and as will be explicated in further detail below, the abject can help. For example, in cases where normative identity and notions about the human body fail, it is likely that what is being exposed or is surfacing is the abject.

2.2.ii Discursive Repetition

Butler (1990/1999, 1993) claims that it is necessary to repeat dominant discourses in order to establish seemingly coherent identities. The need for repetition provides further insights into how to observe dominant discursive failure. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler explains that, "repetition is necessary . . . [and this] indicates that the process [of identity formation] is never quite complete . . . [and that] bodies don't often comply somehow" (9). In this sense, Butler links the notion of repetition to a continual failure of imposed and impossible normative subjectivities, and she emphasizes that this process of repetition exposes weaknesses in the operation of dominant discourses.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990/1999) argues that the necessity to repeat opens dominant discourses up for failure. Here, she asserts that “rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within terms of power itself offers the possibility of a [dominant discursive] repetition . . . which is not its consolidation, but its displacement” (Butler 1999: 41) and she asks: “What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?” (1999: 44). An important point to be noted here is that at the same time as repetition is taken to form the basis of an “appearance of a substance” (1999: 195), Butler also understands the requirement of performative identity reiterations as something which renders assumed stable identity categorizations vulnerable to subversion; that is, because repetition is necessary for coherence in this regard, disrupting repetition emerges as another subversive tactic. Through the force of repetition, Butler explains, an effect of a stable identity appears, but within this process “gaps or fissures that escape or exceed the norm” emerge to be taken up in subversive ways (1993: 124). That is, within the process of repetition, repetitions that do not comply with the norm inevitably occur and are offered by Butler as a possible site for subversion.

In terms of working subversively with repetition I read Butler as suggesting that recognition of the practice of repetition is important. Specifically, I comprehend such recognition to include seeing the repetition, exposing it, and working with it in subversive ways. From this perspective, the exposure of incoherence is a possible avenue for seeing and disrupting the repetitive process. However, how this is all to be done remains unclear to me. Moreover, I

am wondering if there are more concrete ways of thinking about repetition and subversion. For example, can there be repetitions that are subversive, and if so, what might they contain? In relation to this, I suggest that it is important to take a closer look at what is repressed by these repetitions and how what is repressed can be used subversively.

2.2.iii The Object

Butler argues that the object is a haunting entity with the potential to disrupt dominant discourses. This idea is congruent with Kristeva's (1982) work in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, where she argues that in order for dominant discourses to maintain the appearance of coherence and stability, a process of abjection takes place, whereby the object which is by definition what disturbs normative meaning, is cast out. Like Kristeva, Butler asserts that while continual efforts are made to exclude particular entities from dominant discourses in order to make these discourses appear cogent, the object can never be removed entirely because the object is the necessary 'exterior' to dominant discourses.

Developing this concept in the context of gender identity categorizations and the body, Butler (1990/1999, 1993) refers to the object as being a haunting, subversive feature that threatens the borders, boundaries, and stability of dominant discourses. Importantly, it becomes apparent through the above reading of Butler (1990/1999, 1993) that in the operation of dominant discourses, what these discourses need to repress is the object. Therefore, when the object

does emerge within these discourses, it has failed to be repressed and the constraints enacted by dominant discourses have been transgressed

I understand that within these transgressions, important subversive potential exists. First, in relation to the above discussion of dominant discursive failure, repression, and repetition the notion of the abject allows for an understanding that what is necessarily 'excluded' is the abject. Further, the idea that the abject is an entity that needs to continually be repressed means that it returns and marks a failure of the operation of dominant discourses, essentially a transgression of the constraints that Butler discusses. Therefore, consistent and coherent embodiment or personification of norms will inevitably fail because of this returned abject. This means whenever the abject is recognized, dominant discursive failure is simultaneously observed. Importantly, this recognition reveals the practices at work that seek to deal with this failure to enact another repression of the abject. Second, in relation to the idea of dominant discursive repetition, what is necessarily targeted and continually repressed during performative repetitions is the abject. In relation to this, it is interesting to consider what might happen if the abject was sought for repetition.

In summary, the purpose of the discussion laid out in this section of this chapter is to bring together a number of Butler's key claims regarding subversion. Specifically, I have grouped the conceptual themes reviewed in this chapter under three categories: discursive failure, repetition, and the abject. These categories not only describe vulnerabilities within the operation of dominant discourses, but also can be understood as foundational aspects of my framework

of subversion. The main subversive theme that emerges when these categories are brought together is the idea that dominant discourses constantly fail, and these failures include, but are not limited to the failure to repress the abject. Therefore, I understand sustaining the abject to be a key subversive tactic.

2.3 Autonomy and Subverting Dominant Discourses

More than detailing the vulnerability of dominant discourses and offering some insight into subversive action in relation to this vulnerability, Butler also offers an interpretation regarding the notion of situating subversion in a space outside or autonomous from dominant discourses. In *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999), Butler critiques what is thought to constitute this outside through a conversation about pre-discursive claims; that is, what is considered prior to discourse. Butler centrally argues that what is often asserted as pre-discursive is actually discursive and part of a dominant discursive trick.

To outline her argument, Butler criticizes a number of claims about a pre-discursive subject position. For example, she strongly critiques what she takes to be Kristeva's (1982) essentialist notions regarding the maternal body and her placement of disruption within the semiotic. Likewise, Butler (1990/1999) openly disagrees with Freud's (1905) assertions regarding pre-discursive sexual dispositions. For Butler (1990/1999), these particular claims about what constitutes the pre-discursive are actually fictions produced and reproduced by dominant discursive practices. Specifically, she argues against the validity of such assertions about a pre-discursive realm by suggesting that rather than

offering 'truths', they reveal key features of dominant power: for example, societal prohibitions and taboos.

To cement her assertions in this regard, she returns to Foucault's (1978) repression hypothesis. Butler (1990/1999) maintains that discursive practices create the experience known as repressed desire. In the context of the present discussion, Butler argues that theoretical claims regarding what is considered prior to discourse or pre-discursive are generative. For example, when Freud (1905) describes sexual dispositions that are outside of dominant discourses, he is not describing what is prior to these discourses but rather he is generating these narratives. Butler further argues that an assertion of a pre-discursive claim is a concealing tactic that allows the pre-discursive to gain perpetual legitimacy (1999: 126). That is, the pre-discursive is then comprehended as that which is original, prior to culture and discourse, and therefore hard to challenge.

This leads to questions about what makes up the outside or autonomy from dominant discourses. Recall that I initiate this chapter with the assertion that Butler does not address the operation of all discourses in her work, but rather dominant discourses. Also, I understand that dominant discourses repress a wide variety of knowledge, social practices, and identities. As a result, these repressed entities can be understood to make up the 'outside' to dominant discourses. That is to say, this notion of a concern about situating subversion in the realm of the pre-discursive is one that comes about only in the consideration that Butler (1990/1999, 1993) is describing the operation of all discourses. Shifting the focus to the operation of dominant discourses allows for an awareness that there is an

'outside' to these discourses – that is, all those ways of knowing and being that are not dominant.

While there are many things repressed through the operation of dominant discourses, the above discussion highlights that there are certain things that dominant discourses need to repress in order to appear coherent and stable. These entities are characterized as the abject. This leads to the awareness that there are perhaps two types of elements that are repressed by dominant discourses. The first type includes things that are repressed but are not necessarily considered abject by Kristeva's (1982) definition. For example, if Michael were to allow some plants within the lawn space, these might not be considered threatening to his viable lawn. Although, he would likely not let them roam free about his lawn; he would probably contain them within a designated area. Another example is within a normative masculine performance, a man may be able to cry occasionally, but this is controlled, as crying often might be considered non-viably masculine. The second type involves the abject – what needs to be eradicated as it threatens dominant discourses directly. This may involve such things as dandelions or a man swishing his hips as he walks – both may be sought for complete elimination. Although repressions that do not involve the abject can be subversive, as indicated up to this point, my focus in this dissertation is on the abject as a disruptive force.

Elements that are repressed by dominant discourses but are not aligned with the abject can also potentially be engaged with by dominant discourses, as they do not necessarily pose a threat to normalized meaning. Conversely, those

elements aligned with the abject make up the constitutive 'outside' to dominant discourses and therefore are, in a way, connected to these discourses. They are, at the very least, a focus of concern for dominant discourses – sacred in important ways. However, it is also in this way that entities aligned with the abject consist of what dominant discourses cannot engage with as such an engagement would lead to erosion. So, in this sense, what is aligned with the abject represents a certain type of autonomy in that dominant discourses will continually try to cast it off and not engage with it.

2.4 The Emerging Framework of Subversion

At this point, I can start to develop some insights in relation to my main dissertation query: How can autonomous activist tactics be comprehended in ways that are more effectively autonomous from - while also being more pervasively subversive to - dominant discourses? From the discussions above, I have put forth a description of what is involved in subverting dominant discourses and what constitutes autonomous actions in this context. Regarding subverting dominant discourses, a framework of subversion is emerging that understands that dominant discourses are constantly and inevitably failing. These failures are due to the vulnerable operation of these discourses where the appearance of their dominance, coherence, and stability is achieved through performative repetitions that repress a variety of entities. Vitality, this repression involves the abject and one way that these failures can be recognized is through the return of

the abject. Therefore, the subversive task is to sustain the abject and work against its repression.

With respect to autonomy, the above discussion asserts that the autonomy being sought here is from dominant discourses – or more specifically, from the dominant and exclusionary features of these discourses. It is comprehended through Butler (1990/1999) that certain claims about pre-discursive identities, actions, and ways of being do not constitute this type of autonomy. Conversely, repressed discourses that fall outside of these definitions are understood to make up autonomy in this context. I understand the abject to represent an important type of subversive autonomy. This is because dominant discourses cannot engage with the abject in ways other than repression, as so doing, necessitates the erosion of their own dominance. This type of erosion is what I am seeking in developing my framework – working towards a situation of non-dominance where a multitude of discourses, ways of knowing and being, can exist without a relative silencing or marginalization of one over the other.

2.5 Analysis and Critique

As I have presented it, the above review of Butler's (1990/1999,1993) works extract subversive ideas and then connect congruent concepts to build a conceptual framework that can be further developed in order to apply it to current social phenomena. In this section, I begin to do this work by making more explicit claims about the interesting insights this discussion offers regarding subversion. I

also highlight some of the omissions that remain in terms of how to embark, concretely, on this type of work.

My review of Butler's (1990/1999,1993) work is a useful venue from which to develop an analytic framework of subversion. More specifically, I understand that, when pulled out and grouped together, the analytical chains related to subversion that are herein drawn from Butler's works not only offer some logical lines of thinking regarding subversion, but also imply a variety of tactics to that end. The main theme within these strategies is that the return of what dominant discourses repress can lead to subversion.

With respect to omissions, how to recognize and work with what is repressed is not given enough attention within Butler's work. Even after a careful extraction of her subversive notions, a re-grouping of repeating ideas, and a logical extension of her thinking, it remains difficult to make concrete claims about the specifics of subversive practices. In other words, even where Butler makes overt reference to such tactics, her logic tends to remain at a fairly high level of abstraction. For example, how dominant discursive failures might be exposed remains elusive; how to execute subversive repetition is not clear.

In order to assist with this continued conceptual haziness, I suggest that it is helpful to turn to a more engaged exploration of the abject and of processes of abjection. This is because Butler suggests that a continual re-emergence of the abject in dominant discourses is potentially disruptive. Following this reading, I understand there to be important connections between the notion of the abject and ideas of subversion extrapolated from Butler's theory of performativity.

Specifically, following from the above discussions, I see three connections that form the foundation for the framework of subversion I develop in this dissertation. First, I understand the abject to be that which marks the border of constraint in dominant discourses because, following both Butler (1990/1999, 1993) and Kristeva (1982), the abject is that which is necessarily excluded in order for dominant meaning to appear stable and logical. Second, as I read these scholars, abjection is a key regulatory practice that Butler (1990/1999, 1993) outlines. When Butler talks about the coercion placed on ontology, the subject, and identity, I read her as explaining a process of forced exclusion, a repression whereby entities are banned from dominant discourses: abjection. As will be further explored in Chapters Three and Four, working against this exclusionary practice of abjection erodes the dominance of normative discourses leading towards the ideal of non-dominance.

Finally, I understand Butler's claims about the inevitable resurfacing of the abject as central to thinking on subversion. More precisely, I believe that re-emergence of the abject in dominant discourses marks the very failures Butler discusses. From this reading, recognizing and manipulating the abject has important subversive potential that might assist with understanding the subversive processes offered by Butler's work. For example, if the abject can be seen surfacing in moments of linguistic repetition or gender expressions, then we might be able to help maintain the abject longer, offering more dissident potential.

It is important to note here that it is I who understands the concepts of the abject and abjection as important for making Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) ideas on subversion more complete. In other words, while I read these linkages into Butler's texts, Butler does not make them explicit; for example, while she references the abject, she does not offer a detailed account of the abject or abjection. Moreover, the insights she does offer can be seen, as already argued, as limiting. Specifically, I am concerned that there are several areas regarding Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) use of the abject that require further development. For example, it is unclear to me if Butler understands the abject as knowable and controllable. Further, Butler does not specify in any detail how the abject emerges, how it is to be recognized, the possible impact of this emergence, or ways one might manipulate the abject. Therefore, in the next chapter, I engage Kristeva's (1980) *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* in order to think more concretely about intersections between the abject and subversion.

Chapter 3

Weeding Through Abjection: The Abject and Dominant Discourses

Before our house existed, the land where our house rests supported a thriving eco-system. To build the infrastructure that our home requires, much of this green space was torn up. However, what was removed was not fully eradicated, and these things continue to haunt Michael's viable lawn: plant material resides in the soil, breaking through every so often; seeds of various plants are blown into our yard, taking root; and small animals tear up the grass and eat from the pear tree – a groundhog can often be found high in the branches happily munching away. While Michael works to maintain the norm of a decent lawn, what he has to repress in the process constantly threatens the norm he works to maintain. His continual attempts at repression are not enough to keep these threatening entities permanently at bay. In this Chapter, I examine the subversive potential of what is repressed in order for norms to appear viable: the abject.

In the previous chapter, I reviewed two of Butler's formative books: *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993) to assemble a framework of subversion, according to which dominant discourses achieve their dominance through continually repressing anything which threatens their supposed viability and authority. Therefore, dominant discourses are vulnerable to failures through the inevitable return of what has been repressed: the abject. However, as I outlined in the conclusion of the previous chapter, despite Butler's referral to the abject as a haunting subversive feature, she

(1990/1999,1993) does not explicate her understanding of what constitutes the abject. Without such an exploration both my emerging framework for subversion and the subversive ideas in Butler's theory of performativity remain vague and hard to apply to contemporary social situations. In other words, if I read Butler's texts, without contextualizing the abject and related processes, it would be difficult to imagine how to observe and work subversively with dominant discursive failure. It is precisely this work of contextualization that I take up in this chapter.

There are three things missing from Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) theorizing in relation to the abject that are important for my framework of subversion. First, Butler does not explain how one is to recognize when the abject is present – when this disruption of dominant discourses occurs. Recognizing subversive moments is important if the goal is to work to sustain them. Second, through Butler's work I understand only one way that the abject is repressed by dominant discourses – by the repetition of norms. The repression of the abject, known as abjection, involves many more processes. Knowing these processes and how pervasive they are is important if one is looking to work against them. Third, Butler does not define what is abject to dominant discourses. That is, Butler does not explicate what entities necessarily disrupt normative meaning. Therefore, it is difficult to understand what constitutes a subversive entity and also what is autonomous from the operation of dominant discourses. Without knowing how to recognize when the abject is present, the related processes of abjection, and

what is abject to dominant discourses, a framework of subversion remains incomplete, limited, and hard to concretely apply.

