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The Work of Reading
Sachiko Murakami's *Rebuild*:
Situating Community-Engaged Learning
in the Classroom

Ceilidh Hart

> my history's a bit sketchy
>
> — Murakami, *Rebuild* 47

N OT LONG AFTER MY RECENT MOVE from central Canada to the west coast, I taught Canadian poet Sachiko Murakami's poetry collection *Rebuild* for the first time. Published in 2011, this rich collection of poems draws partly from Murakami's Japanese ancestry as it explores the personal, and ongoing, consequences of the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. In our first class on the book, to establish some context, I showed students photographs of Vancouver, including images of Hastings Park in East Vancouver, where Japanese Canadians, deemed enemy aliens by the Canadian government, were forcibly held before being transported to the BC Interior and other places. As we were talking, I noticed that students were taking notes. I wasn't expecting this. I assumed that they would already know this history. In fact, I assumed that they would know it better than I did because, unlike me, most of them had been born in and spent their whole lives in the Lower Mainland of BC. They said things like "I've seen that plaque, but I didn't know what it was." And "I didn't know Vancouver used to have a Japantown." And "I thought I *knew* Vancouver; how did I *not* know this?"

Murakami's explorations of historical violence and its legacies are emphatically localized, and her book demands that readers commit to important archaeological work in which their roles as reader, learner, and community member are collapsed. Doing the work of reading in the classroom compelled me to think more fully about these roles and about the opportunities for community building that the literature classroom affords. I seek here to consider how we can understand the

literature classroom as a space integrated into, even constitutive of, community and to extend current discussions of the value of community-engaged learning in a way that resituates the classroom as a crucial part of that learning.

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

Despite the difficulty that scholars have