I address these omissions in this chapter in order to develop a more cogent, complete, and socially applicable framework of subversion than the one that can be extrapolated from Butler's ideas alone. In order to fill in needed theorizing in relation to the abject, I turn to Julia Kristeva's (1982) book, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. I read Kristeva's (1982) work as an important complement to the subversive concepts within Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) theory of performativity. In particular, I suggest that because Kristeva offers concrete examples, definitions, and in-depth understandings of the abject and abjection, her work provides an avenue by which to further theorize linkages between the subversive potential of dominant discursive failures and the abject. Therefore, in this chapter I focus on the theoretical work that Kristeva does on the abject and abjection.

Kristeva's work is important for developing my framework of subversion for three specific reasons. First, Kristeva's work offers a relatively concrete discussion of the subversive importance of the abject to the processes through which dominant discourses maintain their apparent viability. Indeed, and as discussed throughout this chapter, I focus on the aspects of Kristeva's work that outline some ways by which the abject and abjection can be recognized and manipulated in order to construct subversive repetitions. Second, Kristeva's theorizing helps to separate what is within the operation of dominant discourse from what is autonomous from this operation. Third, Kristeva offers a discussion

of the establishment, reinforcement, and function of repression – abjection. Kristeva’s ideas therefore assist with how to recognize the abject, how to understand abjection practices, and what is abject to dominant discourses – the very aspects I need to flesh out my framework of subversion.

In order to use Kristeva’s concepts to develop my framework of subversion, I have divided this chapter into two sections. In the first section, I focus on Kristeva’s theorizing. I review her (1982) book, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* in order to understand how to recognize the abject, the processes of abjection, and the interconnections between the abject and subversion. I then link Kristeva’s concepts with my framework of subversion in order to explicate what is abject to dominant discourses – i.e. what these discourses need to repress. In the second section, I link what is abject to dominant discourses with Butler’s concept of discursive repetition, in order to present a key dissident strategy: subversive repetitions. I conclude by detailing my autonomous framework of subversion that centrally calls for sustaining the abject.

Before I embark on my review of Kristeva’s (1982) work, it is important that I specify the standpoint from which I enter into my reading. First, like Butler (1990/1999), I disagree with Kristeva’s assertion that the pre-discursive is defined by the semiotic and aligned with the maternal body. That is, in agreement with Butler, I understand Kristeva’s claims about the existence of a pre-discursive realm to be discursive. Second, for the same reasons that I argue that Butler is not outlining the operation of all discourses, I assert that Kristeva’s theorizing

cannot be universalized beyond the operation of dominant discourses. This is perhaps not a controversial point to make because Kristeva examines the Bible, mainstream psychological thought rooted in Lacanian theory, and Western literature. While Kristeva does make reference to what she terms 'primitive' societies, I do not understand these references as justifications for universalizing her thinking for two reasons: one, societies that are not Western, colonial, and dominant are not her focus of study; two, her use of the word 'primitive' is itself a colonial term, thereby indicating the Eurocentric and colonial elements of Kristeva's writing. Although this also means that she is focusing on the types of discourses that I am interested in understanding how to subvert: dominant, Western, and colonial ones. Third, while Kristeva (1982) specifically talks about the subject's entrance into language, she describes this entrance through an exploration of psychological processes, social practices, and the written and spoken word. These elements constitute the entities involved in the definition of discourses that I use in this dissertation. As a result of these understandings, I assert that Kristeva is discussing the subject's emergence not into all discourses, but into dominant ones.

3.1 The Abject and Dominant Discourses

In order to understand what is abject to dominant discourses and how this abject is repressed, I turn to Kristeva's descriptions of abjection. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva (1982) explores abjection as found in the Bible, in psychoanalytical theory, and in Western literature. Importantly, rather

than offering an overly abstract discussion of this concept, Kristeva defines what she means by abjection and offers depictions of the processes of abjection. In the remainder of this section, I explore how Kristeva's (1982) work might help to recognize the abject and abjection.

Kristeva offers several illustrations of dominant discursive depictions of the abject; that is, she provides ways of understanding how dominant discursive practices work in order to generate certain illustrations of entities that are deemed abject. I consider this process of depicting something as abject, an act of abjection. I use Kristeva's depictions of the abject as a way to understand two key things. First, I utilize her work to explain how to recognize what is targeted for abjection – that is, what is abject. Second, I also draw her work to understand an important aspect of the operation of dominant discourses. Through Kristeva's theorizing and examples, I argue that dominant discursive practices involve depicting abjected entities as abject. This helps to distinguish what is part of the operation of dominant discourses and what is genuinely abject to this operation.

Kristeva's work assists with understanding that depicting something as abject involves the logic of separation and many fear-based expressions. The abject can be feared, eroticized, and/or projected onto an excluded 'Other'. These are all ways that dominant discourses work to repress what is abject. Understanding how casting an entity as abject works is important as depictions of the abject have the dual effect of both labelling that which is deemed as abject in negative terms as well as repressing the abject. Negative depictions justify exclusion, as one must get rid of, expel, and cast out things such as corruption,

sin, and criminality. That is to say, that what I am addressing at this point is the dominant discursive act of assigning such characteristics to particular practices, individuals, and forms of knowledge in the service of excluding those entities identified as abject from a viable existence within mainstream society. The products of this act are what I refer to as abject depictions and they are, therefore, not expressions of internal realities of that which is deemed abject. Rather, these depictions are products of the operation of dominant discourses that one can then use to identify when a process of abjection is taking place.

In the discussion below I explore the dominant discursive practice of depicting an entity as abject. I first detail how Kristeva defines the abject and abjection. I then overview various examples of how the abject is depicted. These examples offer concrete ways to mark what is being targeted for abjection – the abject. Next I consider how the abjection practice of depicting something as abject assists with understanding what is abject to dominant discourses. This is important because it is first necessary to identify what is abject to dominant discourses before efforts can be directed towards working to sustain this abject. I end this section with a consideration of how to work against the logic of separation in order to evoke the abject. I should make it clear that by defining the act of depicting something as abject as a dominant discursive practice is my own contribution to the literature on abjection that I make by extending Kristeva's work in relation to my framework of subversion.

To start off, in order to understand how Kristeva defines the abject, it is helpful to consider that she describes the subject's experience of the abject as a

kind of trauma. The abject is where the subject's very sense of self, society, and/or meaning collapses and thus the abject is seen as something that is horrific and that needs to be cast off. However, Kristeva argues that the abject can never be cast off; rather it remains as a haunting, hidden entity, that is "[b]eyond the scope of the possible, thinkable, tolerable, [and] lies quite close but cannot be assimilated"(1982: 1). The abject, because it threatens to collapse all meaning, is experienced as a threat: "Abject is not an object, nor an 'other'. Abject is opposed to the 'I'... [it is a] place of banishment that does not cease to challenge its master" (1982: 2). The abject lures: "what is abject is the jettisoned object . . . that draws me towards the place where meaning collapses" (1982: 2). The abject is a troublemaker that "disturbs identity, system, order, [and] does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (5). Given the threat it poses, the abject evokes intense fear: [It is] "a something that I do not recognize as a thing... a weight of meaninglessness . . . which crushes me; . . . a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" (1982: 2).

In order to try and suppress the havoc that this threatening, fascinating, feared, troublemaker causes, attempts to cast off the abject are continually made through processes of abjection. Kristeva (1982) describes abjection as: "the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding abject things and [as] that act [which] establishes the foundations of collective existence" (1982: 53). That is, the abject is in a sense sacred. It simultaneously disturbs, as well as constitutes the border of meaning – a necessary 'outside'. The abject therefore needs to be repressed but not fully eradicated. As Kristeva

(1982: 2) explains, “abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.” The abject and repression of the abject (abjection) are therefore necessary foundations for meaning, identity, and culture.

However, recall that Kristeva is not describing all forms of meaning, identity, and culture. Rather, she is addressing the operation of dominant discourses as they underpin normative ontology within Western society. Therefore, the meaning that is being threatened by the abject is normative meaning. As well what dominant discourses repress is non-dominant ways of being. These ways of being can be considered threatening to dominant discourses and, therefore, in order to repress non-dominant ways of being, they are cast out with abject depictions. The continual repetition of these practices indicates the constant need to maintain these depictions and the threat of possibly not being able to do so. The possibility that the abject may become unhinged from its abject labelling therefore poses a subversive threat to dominant discourses. Moments where this type of subversive threat – the unhinging of an entity deemed abject from its label as such – has emerged might be indicated by heightened executions of practices of abjection. Ideally, for the purposes of subverting dominant discourses these appearances of unhinging can be maintained and the corresponding abjection practices averted. Therefore, I suggest that the fear that Kristeva describes is the fear of the collapse of normalized meaning that dominant discourses generate or, more specifically, the fear of not being in full control of the process of abjection.

In order to understand how an entity is cast as abject, Kristeva explains that abjection is based on the logic of separation. Following this 'logic', the 'impure' is to be separated from the 'pure', 'filth' from 'clean', and 'sin' from 'holiness'. To support this argument, Kristeva explores examples of such separations with reference to religious prohibitions that purport to purify the unholy self. In this context, Kristeva re-asserts Mary Douglas's (1963) argument that the, "symbolic system of religious prohibitions [is] a reflection of social divisions and contradictions" (Kristeva 1982: 122). Like Douglas (1963), Kristeva (1982) reads religious prohibitions primarily as exclusions that highlight and deepen asserted differences. Divisions are heavily monitored and policed via various rituals, the purpose of which is to facilitate the jettisoning of unwanted entities. For example, Kristeva (1982) argues that religious purification practices are based on a logic that seeks to divide and repress what is asserted as impure and to exclude what is deemed abject and what, thus, threatens religious meaning. In this context, Kristeva notes that such practices tend to be directed at the human body and that they represent efforts to separate the religious subject from its ties with nature – or, more notably, from its links to its material and worldly manifestation (read: the human body). Moreover, Kristeva is adamant that such narratives are not exclusive to religious texts; rather, she understands other practices, such as those that take place in legal and medical realms, to be sites of abjection that rely on and reproduce this 'logic of separation'.

Working from the logic of separation, what is deemed abject is depicted in negative terms. These negative depictions include describing the abject as

“immoral, sinister, scheming” (Kristeva 1982: 5). As well, because the abject highlights transgressions of norms, codes of conduct, and meaning, it is cast as a corruption. Indeed, following Kristeva, corruption is the most frequent and visible manifestation of the abject; it is “the socialized appearance of the abject.” From this perspective, “Religion, Morality, Law... [are] obviously always arbitrary... [and] unfailingly oppressive” and, therefore, one way to recognize what is deemed as abject is to identify what is cast as corrupt, criminal, and sinful (1982: 16). Negative depictions of the abject also manifest in projections of an ‘Other’, fear and eroticization, and a rejection of the materiality of the human body. In relation to projections of an ‘Other’, Kristeva (1982) describes the foundation of particular individuals to be based not on desire but rather on exclusion. She asserts that, “there are lives not sustained by desire, as desire is always for objects. Such lives are based on exclusion, articulated through negation and its modalities – transgression, denial, and repudiation”(1982: 6). In this, Kristeva mirrors Butler’s (1990/1999, 1993) assertions that the dominant discourses that underpin normative identities are constituted through exclusion. As well, Kristeva defines particular types of exclusions of certain entities as important. Adding further clarity, she states: “[A] frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become alter ego, drops so that ‘I’ does not disappear in it but finds, in that subliming alienation, a forfeited existence”(1982: 9). Here, I understand Kristeva to be asserting that the abject in this context is not fully excluded but rather sublimated. This sublimation culminates in projection of an ‘Other’ and a strengthened sense of self. It is in this way that the abject is repressed but not

eradicated – its presence is simply controlled. This act of control works as a foundation and a constitutive border for normalized conceptions of the self.

In relation to fear, and as a way of describing the manifestation that objects and subjects of fear represent, Kristeva reviews Freud's (1905) work and concludes that "fear that one can speak, that has a signifiable object, assumes all earlier forms of non-representable fear, one of constant substitution, condenses all fears from unnameable to nameable" (1982: 35). What is deemed abject is endowed with intense qualities associated with fear – what Kristeva calls horror. Therefore, fear and horror are another way to recognize what is abject.

With respect to eroticizing the abject, consider that in a section titled "The Horror Within", Kristeva describes a fear associated with the material body: "inside abjected boundaries, urine, blood, sperm, excrement, then show up in order to reassure a subject that is lacking its own and clean self," (1982: 53). It is here that Kristeva explores the eroticization of the abject as the unclean self that becomes the sole object of sexual desire – what Kristeva deems "a true abject" (1982: 53). For Kristeva, eroticization of abjection represents "an attempt at stopping, a threshold before death" (1982: 54).

Another way that Kristeva (1982) suggests abject depictions are revealed is through narratives associated with the rejection of material elements of the human body that are repressed from consciousness – and/or deemed improper or unclean. In this context, Kristeva details what she understands as the violence involved in the formation of normative identifications. Her particular focus here is on what she deems as the necessity of casting one's self aside in order to

appear to embody normative identities and to “becom[e] another at the expense of my own death” (1982: 4). A key example of this rejection of human materiality is the horror felt when encountering a corpse. The corpse as described by Kristeva is a vital abject. She explains that “the corpse [is] a border that has encroached upon everything . . . at the border of my condition as a living being” (1982: 4). For Kristeva, the subject within dominant discourses cannot exist without this abject border: “How can I be without a border. The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something that is rejected from which one does not part”(1982: 4). While Kristeva describes other material aspects of the subject that are deemed as abject, such as faeces and spit, the corpse is offered as the most important and central abject. Therefore, following this explanation, another way of identifying what is deemed abject is to consider what is repressed by dominant discourses in relation to the human body. Regarding this, Kristeva describes how particular bodily processes come to be defined as abject while others are not. Importantly, those processes associated with the female body – menstruation, for example – is argued by Kristeva to be associated with defilement, while elements such as sperm are not given the same connotations within dominant discourses. This allows for an understanding of how abject depictions come to be associated with particular identities and assigned to particular bodies.

Understanding that abject depictions are abjection practices that mark what is abject is a key way to recognize subversive moments – the operation of repression through which dominant discourses maintain their dominance has

been threatened or failed momentarily. That is, an abjection reaction occurs in, and can thus direct attention to, instances when the abject has surfaced within dominant discourses. This surfacing necessitates an abjection response that simultaneously marks the return of the abject and the failure of dominant discourses. As well, the evocations of the abject that Kristeva reads into literary texts can be taken to derive, from her readings, a set of tactics that can be used to subvert the operations of dominant discourses. In her discussion of Western literature, Kristeva points out how the logic of separation is defied. That is, she indicates how writers can transgress the logic of separation and produce within literature the connections, inter-mixings, and relationships between entities cast within dominant discourses as separate. What I take away from Kristeva's discussion of the defiance of the logic of separation is that more than simply observing depictions and projections of the abject, it is also possible to manipulate the operation of dominant discourses in ways that work against abjection.

Kristeva (1982) maintains that artistic experience is rooted in the abject and, thus, contemporary literature can work to reverse abjection insofar as the abject represents a border of discourse that literature can try to transgress. Again, it should be noted that her following analysis is based on the readings of only Western writers addressing Western dominant society and related discourses. She argues that, "the writer fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, and as a consequence perverts language ... ; [she/he] transverses the dichotomies of pure/impure, prohibition/sin, and morality/immorality" (1982: 16).

In this passage, I understand Kristeva to be linking artistic endeavours to a pre-occupation with the abject and to be pointing to ways that artistic pursuits can conjure up the abject and break apart the enforced separations. The abject is often described in horrific terms but this does not define the abject; the abject is what works against the 'logic of separation' and breaks apart the normative categorical binaries. It is feared because it fractures – threatens – normative meaning. As a way of explicating how this perversion of dominant discourses occurs, Kristeva focuses on the writings of authors such as Proust, Borges, and Celine whom she sees as continually evoking the abject.

In this regard, Kristeva's (1982) contention is that a number of authors call forth the abject by blurring imposed boundaries, separations, and demarcations. For example, Kristeva argues that for Marcel Proust (1871-1922), the abject is connected to narcissism, scandal, and fashion; in short, the abject, is "the foul lining of [dominant] Society" – the object of social desire (1982: 22). Kristeva reads Proust as eliciting the abject through an exploration of memory, sexuality, and morality where he constantly spins together differences. Similarly, Kristeva contends that Jorge Luis Borges (1899 - 1986) explores limitless slavery and elusive freedom and writes extensively about *adelp*, a term that appears to be equated with the abject. Kristeva notes that for Borges "[n]othing seems to tap the adelph like the narration of infamy – rampancy, boundlessness, the unthinkable, the untenable, the un-symbolizable" (1982: 22). Importantly, for my subversive goals, these authors offer illustrative examples of how the abject – intentionally or not – is featured and brought into the mainstream.

Finally, Louis-Ferdinand Celine (1894-1961) is another writer that Kristeva sees as evoking the abject. There are two main ways that Kristeva argues that Celine conjures up the abject. First, through his topic choices, that include, depictions of delirium, multiple rationalizations, inhumanity, horror, threat, the horrendous, disgust, and flight, as well as and references to atrocity, apocalypse, orgy, suffering, and carnival. Second, through his use of various forms of language stylization, that include, slang, sentence deconstruction, and mixing dualities – for example, disgust/laughter and apocalypse/carnival.

I see the writings of Proust, Borge, and Celine as offering a way to work against the logic of separation. This challenge to the logic of separation also disrupts what is cast as abject, unhinging abject depictions from abjected entities, and realigning them with dominant subjects. These books indicate that abjection can be intentionally worked against through such artistic endeavours, pointing out that dominant discourses are not saturated within Western culture. That is, non-dominant ways of being, including importantly the abject, exist in dominant realms and can be tapped into subversively.

Kristeva's discussion on abjection offers two important ideas in relation to my framework of subversion. First, Kristeva gives specific and concrete ways that one can recognize the abject and the various processes of abjection. As the above review indicates, there are many ways that abjection takes place within mainstream society. This includes casting someone or something as criminal, improper, unclean, sinful, an Other, something to fear, erotic, and a rejection of human materiality. What is important and interesting about all of these various

manifestations of the abject and abjection is how pervasive and ubiquitous they are within Western culture. Dominant discursive repression – abjection – is a process that is enacted on multiple levels in many ways. Recognizing these practices is important for subversion. Kristeva also explains how the abject can be intentionally evoked. This offers two important subversive practices: (1) recognizing the abject and abjection and (2) evoking the abject.

Second, linking Kristeva's theorizing to Butler's subversive concepts helps identify what is abject to dominant discourses. Kristeva's discussion regarding the logic of separation mirrors Butler's conceptions regarding ontological binaries, but neither author makes clear precisely what is abject to dominant discourses. Kristeva explains that dominant discourses work through imposing divisions. These divisions cast what is viable (pure, clean, meaningful, decent) from what is non-viable (impure, filthy, corrupt) within dominant discourses. What is considered non-viable is depicted as abject and all of the projections described above are possible ways of characterizing this depiction and enacting the practice of abjection. It is in this way that dominant discourses appear viable, non-dominant ways of being are repressed, and norms are repeated. Therefore, casting something or someone as abject is a central aspect of normal repetition and, thus, central and vital foci for dominant discourses. To project abject depictions onto to what is deemed abject is to enhance and strengthen dominant discourses. As a result, what I argue is abject to dominant discourses – what has to be cast off in order for these discourses to appear coherent – is the failure of this process. That is, the failure of abjection is precisely what dominant

discourses must work to repress in order to appear viable and that failure is, thus, itself abject to dominant discourses

I envision at least three ways that abjection fails. The first way occurs when those entities – practices, ways of being, and subjects – deemed abject by dominant discourses are enacted without an abject depiction. This complicates the idea that these depictions belong to these entities and allows for expressions generated by what is deemed abject to be realized. For example, when inmates of a prison are observed volunteering at a homeless shelter and when protestors show signs of affection towards the police, these individuals depicted as abject are unhinged from abject depictions. The second way abjection fail is in any situation in which the logic of separation is worked against in order to bring about the interconnections between supposedly binary and divided entities. For example, this is the case when the same person expresses both masculine and feminine qualities. The third situation is when dominant categories are associated with abject depictions. Examples of this third type of failure of abjection include instances when the police are seen as corrupt, when institutions are found to inappropriately cast someone as mentally ill, and when corporations are revealed as criminal. Subversive moments may involve one, two, or all three of these pathways. Bringing these ideas back to Butler's (1990/1999,1993) concepts and my reading of her ideas, the subversive task therefore is to sustain these types of moments – perhaps through the force of repetition.

3.2 Subversive Repetitions

Now that I have offered my reading of Kristeva's (1982) work in relation to the conceptual exploration at hand here, I can go about building on the answer to my central inquiry: How can 'autonomous' activist tactics be comprehended in ways that are more effectively 'autonomous' from – while also being more pervasively subversive to – dominant discourses? Below, I first address the notion of subverting dominant discourses and offer specific ideas on what constitutes subversive action in this regard. Next, I bring these ideas into a discussion of autonomy. Finally, I am able to present my autonomous framework of subversion.

The purpose of this section is to use my reading of Kristeva's (1982) text to flesh out what I see as the key subversive feature emerging from Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) theorizations. In the latter regard, recall that I read Butler's work as resting on the claim that at the same time as they maintain the appearance of stability and coherence through repression of the abject, dominant discourses are inevitably failing. I draw two things from this idea. First, it is constant repression that renders dominant discourses vulnerable to emergence of what has been repressed: the abject. Second, if efforts are directed towards dismantling dominant discourses, a consequent key task is to maintain what is repressed by dominant discourses through opening up space for the three types of subversive moments discussed above.

As a way to build on these readings, recall that following Butler's concepts, dominant discourses maintain their appearance of coherence through

discursive repetition. Similarly, repetition may be one way of giving the abject a presence in relation to these discourses. That is, while repetition works to make dominant discourses appear coherent, this repetition simultaneously operates to repress and exclude. It is, thus, also the point at which dominant discourses are most vulnerable to subversion. Therefore, repeating what is repressed – and not exclusionary dominant discourses – may work against this repression. At the very least, constant efforts to repeat what has been repressed might exhaust, complicate, challenge, and certainly erode abjection practices.

Taking these ideas and re-examining them in light of my reading of Kristeva (1982), I understand the abject in greater depth. Through this understanding and in relation to my reading of Butler, it becomes apparent that it is not some vague idea of the abject that is repressed by dominant discourses, but rather specific things are abject to dominant discourses and require abjection. I have identified three specific things that dominant discourses seek to repress and failure to repress these things marks a failure of abjection. Therefore, failures of abjection involve breakdowns in the ability to fix an abject depiction on a particular entity deemed abject; collapses in rigid normative ontological claims; and inabilities to seamlessly unhinge the abject from dominant discourses.

Bringing these ideas back to the concepts gleaned from Butler, it is not merely any type of repetition that is potentially subversive. Instead, it is important to be careful to repeat what is repressed by dominant discourses and not dominant discourses themselves – or worse, reproduce further repressions. In this context, recall from just above that Butler's work explains that dominant

discourses operate through repetitions of norms that enact repressions, and it is the return of these repressions that mark failures within this operation. Now, through Kristeva, I extrapolate that there are specific elements involved in repression and that we can mark failures in this regard. Correspondingly, if one repeats what I have come to define as abject to dominant discourses (i.e. discursive failures), these repetitions conceivably will work to erode dominant discourses; they constitute what I call subversive repetitions.

Extrapolating from my readings of both authors, I suggest that efforts to subvert dominant discourses may involve four strategies, all of which challenges the viability of dominant discursive repetitions. First, one can repeat the above types of subversive repetitions rather than norms. When read through Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) performativity lens, the purpose of such repetitions is to give a presence to these subversive features that are repressed and perhaps, in so doing, also the appearance of stability. Second, one can work against the repetition of norms. Repetition of norms in dominant discourses, in other words, is herein considered an abjection practice. In other words, countering abjection practices is one way to disrupt normative discursive repetitions. Third, one can work to challenge efforts to divide and exclude – what Kristeva (1982) terms the logic of separation. Connecting Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) ideas to this 'logic', one might further suggest that what is discursively repeated in normative contexts is this separation and, as such, any and all efforts to challenge this 'logic of separation' represent subversive activities.

Fourth and finally, in attempting these subversive repetitions, it is perhaps pertinent to retain the subversive possibilities in relation to repetition that Butler (1993) touches on. That is, in her suggestion that there may be repetitions that are subversive she conceives that each repetition is likely not a perfect one that enacts a congruent adherence to a norm. Likewise with respect to subversive repetitions, it may be valuable to embrace imperfect repetitions and the subversive possibilities therein. I see this last point as particularly important because when I talk about repeating what has been repressed, I am not discussing perfect repetitions or reiterations. Rather, embracing the imperfect repetitions or expressions of what has been repressed – along with what has not – works against two concerning possibilities. The first possibility is that what is being repeated is only a reiteration taking on legitimacy or the appearance of stability through repetition. Not only does this somewhat strip any expression from viable content, but also it carries on with a key aspect of the operation of dominant discourses. I would like to erode, not strengthen this operation. Therefore, embracing, expecting, and celebrating non-congruent expressions, practices, or ‘repetitions’ is important in this regard. The second concern with the idea of seamless subversive repetitions is that these expressions are at risk of becoming dominant (e.g. being swept up as the newest dominant expression of gender). I want to work against this very type of domination. Therefore, a focus on the imperfections, the non-parallel but perhaps inter-connected and related social practices of what is currently repressed is key in attempting to achieve this objective.

In summary, subversive repetitions may involve repeating subversive moments in relation to the abject as described above as a way to (a) give these entities an appearance and presence in relation to normative repetitions, (b) expose normative practices, (c) disrupt normative repetitions, and/or (d) render the expected imperfect repetitions of the subversive entities and use these imperfections for further subversive opportunities.

Bringing the conversation back over to autonomous activism, through the ideas as explored to this point, it is possible to comprehend, to some extent, what is considered part of the operation of dominant discourses and what is antithetical to this operation. Put in another way, through my readings of Butler's and Kristeva's work, I can interpret what might be subversive and 'autonomous' from dominant discourses versus what appears to be 'outside' dominant discourses but is in actuality a vital aspect of these discourses' operation.

First, I want to summarize the various claims that relate to this last statement. Butler (1990/1999, 1993) asserts that pre-discursive claims are discursive and involve a dominant discursive trick. Next, as I continue to argue, what Butler and Kristeva are describing is the operation of dominant discourses – not all discourses. Therefore, following this, all non-dominant discourses can be potentially considered 'autonomous'; in particular, I consider that there might be non-dominant ways of being that are aligned with the abject, and those that are not. I further suggest that we focus subversive attention on those that are aligned with the abject in order for all non-dominant ways of being to be given opportunities to grow and thrive. When I read Kristeva in light of my reading of

Butler (1990/1999,1993), I come to assert that depictions of the abject are not autonomous from dominant discourses. Rather, abject depictions are expressions derived from dominant discourses that are projected onto various individuals, entities, and ways of being. Therefore, 'autonomy' from dominant discourses consists of abjected entities unhinged from these abject depictions. I argue that this represents a true abject by Kristeva's definition. As well, this 'unhinging' may take the form of complicating the abject depiction and/or highlighting inter-connections. In relation to this, autonomy also includes a focus on interconnections instead of separations and, importantly, re-connects abject depictions back onto dominant discourses.

To summarize, subversion involves manipulating the operation of dominant discourses, as explained by Butler's work (1990/1999,1993), by focusing on the failures of this operation and by using one of its key mechanisms against itself – that of discursive repetition. Focusing on failures, in part, means recognizing and repeating what is abject to dominant discourses in order to disrupt and challenge the repetition of norms. These types of subversive repetitions give what has been repressed a presence in relation to these discourses. Overall what is sought is an erosion of the dominance and exclusionary practices of current dominant discourses that operate to silence, marginalize, and oppress an increasing number of people.

By way of conclusion, I end this chapter by suggesting that what emerges as a result of my reading and merging of Butler's (1990/1999,1993) and Kristeva's (1982) texts is a framework of subversion. One notable feature of this

framework is the assumption that it is important to seek to repeat particular events, entities, expressions, and practices that are abject to dominant discourses. Indeed, when read at the intersections of Butler (1990/1999, 1993) and Kristeva's (1982) work, subversive repetitions become a central task. Specifically, Kristeva provides readers with a venue by which to recognize when dominant discourses fail as well as specific ideas regarding how to work with these failures in ways that assist with the realization of subversion. My framework can be applied to current social phenomena in order to gain varying understandings related to autonomous activism and subverting dominant discourses. Indeed, this is the main aim of the chapters that form the remainder of this dissertation: to use the framework introduced above to guide my analysis of autonomous activist practices such as the *Idle No More Movement*, and to shape an understanding of one of the struggles currently facing social movements.

Chapter 4

Cultivating Autonomous Gardens: Autonomous Activism and Subverting

Dominant Discourses

On our walks to school, Ava noticed that dandelions grow freely on many public spaces, and abundantly across her schoolyard (I feel confident that the school groundskeepers do not make suspicious trips across the border). Instead of fighting with Michael or being sad watching her favourite flower continually attacked on the lawn of our house, Ava decided to enjoy the dandelions in spaces where they are free to grow. In one of her rare subversive moments, Ava gathered a bouquet of 'wish' dandelions from her school playground, and when Michael was not watching, she blew the seeds across our backyard. Perplexed by the resurgence, Michael got out his artillery of weapons to deal with the situation. Similar to Ava's decision to stop debating with Michael and enjoy the dandelions at her school, autonomous activism recognizes that it is counter-productive to try and practice non-dominant ways of being within mainstream spaces, as there will inevitably be acts of repression. Rather, it is better to practice non-dominant ways of being in spaces autonomous from mainstream society where they are free to grow. It is in this way that autonomous activists are like beautiful gardeners – cultivating and nurturing spaces for what is repressed by dominant society.

Despite the distancing from mainstream society, autonomous activism (like dandelions) continues to pose a significant threat to dominant discourses (lawns). They cultivate and grow what dominant discourses repress; they take up

space – warding off the expansion of dominant discourses in these areas; and they can emerge in (be blown into) dominant realms, stronger through nurturance, causing havoc. In this chapter, I address the threat that autonomous activism poses, the discursive battle that ensues, and how the subversive potential of autonomous activism might be strengthened.

The preceding chapters have culminated into the formation of a framework of subversion as derived from my readings of Butler (1990/1999,1993) and Kristeva’s (1982) work. According to the framework I have developed, dominant discourses achieve dominance through the repetition of citational norms and three interrelated types of repression. These are repressions of (1) abject projections unhinged from abjected subjects and entities, (2) interconnections between normative binaries, and (3) explicit connections between dominant discourses and projected depictions of the abject. Subverting dominant discourses involves working against the reiteration of norms and the repression of the abject through subversive repetitions.

There are two main reasons I consider it important to understand how dominant discursive practices fight to erode autonomous activism. First, without comprehending the various discursive processes that seek to destroy autonomous activism, the autonomy and subversive potential of this type of activism will not be fully realized. An awareness of the dominant discursive strategies used against autonomous activism can lead to the development of counter-moves. Second, dominant discursive practices work to justify direct interventions – such as, removing activists from physical spaces, hacking online

communities, and arresting non-violent protestors – that seek to dismantle autonomous communities. As Judith Butler (2009) in *Frames of War* explains, particular dominant discourses justify violence against marginalized groups of people by framing them as a threat or as already lost.

For example, the anarchist activist is depicted as posing a danger to law-abiding citizens by purposely refusing to follow the rule of law. The anarchist is also cast as a threat to herself as she involves herself in self-destructive behaviours – engaging in presumed violent protest, taking illegal drugs, and justifying criminal activity. As a result, the anarchist needs to be controlled in order to ensure her safety and the safety of those around her. Any messages about injustice or oppression that she might carry with her are erased through abjection. In relation to the ideas of the framework, abject depictions projected onto abjected individuals can involve the types of narratives that Butler (2009) and Kristeva (1982) describe; for example, autonomous actors are asserted as dangerous, violent, and threats to themselves or other. Simultaneously, dominant discourses work to characterize dominant individuals, institutions, and practices as the complete opposite – safe, neutral, and protective. Therefore, in order to strengthen the autonomy of autonomous activism, and to ward off justifications for violent actions against autonomous activists, the underlying discursive processes need to be understood.

In this chapter, I apply the main elements of my framework to outline what I see as a discursive battle between autonomous activism and dominant discourses. Specifically, my framework makes it clear that dominant discourses

can only appear viable through repressing the abject. In this sense, dominant discourses require an abject if they are to appear viable. Autonomous activism threatens the apparent viability of dominant discourses in two interrelated ways. In the first instance, autonomous activist practices revitalize the very things dominant discourses need to repress, thereby directly counteracting the process of repression that's necessary for the survival of dominant discourses. In the second instance, an equally important way autonomous activist practices threaten dominant discourses is by disengaging from them, thereby denying direct access to an abject and short-circuiting processes of repression on which dominant discourses depend. These two threats are at the centre of a discursive battle wherein dominant discursive practices respond by (1) continually repressing what autonomous activism revitalizes, (2) working to prevent disengagement but also (3) using disengagement to fuel processes of abjection.

In order to understand how autonomous activism can be more effective in fighting this discursive battle, I engage in three discussions in relation to autonomous activist strategizing. In section one of this chapter, I discuss the subversive threat that autonomous activism poses for dominant discourses. In the section two, I specify the ways in which dominant discourses respond to this challenge and continue to operate in relation to autonomous activism. In section three, I consider how the framework suggests that autonomous activists ward off dominant discursive practices in order to become more autonomous and subversive.

4.1 The Threat of Autonomous Activism to Dominant Discourses

In this section, I overview how autonomous activism threatens the operation of dominant discourses. I first define what I mean by autonomous activism. Next, I give an account of the types of direct actions that are taken against autonomous activism that works to erode the functioning of these communities. Finally, I apply the concepts of the framework in order to understand the subversive threat that autonomous activism poses. This section sets up the discussion for subsequent sections in this chapter, where I first consider how dominant discursive practices respond to the challenge of autonomous activism and I then overview possible strategies to counter these practices.

Several scholars argue that autonomous activism is an important undercurrent to many current forms of protest (Day 2005, Graeber 2002, Cunningham 2010, Robinson 2010). The observance that there are an increasing number of autonomous strategies and communities is seen as activists' attempts to respond to "the growing phenomenon of global exclusion in neo-liberalism" (Cunningham 2010: 419). That is, autonomous practices are viewed as a response to marginalization that is enacted through capitalist structures. Instead of continuing to live with increased exploitation, efforts are made by autonomous activists to practice alternatives apart from these structures. Cunningham (2010: 451) reminds that such strategies originate from struggles that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s throughout Germany and Italy that were premised on "theories of worker self-management and autonomy from the mediating

institutions of capitalist labour.” Growing on this idea, autonomous communities and movements exist in ways that seek autonomy from identified oppressive structures, such as the state and related mainstream institutions (Day 2004, Cunningham 2010). Cunningham also asserts that autonomous-based efforts exist worldwide and currently represent infusions from Marxist theory and also from, but not limited to, feminist theories, French post-structural thought, and neo-Anarchism (2010: 419).

Richard Day (2004) provides an understanding of autonomous activism’s common theoretical foundations. In order to explain these foundations, Day (2004) first offers a critique of practices that work from a ‘politics of demand’ framework. This framework accepts that interactions with the state are beneficial because there is belief that the validity of claims regarding lived oppression will be legitimized and resolved through the state apparatus. Therefore, working from this framework entails attempts to enact state power in order to alleviate oppression experienced by some groups of people. However, Day (2004) is critical of this stance, maintaining that such acts that work within a ‘politics of demand’ framework inevitably reproduces and multiplies the impacts of domination. Day (2004) explains that, “actions oriented to ameliorating the practices of states, corporations and everyday life, through either influencing or using state power to achieve irradiation effects. As ‘pragmatic’ as it may be, and despite its successes during the heyday of the welfare state in a few countries, the ‘politics of demand’ is by necessity limited in scope: it can change the content of structures of domination and exploitation, but it cannot change their form”

(2004: 733). Day argues that the state and its related institutions, which include the influence of corporations, are structures of domination. Therefore, approaching these structures to alleviate oppression does not work to subvert how they exert their domination. Rather, these structures of domination are merely given new or different content to focus on – whether that be poverty, crime, or gendered issues. For example, in relation to this idea, Foucault's (1969) theorizing leads to an understanding that institutions produce discourses and technologies that exert power over individuals. Therefore, approaching these institutions to alleviate oppression feeds into the production of discourses and related technologies, thereby expanding the systems of domination.

As opposed to a 'politics of demand,' Day (2004) asserts that it is more productive to work from a 'politics of the act' framework. He insists that it is necessary for activists to "give up the fantasy of a non-dominating response from structures of domination" and instead seek to be autonomous from such structures – to essentially break free from the state-emancipation fantasy (2004: 733). Day explains that a 'politics of the act' framework underpins autonomous activism. Through Day's work, I understand autonomous activism to be predicated on living and practicing ways of being that offer alternatives to current forms of domination. Placed in slightly different terms, instead of continuing on with the ways of being produced and policed by the systems of domination that Day describes and seeking further engagement with these practices, a 'politics of the act' seeks to revitalize, create, and practice alternatives. Focus is placed on creating and living the alternatives to dominant discourses, thereby seeking to

erode dominating systems by not feeding into them. Examples of direct action that prefigures alternatives include the formation of autonomous communities, communication systems, and acts of protest.

With respect to autonomous communities, these collectives seek to disengage from the oppression of mainstream society and focus on non-dominant ways of being that are repressed by dominant discourses. As Jenny Pickerill and Paul Chatterton describe: “‘Autonomous geographies’ [are] spaces where there is a questioning of laws and social norms, and a desire to create non-capitalist, collective forms of politics, identity, and citizenship” (2006: 1). Communities working from an autonomous framework can include any formation, from rural collective farms to urban-based co-operatives, that is engaged in a variety of anti-oppressive struggles (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006, 2010). These communities prefigure and practice alternatives to oppressive structures by involving themselves in such things as working collectively in alternative labour structures, engaging in repressed cultural practices, and organizing in non-hierarchical social groups such as the practice of direct democracy that deploys a variety of communication techniques in order to build consensus within a community (Graeber 2002).

Regarding autonomous communication systems, alternative media outlets have emerged that focus on the non-dominant ways of being that mainstream media repress. As Uzelman (2001) explains, alternative media structures have developed in response to what is seen as state and corporate-controlled mainstream media outlets; largely internet-based, these alternative media

systems seek to be apart from capitalist institutions and use participatory methods to engage communities (Uzelman 2001). I understand these media practices as quite subversively important as they provide a means by which repressed ways of being can be communicated and practiced on a much larger scale than within local spaces relying on direct inter-personal communication.

Creativity seems to be a cornerstone of autonomous-based actions of protest that take place within mainstream society. Examples of such creativity are seen in guerrilla gardening, whereby efforts to increase viable green space occur that involve 'seed-bombing' golf courses, potting plants in abandoned urban spaces, and planting rows of flowers on busy streets. As well, non-violent and playful tactics are seen in street-based protest movements where activists dress up – as clowns or fairies, for example – and 'attack' either one another or the police with feather dusters and balloons (Graeber 2002). Graeber notes that, in response to these playful protestors, the police seem perplexed: "It's this scrambling of conventional categories that so throws the forces of order and makes them desperate to bring things back to familiar territory (simple violence)" (2002: 8).

However, direct interventions by the government and related institutions threaten autonomous activism. These direct intervention strategies include acts such as direct military intervention (Day 2005) and placing barriers in front of alternative labour structures to prevent or limit their entrance into mainstream economic markets. There is also concern that alternative media, which function as a non-localizable communications mechanism for autonomous activism,

continue to be a target for eradication by mainstream actors (Pickerill 2010); government shut-downs of alternative media outlets, seizures of computers, and attempts at on-line censorship are current examples of such acts of repression. As well, massive and increased crackdowns on non-violent street protestors continue to take place: The large-scale removal and arrest of protestors within the Occupy Movement's camps, which had been constructed and operated peacefully within urban spaces, provides a salient example of violent state intervention into non-violent situations (Graeber 2012).

Actions taken against autonomous activism indicate that this type of activism poses a threat to norms within mainstream society that are supported by dominant discourses. My autonomous framework of subversion assists with understanding this threat. In order to ground the discussion, it is helpful to recall that dominant discourses rely on repressing the abject and continually repeating this repression to appear viable. Two important points emerge in relation to autonomous activism and dominant discursive practices. The first insight is that dominant discourses actually depend on non-dominant ways of being. Practices that project abject depictions onto abjected ways of being and individuals, that repress ontological inter-connections, and that work to dissociate dominant discourses from abject characteristics – in combination with the repetition of citational norms – give dominant discourses the appearance of viability, coherence, stability, and dominance. Dominant discourses require subjects and non-dominant ways of being in order to carry out these tasks. Non-dominant ways of being are especially important to the dominant discursive practice of

projecting abject depictions onto abjected entities in order to appear dominant in relation to non-dominant alternatives. The second insight is that non-dominant ways of being and subjects do not depend on dominant discourses for their continued existence. In fact, dominant discursive practices repress non-dominant ways of being and subjects – confining them to an abject existence. In order to actually practice, revitalize, create, and grow non-dominant ways of being, autonomy from the operation of dominant discourses is necessary; this distancing is already explored by a multitude of autonomous communities.

Autonomous activism provides useful strategies for effecting autonomy from dominant discursive practices. For example, a dependent ‘politics of demand’ framework that approaches the government and related institutions for both, recognition of valid claims of injustices, and emancipation from oppression offers an engagement with dominant discourses. This engagement renders the practices that dominant discourses rely on fairly easy to execute. Conversely, an autonomous ‘politics of the act’ strategizing removes this direct and arguably subservient relationship, making it more difficult for dominant discourses to operate. However, while autonomous actors work from a framework that does not recognize the state as a legitimizing authority, the state – and related dominant institutions – continue to recognize autonomous actors and ways of being as vital components to the operation of dominant discourses. For example, the state cannot justify its authority over a population in the absence of people. Abject depictions are also more difficult to apply to individuals who are not present. Dominant institutions require subjects in order to operate such things as

the legal or medical system. As a result, there is an inter-connected struggle, whereby non-dominant ways of being can exist only apart from dominant discourses and dominant discourses can only exist in connection to non-dominant ways of being. What autonomous activists do is attempt to sever the connection with dominant discourses, which threatens their very existence.

Autonomous communities pose a threat to dominant discourses because they tend to work from a collective, non-hierarchical, perspective that seeks to be outside of mainstream society. As outlined in my framework of subversion, dominant discursive practices seek to align abjected individuals and ways of being with abject depictions and to repress anything that contradicts this association. In this context, dominant discursive practices seek to cast autonomous actors and practices with abject depictions: 'improper', 'unclean', 'criminal', and 'fearsome,' for example. Autonomous depictions of those who are already cast as abject and also those who seek to be more autonomous from mainstream society threaten the operation of dominant discourses in two ways: First, they unhinge abject depictions from abjected subjects and practices; second, they compromise the monopoly that dominant discourses seek to hold over positive depictions such as 'legitimate', 'rational', 'proper', and 'progressive'.

Autonomous communities also tend to make more widely known the oppressive aspects of dominant discourses that permeate mainstream society. Revealing the exploitation involved in mainstream capitalist practices, for example, associates capitalist practices with abject depictions, revealing them as 'dirty', 'improper', and 'criminal'. Thus, abject depictions not only are untied from

abjected subjects and practices, but also come to be associated with dominant discourses. These things that are abject to dominant discourses need to be repressed in order for these discourses to appear viable, dominant, and legitimate. Therefore, subsequent repressive practices by dominant discourses are required for the existence of dominant discourses, revealing autonomous activism as an important threat to this operation.

Alternative media outlets pose another threat. These communication avenues strengthen autonomous practices and communities and, in so doing, challenge dominant discourses in two ways. First, through alternative media outlets, messages regarding the exploitive and oppressive practices of mainstream culture, practices supported by dominant discourses, are communicated much more pervasively. Second, positive depictions of practices and people within autonomous communities that demonstrate viable alternatives to mainstream practices are also shared. In these ways, alternative media structures threaten the monopoly that corporate-driven mainstream media holds over positive and negative depictions. The unhinging of abject depictions from abjected subjects and practices, as well as the alignment of abject depictions with mainstream dominant discourses, is communicated and repeated on a much larger scale than just within or between localized autonomous communities.

Consider the idea that media coverage is a social enactment. Repetition of this social act occurs every time the media narrative is communicated – that is, seen, read, heard, discussed, and understood. This moves the repetition of citational norms that Butler (1990/1999, 1993) describes from an inter-personal

event to a multi-personal situation, making the force of that repetition much stronger. Alternative media challenge mainstream media's monopoly over these repetitions and offer counter-reiterations that surface the very things that dominant discourses need to repress. Alternative media does this on a global scale, repeating what dominant discourses repress and connecting autonomous actors worldwide.

Another type of threat to dominant discourses is produced by autonomous actions. For example, non-violent protest, particularly those acts that confuse normative categories, creates bewilderment. As Graeber (2002) points out, a scrambling of categories perplexes the authorities who do not seem to know how to respond. Dominant discourses tend to cast the protestor as an abjected subject, outside and against the actions of the state, and therefore associated with abject depictions: 'unclean', 'criminal', and 'something to fear'. Yet, autonomous activists dressed up as clowns and fairies, for example, present depictions of playfulness. Thus abjected subjects and practices are unhinged from the state's abject depictions of them. Consequently, a response from state authorities is delayed until the abject depictions can be again associated with abjected protestors: for example that the protestors pose some sort of threat. In the case of the Occupy Movement, the asserted threat was to the cleanliness of the public parks, casting these activists, their communities, and their practices as 'unclean' (Graeber, 2012).

Autonomous communities, alternative media outlets, and non-violent forms of protest bring to the surface what dominant discourses seek to repress.

Responses from the state that seek to maintain key repressions – on which dominant discourses are dependent for their survival – are examples of the discursive battle at play between dominant discourses and autonomous activism. Such responses indicate that autonomous activism poses a significant threat to the operation of dominant discourses. In the next section, I consider how dominant discourses respond to this threat and continue to operate in relation to autonomous activism, and in so doing, compromise this activism's autonomy, subversive potential, and sustainability.

4.2 The Discursive Battle

Despite the increased difficulty that autonomous activism poses to dominant discourses, dominant discourses continue to operate in relation to autonomous activism. In the discussion below, I overview how my framework of subversion provides insights into how dominant discursive practices continue to function, compromising the existence, autonomy, and subversive potential of autonomous activism. I divide the discussion into two parts: dominant discursive practices in relation to autonomous communities seeking distance from mainstream society, and autonomous-based actions that take place within mainstream societal contexts.

In relation to autonomous communities that seek, or are forced, to be outside mainstream society, there are three ways in which dominant discursive practices can be carried out. First, dominant discursive practices can make use of the autonomous position activists reside within; that is, the operation of

dominant discourses, as understood through my framework of subversion, functions through practices of exclusion. These practices repress and compromise a wide variety of non-dominant ways of being. Autonomous activism takes up the task of working against these practices of exclusion by seeking to revitalize repressed ways of being as well as creating further non-dominant practices. The upshot of this is that repressed ways of being are given opportunities to thrive, presumably less hindered by dominating influences. The downside is that dominant discursive practices use this autonomous position as a 'constitutive outside' for dominant discourses that seek to work through exclusion. That is, through seeking autonomy from mainstream society and systems of domination, autonomous activism provides, in some ways, a relief to the operation of dominant discourses by generating and enacting an exclusion for this operation. Therefore, some of the efforts to repress and exclude that dominant discourses must do in order to appear stable and coherent are already enacted.

Second, making use of autonomous groups' exclusion from mainstream society, dominant discursive practices can more easily project abject depictions onto abjected autonomous activists and ways of being. Recall that my reading of Kristeva's (1982) concepts leads to a comprehension that one of the ways that dominant discourses operate is through asserting abject depictions onto particular abjected entities. Consequently, autonomous activist communities become easy targets when residing within autonomous spaces; this gives the appearance of their already assuming a 'cast-out' identity. As well, it is

understandably easier for dominant discourses to fix an abject depiction onto subjects, entities, practices, and ways of being in the absence of their counter-claims, displays, or expressions to the contrary. This is not to say that autonomous communities do not enact a presence within mainstream contexts – many urban-based collectives are examples to the contrary. Rather, it is to point out that the relative autonomy sought from mainstream society places activists at risk of making it easier for abject depictions to be melded onto them and their ways of being and to be projected to mainstream society.

A third way that dominant discourses can continue to operate is within the autonomous communities themselves – whether these communities exist within a physical, social, or online space. Seeing as the operation of dominant discourses is pervasive, there is a real risk that dominant discursive practices continue to pervade autonomous communities. This, of course, compromises the revitalization and creation of non-dominant ways of being. Therefore, understanding and counteracting the operation of dominant discourses within autonomous spaces – in all the forms it takes – is very important. An awareness of this type of permeation of dominant culture is already a part of the reflective practices of many autonomous communities (Graeber 2002). Adding onto those reflective practices, the concepts explored in this dissertation assert that attention needs to be paid to diverting from practices that repeat citational norms and focusing on non-dominant ways of being. From a perspective of subverting and eroding dominant discourses, attention can be paid to moving away from the vital actions that these discourses rely on while simultaneously nurturing what these

discourses need to repress – abjected entities unhinged from abject depictions, ontological interconnections, and explicit links between dominant discourses and the abject. Without this awareness, there are risks that dominant discourses will continue to operate in relation to autonomous communities both within mainstream society and within these spaces as well.

When these non-dominant ways of being are practiced within mainstream society, this necessitates that dominant discursive practices respond with effective, strong actions in order to counteract their erosive impact. There appear to be three main types of responses in this regard. First, there are the responses that come in the form of direct attacks that carry out such acts as dismantling infrastructures of autonomous communities and arresting non-violent protestors. These are obviously quite evident and easy to spot. Second, there are the responses that take the form of discursive abjection practices. As Kristeva's (1982) ideas point out, abjection can take a variety of forms and modalities, casting individuals and ways of being as 'criminal', 'unclean', 'improper', 'erotic', and 'fearsome', for example. Third, in some cases, there appears to be a lack of a response because the autonomous action in mainstream contexts confuses the authorities on how to respond or how to repress these eruptions of autonomous action. It is as if these actions have tapped into unfamiliar territory. For example, in cases where abjected subjects and ways of being are unhinged from abject depictions, it is difficult for dominant discursive practices to be carried out in the absence of defining these people and practices as threats. The only recourse, it

seems, is for them to work to re-fix abject depictions onto abjected subjects and then respond with various abjection/repression responses.

Dominant discursive practices that respond to the threat of autonomous activism include: capitalizing on the autonomous location of autonomous communities as forming a convenient 'outside' for dominant discourses; using this autonomy from mainstream society to more pervasively assert abject depictions onto these abjected activists and related actions; and working to repress autonomous actions within mainstream society. Importantly, these discursive strategies tend to be hidden, particularly in the context of claims to legitimacy, authority, and neutrality. As Judith Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) theorizing points out, dominant discourses operate through practices that remain undetected through claims or the appearance that dominant discourses are natural, viable, and revealing inner truths, through a constant citational deferral of authority, and through appeals to pre-discursive assertions that are in effect a dominant discursive illusion and a vital aspect of the operation of dominant discourses.

4.3 Subversive Repetitions and Autonomous Activism

In this section, I consider how autonomous activists can ward off the continued operation of dominant discourses by addressing how my framework of subversion assists with strategies for overcoming the obstacles currently facing autonomous activism. Overall, there are four areas that I understand through the concepts of the framework that may be helpful in remedying the issues described

above: adding onto the already existent self-reflective practices that take place within autonomous communities; focusing on repetitions that are subversive to the operation of dominant discourses; giving concrete ideas on how these subversive repetitions may be compromised through the processes of abjection and how to resist abjection practices; and indicating where erosive efforts may be located.

First, as already touched on, there is a risk that dominant discourses continue to operate within autonomous communities. Efforts already exist to eradicate dominant practices within autonomous communities by focusing on such things as self-reflection, decolonization work, non-hierarchical organizing, and direct democracy practices (Day 2005, Graeber 2002). Adding to these efforts, my framework suggests a focus on refraining from repeating citational norms and practices of repression. As well, efforts need to be made to repeat non-dominant ways of being especially those that dominant discourses need to repress, which are understood to comprise subversive repetitions.

Second, subversive repetitions can take place within autonomous communities and within mainstream contexts. In either location, it may be helpful to understand the above-mentioned discursive battle and the meanings over which there is a contentious struggle. This includes becoming aware of the particular dominant discourses – that is, the normalized categories and binaries – being disrupted by autonomous actors in any given situation. It may be important to comprehend which of the three types of repressions outlined in the previous

chapter, or combinations of them, has surfaced so that these practices can be emulated – subversively repeated.

Third, another idea includes using this awareness to watch out for attempts to repress these particular disruptions. This involves comprehending the various abjection practices that Kristeva describes – for example, negation, logic of separation, abject projections, and sublimation – in conjunction with attempts to repeat citational norms. Activists can continue to work to repeat what has surfaced and work against abjection. It may be particularly salient to observe where abjection practices become heightened and what are the targets of such strategies; this likely indicates important subversive entities as they may be perceived as particular threats to dominant discourses. The responses of abjection and repression may be telling in this regard. All of this can be used to help efforts to continue to repeat subversive practices and try to counter abjection.

Fourth, the framework also addresses the subversive potential that exists within autonomous communities and through autonomous actions within mainstream society. What autonomous spaces do is provide opportunities for non-dominant ways of being to be practiced, presumably with more support and less hindrance than in mainstream contexts. However, when these same types of repetitions are practiced in mainstream society in close proximity to dominant discourses – for example, as a response or pre-emptive action – this provides a more direct erosive attack to the operation of dominant discourses. As well, these types of actions work against the issue of generating a constitutive outside for

dominant discourses. This thinking focuses the autonomous activist towards a discursive battle both within autonomous communities and in relation to mainstream society. Working to eradicate dominant discourses within autonomous communities in order to strengthen the revitalization and creation of non-dominant ways of being is understood as a key practice leading to autonomy and subversion of dominant discourses. These non-dominant ways of being can then be more pervasively used in specific erosive attacks within mainstream society. These attacks centrally rely on subversive repetitions.

Importantly, these repetitions require social enactments that directly confront and contradict dominant discourses. Repeating repressed elements in social areas that seek to be autonomous from mainstream society strengthens and revitalizes these practices, and it also works against the operation of dominant discourses within these realms. Repeating dominant discursive failures within mainstream society provides a more direct subversive attack. Through the repetition of what is repressed in relation to citational norms, subversion operates by giving a presence to those things that dominant discourses repress, a presence that disrupts citational norms. In so doing, citational norms have fewer opportunities to be repeated and the process of their repetition may also be exposed. As well, embracing the imperfect aspects of repetition itself offers further subversive possibilities, by exposing the repetition operation of dominant discourses and creating further non-dominant practices and expressions.

Working against the operation of dominant discourses in relation to autonomous activism is important for two main reasons. One, it allows for non-

dominant ways of being to exist, be practiced, and be developed. Two, countering dominant discourses erodes the ability of these discourses to justify interventions into autonomous communities that compromise the communities' ability to be autonomous, subversive, and functional. That is, if abject depictions are not associated with these abjected subjects and ways of being, and if dominant discourses do not hold a monopoly over positive associations, these sorts of justifications cannot persist.

The ability to practice non-dominant ways of being and to ward off external interventions is particularly important for autonomous forms of Indigenous activism. In the next chapter, I apply the concepts developed up to this point, and to the *Idle No More Movement* in order to understand the challenge that this Movement poses to dominant discourses, how that challenge is met, and strategies for countering covert, creative, and hidden dominant discursive practices – what Jeff Corntassel calls the 'colonial shape-shifter'.

Chapter 5

Indigenous Roots: The *Idle No More Movement* and Autonomous Gardens

Michael plans to turn our backyard into a pear orchard this summer. He would like to make cider. The remaining yard space is to be covered with an expansive deck. He won't admit that he is giving up, but Ava and I know better. We can tell he's tired (and possibly out of banned substances). Every once in a while I catch Ava looking out at the backyard with a small, victorious smile. At bedtime she tells me stories about our future orchard. She talks about baking pies for her teacher, bringing leftover fruit to homeless shelters, and learning to climb (and apparently swing between) the trees. She recently found out that plants feel, so for her part, she is going to offer hugs, nice talks, and singing to the orchard. One night, Ava confided that she's really happy that we are now growing something useful – something that feeds people.

Autonomous activism does the same thing orchards do – it grows something useful that nurtures people. I am therefore interested in understanding how get more autonomous gardeners and more thriving gardens. In this final chapter, I return to the main motivations of my dissertation – to understand and work against the silencing of autonomous activism which includes, but is not limited to, non-dominant ways of being (as discussed in Chapter One) within mainstream Canada. To this end, I apply my framework of subversion to the *Idle No More Movement*. I offer an interpretation of this movement as one that disrupts dominant discourses and is confronted with abjection. This grounds my discussion of the silencing of activism as something that is deeply rooted in a

variety of social practices within mainstream society. Therefore, in order for this silencing to be subverted, many more autonomous gardens are required so that non-dominant ways of being can take root and grow.

In the previous chapter, I argued that there is a discursive battle between dominant discourses and autonomous activism. On the one hand, dominant discourses rely on the repetition of citational norms and the repression of non-dominant ways of being. On the other hand, one of the things that autonomous activism does is revitalize non-dominant ways of being causing a disruption to the repetition of citational norms. These disruptions threaten dominant discourses and are, thus, deeply and directly subversive. In order to strengthen the subversive potential of autonomous activism, my framework emphasizes that activists need to work against abjection and to use subversive repetitions in order to sustain what is abject to dominant discourses.

In this chapter, I apply my framework of subversion to illustrate that the *Idle No More Movement* is acutely subversive to dominant discourses and also silenced within mainstream Canada. I focus on the *Idle No More Movement* for three reasons. First, the *Idle No More Movement* developed out of a desire for the type of autonomy that I explore in my dissertation (Alfred 2013). This autonomy calls for a revitalization of Indigenous ways of being and an eradication of the colonial relationship with the Canadian settler-state. Second, I am interested in explaining precisely what it is that makes these autonomous-based actions subversive and how this subversive potential might be strengthened. And, Third, I want to offer an interpretation for the silencing of First

Nations' communities – and activism – that has taken place and still takes place within mainstream Canada.

For example, the Canadian public appears to almost ignore the history of genocide and slavery that First Nations' communities experienced in the founding of Canada and remains largely complicit with the on-going conditions of oppression that First Nations' communities face. Examples of current conditions include, extreme poverty, human rights violations, over-incarceration, degradation of land claims, and an increasing number of murdered and missing women (Gilchrist 2010; Lavalee 2010; Pratt 2005; Salee 2006). When all of this is brought to mainstream Canada's attention, it is either quickly silenced or largely ignored. My framework allows me to illustrate that dominant discourses operate in such a way as to simultaneously repress First Nations individuals, communities, and ways of being and justify on-going oppression. Therefore, I apply my framework of subversion to explain how dominant discourses can be effectively subverted.

In order to offer an explanation of the subversive potential of the *Idle No More Movement*, and the silencing of activism, I engage in four inter-related discussions. In the first section, I discuss how the *Idle No More Movement* started, the subversive events associated with the Movement, and the autonomous objectives of the Movement. In section two, I examine the concept of 'colonial shape shifting' and the specific dominant discourses that the *Idle No More Movement* disrupts. In section three, I evaluate three types of events that took place in support of the *Idle No More Movement*. These discussions allow me

to more concretely identify the processes of a specific type of colonial shape shifting. That is, I offer a discussion of some of the ways the *Idle No More Movement* subverts this shape-shifter. In my fourth and final section, I discuss the silencing of First Nation communities within mainstream Canada and I argue that autonomous-based activist allied support is required in order to work against this silencing.

5.1 Autonomy and The *Idle No More Movement*

In a lecture given to the University of Melbourne on November 28th, 2013, Indigenous scholar Taiaiake Alfred spoke about the *Idle No More Movement* and revitalizing Indigenous ways of being. In this talk, Alfred honours the younger generation for initiating a quest to reclaim their genuine Indigenous selves. He observes that there is a “surge of energy on the part of younger people demanding an authentic representation of their voice in Native politics and in confrontation with the colonial reality” (2013). Alfred (2013) explains that in this journey for a more unadulterated Indigenous existence, the younger generation is critical of the Canadian government and of current forms of supposedly traditional First Nations structures. They are concerned that the Band Councils only appear to represent Indigenous ways of being, but in reality act within a colonial framework. This concern is not surprising given that Indigenous Band Councils derive their authority and funding from the Canadian government as outlined in the Indian Act. This Act is the object of major criticism for homogenizing and racializing Indigenous people within Canada, as well as,

imposing colonial forms of governance through the implementation of white supremacist, patriarchal, heteronormative structures that effectively erode Indigenous self-determination (Lawrence 2003, 2004). Alfred argues that the *Idle No More Movement* is a great example of resurgence where Indigenous ways of being are revitalized and the colonial relationship with the Canadian government is eroded.

Alfred (2013) argues that a central aspect of revitalizing Indigenous ways of being is a movement back to the land. He explains that, through colonization, land has been continually stripped from Indigenous communities, and with this removal Indigenous ways of being are repressed. That is to say, the colonial work of removing Indigenous people from their land and then destroying what land is left erodes the ability of First Nations people to connect with the land. While this removal took place through historical colonization, it continues today in the form of economic development that destroys the environment.

Removal from traditional lands and economic development threaten Indigenous identities and ways of being in two ways. First, there is a diminished ability and capacity to take care of the land. Alfred explains that many Indigenous knowledge systems are based on an inter-connected and reciprocal relationship to the land. For example, Wotherspoon (2010) discusses a Cree belief system whereby it is important for to act as a protector of the land. Second, the connections with the land and practices on the land and water can no longer pervasively take place. For example, pollution and destruction severely limit

capacities for fishing, hunting, and spiritual connection. As a result, protection of the land is a key element of the *Idle No More Movement*.

The continued removal of land from Indigenous communities through economic means is particularly evident in omnibus Bill C-45, which the Canadian government proposed on May 2nd, 2011. This Bill, later entitled the 'Jobs and Growth Act', effects a number of changes that remove barriers to resource extraction in Canada. Key amendments proposed by this Bill involve both eroding Indigenous Treaty Rights through such acts as modifying land management on First Nations reserves and removing a significant amount of environmental protections, such as the protection of hundreds of waterways in Canada. Bill C-45 overhauls two acts: the Navigable Waters Protection Act and the Indian Act. The Navigable Waters Protection Act is renamed The Navigation Protection Act. As this new name implies, the Act removes the requirement for environmental approval prior to implementation of development projects, such as laying gas pipelines that impact many waterways – many of which pass through First Nations lands. The Indian Act has been modified to make it easier for the federal government to control reserve land – including the extraction of resources.

In violation of Articles 19 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Bill C-45 was proposed and later passed by the Canadian government without consulting First Nations people. Wotherspoon (2013) argues that both the spirit of the Bill and the massive changes it entails contradict important laws found in many First Nations knowledge systems – particularly those that emphasize the importance of a protective and reciprocal

relationship between humans and the environment. In this respect, consider Cree Elder Dennis Thorne's (2013: 272) explanation that Cree law is not based on greed but rather on a responsibility to protect and respect "the earth and all ways of life." Likewise, another Cree Elder, Youngblood Henderson, notes that Cree law speaks of "harmony, trust, sharing and kindness . . . respect for the ecosystem . . . not power over it Aboriginal law is the law of speaking softly, walking humbly and acting compassionately" (cited in Wotherspoon 2013: 273). These elders maintain that the contents of Bill C-45, and the process of its development, are in direct opposition to important Indigenous laws and philosophies.

Bill C-45 serves an impetus for the formation of the *Idle No More Movement*. Four women from Saskatchewan, three Indigenous and one non-Indigenous – Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, and Sheelah McLean – decided that this Bill was completely unacceptable, and they were going to be 'idle no more'. While the bill itself serves as a rallying point, the underlying motivations for the four founding women of the movement involves the larger project of eroding a colonial relationship with the Canadian settler-state, including the structures of patriarchy and heterosexism that are imposed on Indigenous communities. As Scott Morgensen (2013) asserts, the *Idle No More Movement* is founded and led by women, works outside of Canadian settler-state recognition, honours traditional Indigenous practices, and erodes externally-imposed colonial conditions such as patriarchy.

Using social media, the female leaders of the movement brainstormed ideas on Facebook about how to stop the Bill. These efforts led to a teach-in in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, on November 10th, 2012. Presumably, due to the pervasiveness of social media, shared concerns amongst First Nations communities, and support from allies, this event sparked the *Idle No More Movement*, which quickly gained global support. At first, rallies, protests, and teach-ins were held in Manitoba and Alberta; soon after, similar events took place throughout Canada and the United States. These events included 'flash mobs' in the form of Indigenous Circle Dances and drumming in public spaces, as well as marches and blockades. Similar events and Days of Action called on all allies of the *Idle No More Movement* to hold events, protests, and demonstrations.

Despite nineteen months of massive protest, the violation of various Treaty declarations and United Nations Articles that address First Nations' rights regarding political processes and consultation regarding land development, on December 4th, 2012, the Bill C-45 was passed. This major drawback notwithstanding, the *Idle No More Movement* did not lose momentum. For example, on December 10th, 2012, an international Day of Action took place that garnered support from Indigenous people and allies across the United States, Europe, Australia, and South America (www.idlenomore.ca). On December 11th, 2012, Attawapiskat First Nations Elder, Theresa Spence, initiated a hunger strike in Ottawa to bring attention to the conditions of poverty her community lives with and in support of the *Idle No More Movement*. On March 24th, 2012, inspired by

the resurgence of First Nations ways of being, David Kawapit and many other Indigenous people trekked 1600 kilometres, in winter conditions, and arrived in Ottawa to raise awareness about the movement. Sylvia McAdams (www.idlenomore.ca) explains this continued support for the *Idle No More Movement* is an indication that “[i]t’s not just about legislation; it is about a call for a renewal of Indigenous identities and life-ways.”

A consistent discursive thread that connects the various events that make up the *Idle No More Movement* is that, from various Indigenous perspectives, there is not a ‘postcolonial’ reality; rather, colonialism currently manifests in the continued repression of First Nations cultures, knowledge, laws, and ways of being. In Canada, one-way that neo-colonialism exists is through the repression of various Indigenous ways of being. For example, there has been ongoing erosion of hunting and gathering practices through industrial development and mining extraction on Indigenous land.

Bringing together the ideas of reconnecting with the land, severing ties with colonial relationships, and reclaiming Indigenous ways of being, the *Idle No More* activists called for a Day of Action on January 11th, 2013 because this was the day that there was a meeting scheduled between The Assembly of First Nations leaders and the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper. Thousands of Indigenous people and allies gathered outside of Parliament Hill. The protestors’ goal was to block the Assemble of First Nations’ members from entering the meeting with Harper. Taiiaki Alfred (2013) describes the vision that activists within the *Idle No More Movement* had about what might take place that

day: A line of Cree women Elders would stand in the pathway of the Indigenous leaders. Drummers and dancers would perform behind them. Then, the Elders would invite the leaders to not enter into the Canadian parliament and not continue with a colonial relationship, but instead to join their people outside this building and reconnect with Indigenous ways of being. As Alfred (2013) notes, as compared with that vision, on January 11th, 2013 the dancers danced, the drummers drummed, and the Elders lined up. In what is seen by some within the movement as a sad moment, the Assembly of First Nations' leaders ignored the requests of the Elders. Several Indigenous leaders walked through the line of Elders directly into the meeting, while others entered the meeting through the backdoor.

The events of January 11th, 2013 demonstrate important ideas in relation to autonomy. Activists within this movement pleaded with Indigenous leaders not to engage with the Canadian government or colonial systems – in all the shapes and forms that this engagement can take. Instead, they called for a focus to be placed on Indigenous ways of being autonomous from colonial practices. Placed in terms of my framework of subversion, activists within the *Idle No More Movement* are trying to bring back what had been repressed by working to disengage – be autonomous – from colonial institutions, practices, and systems. Integral to being able erode a colonial relationship is the ability to subvert what Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Cornstassel (2005) call the colonial shape-shifter.

5.2 The Colonial Shape Shifter

Canada does not exist in a 'post-colonial' situation, but rather colonialism – and its inherent brutality – continues to persist (Alfred 2013; Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Lawrence 2003, 2005). Colonialism is currently discursively enacted through such practices as colonial shape shifting. Alfred and Corntassel (2005) use the term colonial shape shifting to refer to actions that appear to be either neutral or positive, but enact control over Indigenous people. These two authors are adamant that “we live in an era of post-modern imperialism and manipulations by shape shifting colonial powers; the instruments of domination are evolving and inventing new methods to erase indigenous histories and sense of place” (2005: 601). Three examples of these new methods of control as enacted by the Canadian government are: (1) dominant discourses that purport to be working for the 'common good' while only serving colonial elites; (2) economic development strategies that are asserted to benefit everyone, while stripping Indigenous people from their land and making the wealthy richer; and, (3) offers of amnesty to militant Indigenous protestors in order to co-opt their movements. Alfred and Corntassel argue that, “while some of the shape-shifting tactics may on the surface appear to be subtle, they, like other forms of brutal oppression, threaten the very survival of Indigenous communities” (2005: 602). The point here is that even though colonial shape-shifting actions are presented as co-operative, these actions are greatly harmful to Indigenous people.

Underlying colonial shape-shifting practices are narratives that assert powerful messages of control and destruction. In other words, the colonial

discourses of the Canadian settler-state assert that Indigenous communities can either assimilate to mainstream Canadian society or face eradication (Alfred 2013). It is this underlying narrative that shapes the discourses behind Bill C-45. According to Wotherspoon (2013), Bill C-45 represents the unilateral decision-making characteristic of colonial relationships. The message delivered by the Canadian government is that there is no place for Indigenous ways of being in aggressive capitalist growth – essentially calling for the demise of Indigenous communities, cultures, and identities.

In order to justify the narrative of ‘assimilate or die’, racist depictions of First Nations’ people are regularly presented to mainstream Canadian society. Several authors discuss the racist and stereotyped narratives that permeate Canadian mainstream discourses in relation to First Nations people (Alfred and Lana 2005; Wotherspoon 2013). According to these scholars, such racist narratives blame First Nations communities for their own oppression. State-led discourses assert that interventions into Indigenous communities, which erode these communities, are necessary in order to ensure the safety of all citizens. As well, oppressed communities are blamed for the brutal conditions with which they must live. Considering the harm that racist narratives and colonial shape-shifting practices create for First Nations’ communities, autonomy from and subversion of these dominant discourses is important.

My autonomous framework of subversion can build on these understandings of how colonial shape shifting unfolds to provide insights into how dominant colonial discourses operate through key discursive repressions.

The types of things that are repressed are not incidental. As my framework explains, dominant discourses assert dominance and control by seeking to project abject depictions onto abject entities, by separating ontological categories, and by disassociating from abject characterizations. The repressions enacted by dominant discourses work to reinstate a colonial relationship between the Canadian settler-state and First Nations communities.

Furthermore, tying abject depictions to abjected subjects and ways of being has the effect of justifying oppression. State-led interventions come to be asserted as essential because abjected individuals and practices are cast as 'criminal', 'sinful', 'fearsome', and in need of assistance. Using colonial shape-shifting practices that are asserted as helpful, co-operative, or even neutral, the government can in fact reinstate a relationship of control that seeks to enact an eradication of Indigenous communities and ways of being while framing their work as being in the service of Indigenous people.

It is not just the straightforward repetition of these depictions that works to project abject depictions onto abjected subjects and ways of being, but also the numerous ways that abjection is executed. These ways include discourses that deal with such concepts as the sublime, sin, fear/phobia, and eroticization that permeate mainstream talk, texts, social interactions, identities, and inner psychological processes. Attaching these depictions is a deeply ingrained part of mainstream culture that produces a violent exclusion and simultaneously blames oppression on the oppressed. Adding to this, the dominant discursive practice of asserting ontological separations fixes abject depictions onto abjected individuals

and ways of being, while holding monopoly over positive attributes at the opposite end of the categorical binary. This has the effect of creating the illusion that oppression and privilege, as they currently exist, are somehow inevitable, legitimate, and justifiable. That is, dominant colonial discourses, such as those that emanate from the Canadian settler-state, work to assume this particular shape of helpful authority, in part, by enacting powerful abjection practices while hiding these efforts and working to disassociate from abject depictions.

In this context, First Nations' communities are framed as lost, threatening, and in need of assistance. The Canadian government is asserted as the legitimate, wise, all-knowing, helpful authority that is required to intervene to save First Nations' communities. This is all done by repressing any complications or interconnections between these two entities – i.e. through an assertion of these depictions as binaries. These depictions, the binaries they enact, and the repression of their inter-connections taps into the existent dominant discursive practices that already hold these depictions and work from the same repressions. For example, these associations come to be supported through mainstream media stories, popular films that represent First Nations' people in static and stereotypical ways, racist Halloween costumes, school curriculum, criminal justice practices, and the psychological processes of privileged individuals. All of these discursive practices work from the logic of separation and are permeated with various narratives based on such ideas as impurity, criminality, sin, fear, and eroticization. In this sense, the colonial shape-shifter is a tricky and deeply pervasive practice indeed.

5.3 Subverting the Colonial Shape Shifter

Autonomy from the Canadian settler-state through the revitalization of Indigenous ways of being assists in subverting the repression of what is abject to dominant discourses. This happens in three inter-connected ways. First, the connection between what is rendered abject and abject depictions is broken down. Indigenous identities and ways of being, lived and practiced through Indigenous knowledge structures, contradict the negative abject depictions doled out by dominant discourses. Second, the binaries asserted through the operation of dominant discourses are broken apart and start to reveal this operation. Abject depictions as only tied to abjected entities are dislodged and become free to be associated with dominant discourses. Finally, the colonial shape shifter starts to be revealed through the erosion of justifications for oppression that blame those who are oppressed. I take a closer look at how the *Idle No More Movement* disrupts the colonial shape-shifter by examining three events within the Movement: the Journey of the Nishyuu, the hunger strike of Theresa Spence, and circle dances in malls. These three events touch on the three subversive tactics I have just detailed. In each event I examine at how *Idle No More* activists disrupt dominant discourses, the abjection practices enacted by the Canadian government and mainstream media to repress this disruption, and possible ideas from my framework of subversion about how activists might work to counter abjection.

5.3.i The *Journey of the Nishiyuu* – Troubling Abject Depictions

The theoretical perspectives developed thus far allow me to interpret the events surrounding David Kawapit's trek as particularly threatening to the operation of dominant discourses. Kawapit revitalizes what dominant discourses seek to repress and he does so by working from the type of autonomy asserted by scholar Taiaiake Alfred that derives knowledge, identity, and practice from Indigenous ways of being distanced from dominant discursive control. As already discussed in Chapter One, the *Journey of the Nishiyuu*, included stops in a number of communities that promoted a revisiting of Indigenous ways of being and unity amongst First Nations participants, who numbered anywhere between 200 and 400 people. Trek participants spoke about the healing that occurred for many during the journey with regards to the loss of friends, family and missing Aboriginal women in Canada, for example. Additionally, First Nations across Canada praised the youth for their dedication, commitment, spirituality, accomplishment, and for providing hope for future relations with the Canadian government. For example, Elder Theresa Spence spoke about how the youth reconnected with the land and sought to make the importance of this connection known to the broader population: "It shows that they're really proud of their land and telling everybody ... the land is there for them and they really want to protect the land. The journey was really a commitment for them to be strong about something they're determined about" (APTN 2013).

On March 25th, 2013, the Journey of the Nishiyuu ended on Parliament Hill in the absence of Prime Minister Stephen Harper to meet the trekkers.

Presumably, it would have made for a captivating media narrative and good publicity for Prime Minister Harper to greet these youth. As a result, it is important to consider what was at stake if the Prime Minister met with the trekkers. From the perspective of my autonomous framework of subversion, dominant meaning structures would have been shaken by the plight and related efforts of the trekkers. Specifically, widespread public knowledge of this journey had the potential to disrupt current oppressive stereotypes of First Nations youth as runaways, drug abusers, lost, and in need of help.

From the perspective of my framework, the *Journey of the Nishiyuu* unhinges abject depictions from abjected subjects and ways of being. The Journey defies, opposes, complicates, and contradicts racist narratives about Aboriginal youth that pervade mainstream Canadian discourses. These negative depictions focus on drug use, transiency, and poverty while ignoring structural inequalities (McCarty 2006; Wotherspoon 2013). Participants in the journey challenge these depictions via actions that can only be described as impressive, accountable, responsible, and committed. David Kawapit and the trekkers walked onto Parliament Hill representing the very things the Canadian settler-government seeks to repress – individuals that dominant discourses work to render abject unhinged from abject depictions. When read critically, the journey also drew attention to many of the structural inequalities that impact the Indigenous trekkers' lives and communities such as inadequate housing, poverty, lack of access to resources and exploitation of their reserve lands.

In this context, Prime Minister Harper's absence can be read as an act of abjection. Rather than meet with the trekkers – an act that may have contributed to communicating positive narratives within mainstream society – Harper was not present on Parliament Hill that day. This had the impact of negating and ignoring the *Journey of the Nishyuu*. Negation is an effective abjection practice in this situation for three reasons. One, it would be challenging in this context to reassert abject depictions onto these youth as the journey is an outstanding example of all that contradicts abject depictions. Therefore, it is easier to ignore the arrival of the walkers and suppress the story of the trek within mainstream media. Two, negation, denial, and silencing are powerful responses that work effectively to exclude what is rendered abject. Three, the *Journey of the Nishyuu's* arrival in Ottawa and visibility within mainstream media was a time-limited event. Had the youths' journey somehow aroused a more sustained media presence, a stronger threat to dominant discourses may have surfaced, necessitating further abjection measures.

5.3.ii The Hunger Strike of Theresa Spence – Sustaining the Abject

Theresa Spence is the Chief of the Attawapiskat First Nation. She went on her hunger strike on December 11th, 2012 in support of her community and the *Idle No More Movement*. Her intention was to bring attention to the impoverished conditions of her community. Her specific demand was to meet with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Governor General David Johnston to discuss the Treaty relationship between First Nations and the Canadian government.

Spence's hunger strike represented a powerful counter-narrative to racist discourses in two ways. First, she unhinged abject depictions of Indigenous people by showcasing an act of sacrifice, determination, strength, and leadership. Second, she also unhinged positive depictions from a dominant institution. Chief Spence drew attention to the oppression of Indigenous communities and linked this oppression to the failures of the Canadian government. Her hunger strike brought the conditions her community lives with – such as poverty, poor housing, lack of adequate resources – into mainstream society. Chief Spence located her fasting body in close proximity to Parliament Hill, rendering visible within dominant society the linkage between the oppressed Indigenous reality and the oppressor.

Unlike the *Journey of the Nishiyuu* the hunger strike of Chief Theresa Spence involved a sustained presence in mainstream media. She set up camp on Victoria Island close to Parliament Hill. She is an individual whom dominant colonial discourses seek to render abject but who appeared to be separated from abject depictions. Garnering weeks-long mainstream media attention, her prolonged presence may have posed a significant threat to dominant discourses. Therefore, more direct abjection efforts were deployed against Chief Spence than the youth trekkers.

Her hunger strike resulted in various demeaning narratives being spread about Spence: issues regarding her credibility surfaced, including allegations of financial dishonesty, of faking her hunger strike, and of being counter-productive to the *Idle No More Movement*. Specifically, a federal audit was leaked to the

mainstream media which was interpreted as evidence that Chief Spence had mismanaged the finances of her community from 2005 to 2011: millions of government-transferred dollars were said to be unaccounted for (Wotherspoon 2013). Mainstream media also represented this audit in a way that discredited other First Nations Chiefs (Wotherspoon 2013). This discrediting also framed First Nations' communities as in need of assistance by the federal government.

Chief Spence's response to these allegations did not receive as much media attention as the demonizing narratives that sought to discredit her. As Wotherspoon (2013) explains, these narratives also were generalized to all First Nations individuals, thereby highlighting entrenched racism. Specifically, Wotherspoon argues that "denigration of Indigenous people as lazy, apathetic, and indifferent both ignores and reinforces the impact of longstanding experiences of systemic discrimination and colonization. Such racialized interpretations continue colonial practices ("blaming the victim", "divide and conquer") that criticize Indigenous people for their impoverishment while embracing the misguided premise that Canada is a meritocracy in which social and economic status are presumed to have little to do with race, class and gender in the reproduction of social inequality" (2013: 32).

Taking this critique seriously means that it is worthwhile to take a closer look at what happens when stereotypical, racist narratives appear in mainstream media coverage. Drawing on Butler's (1993) concepts through my framework of subversion, the repetition of racist discourses in mainstream media can be understood as a citational performance. Such stereotypes are cited norms that

gain authority through repetition and a perpetual deferral of their authority. For dominant discursive practices, citing or referencing assumed meanings is enough to re-establish negative depictions. The above described mainstream media narratives that focused on assertions of corruption while ignoring counter-claims can be understood as attempts to re-establish abject depictions onto a subject that dominant discourses seek to render abject.

What these racist narratives do is re-establish abject depictions onto Spence and Indigenous communities by blaming them for the conditions in and with which they live. Within the context of the operation of dominant discourses, it takes only a seemingly quick reference to citational norms – in this case racist narratives – to re-establish their authority. That is to say, racist narratives are not questioned or pervasively unpacked by mainstream society but rather obtain legitimacy through a citational reference.

5.3.iii Flash Mobs – Inter-connections

A slightly different response took place in relation to Flash mob Circle Dances, which offer another example of *Idle No More* subversive practices within mainstream contexts. Flash mobs are a popular Western trend whereby a group of people suddenly performs a choreographed dance routine in public spaces – on street corners, in front of Museums, or in shopping malls for example. The *Idle No More* activists used this trend to reinsert a traditional Indigenous practice within mainstream spaces in order to bring attention to the movement and its goals. For the most part, these flash mob dances took place in Western public

spaces such as malls and busy street intersections and included traditional circle dances, drumming, and singing. The majority of these events occurred during the Christmas shopping season of 2012 in cities such as Toronto, Winnipeg, Cornwall, Ottawa, Minnesota, and Saskatoon. Within these spaces, protest signs often appeared, and sometimes group marches ensued directly before and/or after these events. The dances themselves tended to last approximately 10-20 minutes and included up to 2000 participants (www.idlenomore.ca).

From the perspective of my framework, these dances offer a display of inter-connections between entities separated by dominant discourses as a marginalized cultural practice (i.e. circle dances) are situated within privileged mainstream spaces. Placed in slightly different terms, flash mobs are examples of the placement of First Nations people, practices, and beliefs into locations claimed and heavily populated by mainstream individuals and, as such, they challenge the norms and practices of these venues. Similar to Carla Taunton's (2011) assertion that Indigenous performance art can be understood, in part, as a way for First Nations' communities to intervene in colonially entrenched spaces, these flash mobs inserted an Indigenous reality into a mainstream, colonial, capitalist venue.

The discursively separated practices of circle dances and shopping come to be inter-connected in ways that trouble dominant discourses. First, circle dances in malls disturb dominant discursive conceptions of which people and practices belong to these locations. Second, these Flash Mobs drew the direct visual inter-connection between settler subjects engaged in a privileged capitalist practice

and an oppressed Indigenous reality. Third, these circle dances highlight the erasure of Indigenous influences in mainstream colonial spaces as this cultural practice enacted in a mall comes to be seen as not part of the practices within this space but rather a momentary event that stands out. Fourth, these events used a mainstream phenomenon – flash mobs – to display a traditional Indigenous practice in order to bring attention to First Nations’ conditions of oppression. This indicates that a mainstream practice needed to be utilized to garner an Indigenous presence within a colonial space. It also interconnects an Indigenous reality with a popular Western trend and complicates how this trend may be deployed. Finally, the need for *Idle No More* activists to draw on a traditional dance – instead of being able to readily utilize an Indigenous practice that has been cultivated over time by Indigenous people – in order to be understood as an Indigenous demonstration in these spaces, brings awareness to the historical exclusion of Indigenous identity in urban/suburban venues. Just like traditional Indigenous artifacts displayed in museums that ties First Nation art to human history and not current mainstream culture (Jessup 2002), these flash mobs had to draw on traditional practices in order to be understood by settlers. In all of these ways, the flash mob circle dances blurred dominant lines of meaning by inter-connecting separated binaries and highlighting the erasure of Indigenous reality within mainstream contexts.

Circle dances performed in malls over the Christmas shopping season enacted an interesting blurring of dominant discursive boundaries. Similar to police responses to street theatre protests involving clowns and fairies that

Graeber (2002) describes, there seemed to be a lack of an available response to the circle dances. This may be due to the time-limited nature of these events and/or a lack of abjection practices to draw on in this situation. Circle dance flash mobs in malls may be so effectively autonomous from the operation of dominant discourses that disciplinary measures have yet to be developed. Perhaps if these moments were continuously repeated and lengthened, more attempts would be made to repress them.

Overall, the *Journey of the Nishyuu*, the hunger strike of Theresa Spence, and flash mob Circle Dances represent an eruption of what dominant discourses seek to repress within mainstream society. The trekkers and Spence's hunger strike unhinged abject depictions from Indigenous subjects and the flash mob Circle dances highlighted interconnections between Indigenous practices and mainstream spaces. In response to temporally limited events of the trekkers' arrival in Ottawa and flash mobs, abjection appears like negation. Theresa Spence's more sustained presence surfaced harsher abjection practices that drew on racist narratives to re-establish abject depictions onto Indigenous communities. As a result of this analysis, sustaining repressed ways of being within mainstream society appears to pose a bigger threat to dominant discourses than momentary events.

Recall from the previous chapter that there are several ways that dominant discourses continue to be practiced in relation to autonomous activism. A key practice includes capitalizing on the marginalization of autonomous communities as providing a constitutive outside for dominant discourses. In this

context, abject depictions are more easily projected onto these abjected subjects and ways of being. The above events illustrate a movement against this marginalization that is effectively disruptive, garnering abjection responses. The ideas of my framework of subversion suggest that there is a powerful need for dominant discourses to keep Indigenous people marginalized in order to successfully carry out vital dominant discursive tasks.

These examples of subversive practices, and the moves to suppress them, also illustrate the importance of repeating and sustaining what is abject to dominant discourses. This is a challenge, however, as abjection practices are pervasive and take place in a variety of forms – social interactions, institutional practices, language, knowledge, and psychological processes that permeate and constitute mainstream society. Counteracting these abjections requires more than subversive events enacted by oppressed individuals. Non-indigenous subjects need to engage in autonomous subversive efforts in order to erode the operation of dominant discourses that exclude, repress, and oppress a large number of individuals. Overall, there continues to be significant challenges facing this type of subversion: the pervasiveness and multiple forms of abjection, the ease by which repetition of norms enacts citational authority, and the difficulty of sustaining visibility for that which is repressed within mainstream society. These are the underlying challenges facing activists currently engaged in this covert discursive battle.

5.4 Conclusion – Subverting Silence

When I think seriously about the land that my house resides on, I understand in greater depth the importance of subverting dominant discourses. Apart from the on-going grunt work of maintaining norms, and the more fruitful option of growing pears, a much deeper issue is at stake – ‘my’ property rests on stolen ground. Every night that I am home, I sit on my back step (even in winter) and I look up at the trees. I am grateful for the land that I live, play, and work on. I often think about how I came to have this privilege. I consider what was sacrificed so I can sit on my back porch looking up at huge trees. I am aware of the history of this land. I am also aware of the idea that if colonialism did not take place, an alternative history could have existed – one that inevitably would not situate me on this property but rather descendants of First Nations. Grass probably would not have been planted. The eco-system may have remained intact. That is, the privilege that I hold, residing on the land that is ‘legally’ mine, is borne out of a brutal history of colonialism. Ava’s innocence in sensing that not all is right with the suburban landscape represents a crack in a normative discourse – a discourse that seeks to erase this colonial history and current Indigenous reality within mainstream Canadian society.

These cracks are important as they render visible hidden issues of oppression. As Ava watches Michael maintain a norm through exclusion, she senses injustice. Digging deeper into the history of the land we live on, it is understood that an eco-system has been eradicated. Going further into a colonial history and a current reality, I can tie my daily existence of privilege to brutality

and oppression. All of the dominant discursive acts that maintain norms through repetition and exclusion distance settlers from this reality. It is therefore important to work erode dominant discourses on multiple levels.

As the responses to the events within the *Idle No More Movement* indicate attention that brings this colonial history and current reality into mainstream contexts – through various forms of activism – is swiftly silenced. What my framework of subversion explains is that dominant discourses that repress activism within mainstream society are pervasive. Butler's (1990/1999, 1993) ideas give an account of the exclusionary and violent operation of norms. My reading of Kristeva (1982) indicates that abjection takes multiple forms. Questioning norms – such as wondering why only grass can grow on lawns – starts the process of eroding these pervasive, repressive dominant discourses. My framework yields a subversive strategy that supports this erosion process through performatively repeating what is abject to dominant discourses.

Deploying these types of subversive strategies is important because of the pervasive nature of dominant discourses, which include various forms of abjection, cause and support the repression of activism. For example, it is not just a lack of media attention and Harper's failure to meet with David Kawapit that suppressed this subversive act. It is also the general Canadian public's acceptance of the poor media coverage of the trek and the Prime Minister's absence on Parliament Hill that day. Dominant discursive practices that reiterate norms and repress through abjection pervade mainstream society on various levels – such as institutional practices, social enactments, knowledge production,

and psychological processes. These on-going repressive practices readily accept actions by the Canadian state that repress First Nations' organizing. Already within mainstream Canadian society, First Nations' people are framed as threatening or lost. Already dominant discourses within Canada assert an Indigenous identity that is abject. Events such as those within the *Idle No More Movement* that surface the abject, that unhinge abject depictions from abjected subjects, that feature inter-connections, and that link abject associations with dominant institutions are antithetical to the dominant discursive practices that already, continually, and pervasively take place. Acts to repress what is abject to dominant discourses are therefore somewhat easily accepted as they reinstate a dominant discursive equilibrium.

Up to this point, I have examined how to strengthen non-dominant ways of being, autonomy, and subversion within activist movements. Now, I want to offer the same analysis of mainstream society. That is, I want to break through another binary: the binary that only attaches autonomous activism to autonomous spaces and dominant discourses to mainstream society. I want to break through this binary because due to the pervasiveness of dominant discourses, it is imperative that autonomous activism is taken up in mainstream societal contexts, in order to subvert the silencing of activism.

It is important to note that, although dominant discourses are pervasive within Western culture, they are not fully saturated within mainstream society. That is, just as dominant discourses are sometimes practiced in autonomous spaces, non-dominant ways of being are also enacted within privileged spaces.

Importantly, in relation to my framework of subversion, there are practices that regularly unhinge abject depictions from abjected subjects, that focus on inter-connections between asserted binaries, and that associate abjection and abject depictions with dominant discourses.

Practices that already take place to repeat what is abject to dominant discourses may involve actions that directly support Indigenous activism within mainstream contexts – as well as – actions that take place in relation of contexts that tear away at the repressive operation of dominant discourses. For example, within scientific discourses on sex, there are medical interventions that practice the norm of assigning either a male or female sex to people born as inter-sexed (Fausto-Sterling 2008). However, there is also scientific research that understands that approximately four percent of the population is born inter-sexed and that there is no medical necessity – no health reason – why interventions need to be put in place to re-assign an inter-sexed person to a male or female sex (Fausto-Sterling 2008). The medical practice of assigning an inter-sexed person as either male or female is dominant but within the medical field there is dissent regarding this view. As well, what is considered abject to dominant discourses is not neatly, completely, and easily recognized as such by everyone within mainstream culture. For example, while men wearing dresses or walking while swishing their hips may not be recognized as viably male within certain normative situations, there are communities and individuals who understand otherwise. Likewise, while women are not considered viable ‘womanly’ while leading in certain contexts, others have held vastly different points of view. These

are the ways that what is abject to dominant discourse are already being repeated within mainstream society that can be tapped into. These acts start to erode the underlying dominant discursive mechanisms that lead to exclusionary oppression and the silencing of activism.

In order to further support this erosion, individuals within dominant culture can deploy the strategies of autonomous activism that are discussed in the previous chapter. A self-reflective process can take place to examine personal processes of abjection and this can be used to counter these internal responses. Non-dominant ways of being that already exist within mainstream society can be supported. The pervasive practice of abjection can be used against itself as these various repressions offer many avenues for one to work subversively. Assisting with this dissident work is that abjection tends to be a fairly strong reaction and therefore somewhat easily marked. All the ways that Kristeva (1982) illustrates the abject and abjection can be used in these efforts. Work can be done to evoke the abject. There are numerous ways that autonomous activism can and should be taken up in mainstream contexts. There is a real need for ally support within dominant society in order to work against the silencing and repression of activism.

I understand my dissertation to offer an analytical gardening tool kit with suggestions on how to nurture an effective autonomous practice. I offer an explanation of how autonomous activism can go about supporting non-dominant ways of being similar to how a gardener would tend to her plants. I provide ways of understanding how autonomous activism is silenced and how to work against

this repression – just like flowers for example that require shelter from harsh winds and protection from trampling animals. I overall suggest that more repetition of what is abject to dominant discourses takes place; that is, more autonomous gardens need to be cultivated in specific ways. I also indicate that this type of activism needs to take place on multiple levels as what appears to be the mere maintenance of a norm supports the overall dominant discursive practice of repressing activism and the visibility of oppression within mainstream contexts. In the end, like Ava, I advocate for the dandelions, for the planting of orchards, for starting the process sustaining activism within mainstream society, and for growing something that is effectively subversive.

References

- Alfred, Taiaiake. 2013. "Being and Becoming Indigenous: Resurgence Against Contemporary Colonialism" *The Narrm Oration*. Melbourne Institute for Indigenous Development at The University of Melbourne.
- Alfred, Taiaiake, and Lana Lowe. 2005. *Warrior societies in contemporary indigenous communities*. Ipperwash Inquiry.
- Alfred, Taiaiake, and Jeff Corntassel. 2005. "Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism". *Government and Opposition* 40.4: 597-614.
- Alfred, Taiaiake. 2002. "Sovereignty." *A Companion to American Indian History*. 460-474.
- Alfred, Taiaiake. 1999. *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Aboriginal Peoples Network. 2013. *Journey of Nishiyuu walkers' names now 'etched' into 'history of this country'*.
- Anderson, John. 2013. "Idle No More." *Social Policy* 43.1
- Applebaum, Barbara. 2004 "Social Justice Education, Moral Agency, and the Subject of Resistance." *Educational Theory* 54.1: 59-72.
- Atkinson, Catherine. 2012. "Indigenous Youth on Epic Journey to Ottawa Deserve Attention and Respect". Rabble.
- Barad, Karen. 2003. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28(3): 801-831.
- Barker, Adam J., and Jenny Pickerill. 2012. "Radicalizing Relationships to and through Shared Geographies: Why Anarchists Need to Understand Indigenous Connections to Land and Place." *Antipode* 44.5: 1705-25.
- Bell, Vikki. 1999. "Mimesis as Cultural Survival Judith Butler and Anti-Semitism." *Theory, Culture & Society* 16.2: 133-61.
- Borgerson, Janet. 2005. "Judith Butler: On Organizing Subjectivities." *The Sociological Review* 53.s1: 63-79.
- Boucher, Geoff. 2006. "The Politics of Performativity: A Critique of Judith Butler." *Parrhesia* 1: 112-41.

- Bowie, Ryan. 2013. "Theorizing a Resurgent Rights Praxis in Environmental Management by Indigenous Communities in Canada." *Victoria*. **Need p#
- Braidotti, Rosi. 1994. *Nomadic subjects: Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*. Columbia University Press.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 1991. *Patterns of Dissonance*. New York: Polity Press.
- Brickell, Chris. 2005. "Masculinities, Performativity, and Subversion A Sociological Reappraisal." *Men and Masculinities* 8.1: 24-43.
- Butler, Judith. 2009. *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?*. London: Verso.
- Butler, Judith, and Gayatri Chakravorty. 2007. *Who Sings the Nation-State?*. New York: Seagull Books.
- Butler, Judith. 2006. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 2004. "Bodies and Power Revisited." *Feminism and the Final Foucault*: 183-94.
- Butler, Judith, and William E. Connolly. 2000. "Politics, Power and Ethics: A Discussion between Judith Butler and William Connolly." *Theory & Event* 4.2
- Butler, Judith, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. 2000. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. Verso.
- Butler, Judith. 1999. "Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures." *Theory Culture and Society* 16: 11-20.
- Butler, Judith. 1990/1999. *Gender Trouble*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1998. "Subjects of sex/gender/desire." *Feminism and Politics* (1998): 273-91.
- Butler, Judith. 1997. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford University Press.
- Butler, Judith. 1997. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1997. "Merely Cultural." *Social Text*. 52/53: 265-77.

- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies That Matter*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. "Lana's" Imitation": Melodramatic Repetition and the Gender Performative." *Genders* 9: 1-18.
- Cairns, Alan. 2011. *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Chambers, Samuel A., and Terrell Carver. 2008. *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Chatterton, Paul, and Jenny Pickerill. 2010. "Everyday activism and transitions towards post-capitalist worlds." *Transactions of the institute of British Geographers* 35.4: 475-490.
- Chesters, Graeme, and Ian Welsh. 2005. "Complexity and Social Movement (s) Process and Emergence in Planetary Action Systems." *Theory, Culture & Society* 22.5: 187-211.
- Chester, Graeme, and Ian Welsh. 2006. *Complexity and Social Movements: Multitudes at the Edge of Chaos*. Routledge.
- Coburn, Elaine. 2013. "Indigenous Research as Resistance." *Socialist Studies* 52.
- Cohn, Jesse. 2002. "What is Postanarchism "Post"?" *Postmodern Culture* 13.1.
- Comack, Elizabeth, and Gillian Balfour. 2004. *The Power to Criminalize: Violence, Inequality and the Law*. Fernwood Publication.
- Cuninghame, Patrick. 2010. "Autonomism as a Global Social Movement." *Working USA* 13.4: 451-64.
- Davies, Bronwyn. 2007. *Judith Butler in Conversation: Analyzing the Texts and Talk of Everyday Life*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Day, Richard JF. 2004. "From Hegemony to Affinity: The Political Logic of the Newest Social Movements." *Cultural Studies* 18.5: 716-48.
- Day, Richard JF. 2005. *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*. London: Pluto Press.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. [1949] 1989. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books.

- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press.
- Deutscher, Penelope. 1992. "The evanescence of masculinity: Deferral in Saint Augustine's Confessions and some thoughts on its bearing on the sex/gender debate." *Australian Feminist Studies* 7.15 (1992): 41-56.
- Disch, Lisa. 1999. "Judith Butler and the Politics of the Performative". *Political Theory*. 27:545.
- Escobar, Arturo, and Sonia E. Alvarez. 1992. *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2008. *Myths of gender: Biological theories about women and men*. Basic Books.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 1993. "The five sexes." *The Sciences*. 33.2: 20-24.
- Fee, Margery. 2012. "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada." *Canadian Literature*. 215: 6-10. *CBCA Reference & Current Events*.
- Foucault, Michel. 1969. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Random House.
- Foucault, Michel. 1970. *The Order of Things*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*. Random House LLC.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. "Two Lectures." Pp. 78-108 in C. Gordon (ed.) *Power/Knowledge*. Toronto: Random House of Canada, Ltd.
- Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8:777-795.
- Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1991. "Governmentality." Pp. 87-104 in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1995. "False Antitheses: A Response to Seyla Benhabib and Judith Butler." *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* 71: 26-8.
- Froehling, Oliver. 1997. "The Cyberspace "war of Ink and Internet" in Chiapas, Mexico." *Geographical Review* 87.2: 291-307.

- Gilchrist, Kristen. 2010. "'Newsworthy' Victims? Exploring differences in Canadian local press coverage of missing/murdered Aboriginal and White women." *Feminist media studies* 10.4: 373-390.
- Graeber, David. 2012. *Inside occupy*. Campus Verlag, 2012.
- Graeber, David, and Gustaaf Houtman. 2012. "The Occupy Movement and debt: An interview with David Graeber". *Anthropology Today* 28.5: 17-18.
- Graeber, David. 2002. "The New Anarchists." *New Left Review* 13.1: 61-73.
- Grosz, Elizabeth A., et al. 1998. "The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell." *Diacritics* 28.1: 19-42.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 1995. *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. New York: Routledge.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 1999. "Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigations for a Possible Alliance." *Australian Feminist Studies* 14: 32-45.
- Halberstam, Judith. 1993. "Imagined Violence/Queer Violence: Representation, Rage, and Resistance." *Social Text*. 37:187-201.
- Hall, Terrence. 2013. "The Art of Youth Resistance and Inspiration: Nishiyuu Journey Across Snowy Canada." *Cultural Survival Quarterly*. 8-9.
- Heidegger, Martin, 1998. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hey, Valerie. 2006. "The Politics of Performative Resignification: Translating Judith Butler's Theoretical Discourse and its Potential for a Sociology of Education." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27.4: 439-57.
- Hekman, Susan. 2000. "Beyond Identity: Feminism, Identity and Identity Politics." *Feminist Theory* 13:289-308.
- Houlgate, Stephen. 2005. *Introduction to Hegel : Freedom, Truth, and History*. 2nd ed. ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Houlgate, Stephen. 2006. *Opening of Hegel's Logic: From being to Infinity*. West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2006.
- Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *This Sex Which is Not One*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Inman, Derek, Stefaan Smis, and Dorothee Cambou. 2013. "We Will Remain Idle no More": The Shortcomings of Canada's 'Duty to Consult' indigenous Peoples." *Goettingen Journal of International Law* 5.1: 251-85.
- Jessup, Lynda and Shanon Bagg. 2002. *On Aboriginal Representation in the Gallery*. Canadian Museum of Civilization.
- Jagger, Gill. 2008. *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics, Social Change and the Power of the Performative*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Kino-nda-niimi Collective. 2014. *The Winter We Danced Voices: From the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement*. ARP Books.
- Kirby, Vicki. 2006. *Judith Butler: Live Theory*. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Kirby, Vicki. 2002. "When all that is Solid Melts into Language: Judith Butler and the Question of Matter." *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 7.4: 265-80.
- Kirsch, Max H. 2002. *Queer Theory and Social Change*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Krull, Catherine. 2011. "Privileging the Nuclear Family Model: Moving beyond Essentialisms, Universalisms and Binaries." In Krull and Sempruchs (Eds) *Demystifying the Family/Paid Work Contradiction: Challenges and Possibilities*, University of British Columbia Press. Pp. 11-30
- Lavallee, Lynn F., and Jennifer M. Poole. 2010. "Beyond recovery: Colonization, health and healing for Indigenous people in Canada." *International journal of mental health and addiction* 8.2 (2010): 271-281.
- Lawrence, Bonita, and Enakshi Dua. 2005. "Decolonizing antiracism." *Social Justice-San Francisco*. 32.4: 120.
- Lawrence, Bonita. 2004. *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*. U of Nebraska.
- Lawrence, Bonita. 2003. "Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An overview." *Hypatia* 18.2: 3-31.
- Lloyd, Moya. 2007. *Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics*. Polity.

- Lloyd, Moya. 1999. "Performativity, Parody, Politics". *Theory, Culture & Society* 16.2: 195-213.
- Magnus, Kathy Dow. 2006. "The Unaccountable Subject: Judith Butler and the Social Conditions of Intersubjective Agency." *Hypatia* 21.2: 81-103.
- McCarty, Teresa L., Mary Eunice Romero, and Ofelia Zepeda. "Reclaiming the gift: Indigenous youth counter-narratives on Native language loss and revitalization." *The American Indian Quarterly* 30.1 (2006): 28-48.
- McClintock, Anne. 2013. *Imperial leather: Race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest*. Routledge.
- McClintock, Anne, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds. 1997. *Dangerous liaisons: Gender, nation, and postcolonial perspectives*. University of Minnesota Press.
- McNay, Lois. 1999. "Subject, Psyche and Agency the Work of Judith Butler". *Theory, Culture, and Society* 16.2: 175-93.
- Mills, Catherine. 2000. "Efficacy and Vulnerability: Judith Butler on Reiteration and Resistance." *Australian Feminist Studies* 15.32: 265-79.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 2003. "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles". *Signs* 28.2: 499-535.
- Mohawk, John C. 2002. "The 'Disappearing Indian:'20th Century Reality Disproves 19th Century Prediction." *Native Americas: Hemispheric Journal of Indigenous Issues* 19.1: 2.
- Mookerjea, Sourayan. 2013. "Epilogue: Through the Forest of Time". *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 38.2: 233-54.
- Morgensen, Scott. 2013. *Indigenous Feminism and Settler Sovereignty: Responding to Idle No More*. *Twenty-First Century Feminism and the Academy*. University of Western Ontario.
- Mueller, Tadzio. 2003. "Empowering Anarchy: Power, Hegemony, and Anarchist Strategy". *Anarchist Studies* 11.2: 122-49.
- Nayak, Anoop, and Mary Jane Kehily. 2006. "Gender Undone: Subversion, Regulation and Embodiment in the Work of Judith Butler." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27.4: 459-72.
- Nussbaum, Martha. 1999. "The Professor of Parody". *The New Republic* 22.2: 37-45.

- Olson, Gary A., and Lynn Worsham. 2000. "Changing the Subject: Judith Butler's Politics of Radical Resignification." *JAC* 20.4: 727-65.
- Pentland, Ralph, and Chris Wood. 2013. "Drowning in Neglect". *Alternatives Journal* 39.4: 37-9.
- Pickerill, Jenny, and Paul Chatterton. 2006. "Notes towards autonomous geographies: creation, resistance and self-management as survival tactics." *Progress in Human Geography* 30.6: 730-746.
- Pratt, Geraldine. 2005. "Abandoned women and spaces of the exception." *Antipode* 37.5: 1052-1078.
- Regan, Paulette. 2010. *Unsettling the Settler within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Rice, Patricia C. 2013. "Paleoanthropology 2013—part 1." *General Anthropology* 20.1: 10-3.
- Salée, Daniel. 2006. "Quality of Life of Aboriginal People in Canada." *IRPP Choices* 12.6.
- Said, Edward W. 1977. "Orientalism." *The Georgia Review* 31.1: 162-206.
- Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Salih, Sara. 2002. *Judith Butler*. Psychology Press.
- Salih, Sara. 2007. "On Judith Butler and Performativity". Pp. 55-67. in *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader*.
- Samuels, Ellen Jean. 2002. "Critical Divides: Judith Butler's Body Theory and the Question of Disability." *NWSA Journal* 14.3: 58-76.
- Schwartzman, Lisa H. 2002. "Hate Speech, Illocution, and Social Context: A Critique of Judith Butler." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 33.3: 421-41.
- Speer, Susan A., and Jonathan Potter. 2002. "From Performatives to Practices Judith Butler, Discursive Psychology and." *Talking Gender and Sexuality* 94: 151.
- Steyn, Ibrahim. 2012. "The State and Social Movements: Autonomy and its Pitfalls." *Politikon* 39.3: 331-51.

- Stone, Alison. 2005. "Towards a Genealogical Feminism: A Reading of Judith Butler's Political Thought." *Contemporary Political Theory* 4.1: 4-24.
- Stoler, Ann 2002. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. University of California Press.
- Tauton Carla Jane. 2011. "Performing Resistance/Negotiating Sovereignty: Indigenous Women's Performance Art in Canada." Queen's Theses and Dissertations.
- Taunton, Carla. 2008. "Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr (review)." *University of Toronto quarterly* 77.1: 322-324.
- Taylor, Astra, et al. 2009. *Examined Life*. Zeitgeist Films.
- Thiem, Annika. 2008. *Unbecoming Subjects: Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility*. Fordham University Press.
- Tonge, Alison. 2013. "Time for all Canadians to Idle No More" *Ethics* (forthcoming).
- Trahan, Mark. 2013. "Termination and Idle no More." *Indigenous Policy Journal* 24.1.
- Uzelman, Scott. 2005. "Hard at Work in the Bamboo Garden: Media Activists and Social Movements." Pp. 17-28. *Autonomous Media: Activating Resistance and Dissent*.
- Uzelman, Scott. 2001. "Catalyzing participatory communication: Independent Media Centre and the politics of direct action." *Canadian Journal of Communication*.
- Watson, Janell. 2005. "Schizo-Performativity? Neurosis and Politics in Judith Butler and Flix Guattari." *Women: a Cultural Review* 16.3: 305-20.
- Wiggins, Armstrong. 1993. "Indian rights and the environment." *Yale J. Int'l L.* 18: 345.
- Wilmot, Stephen. 2014. "First Nations Health Care and the Canadian Covenant." *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 17:61-69.
- Woons, Marc. 2013. "The "Idle no More" Movement and Global Indifference to Indigenous Nationalism." *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 9.2.

Woons, Marc. 2013. "Taking The Road Less Traveled: Indigenous Self-Determination and Participation in Canadian Institutions." *Federal Governance* 10.1.

Wotherspoon, Terry, and John Hansen. 2013. "The" Idle no More" Movement: Paradoxes of First Nations Inclusion in the Canadian Context." *Social Inclusion* 1.1: 21-36.

www.idlenomore.ca

www.journeyofthenishiyuu.ca

Zylinska, Joanna. 2004. "The Universal Acts: Judith Butler and the Biopolitics of Immigration." *Cultural Studies* 18.4: 523-37.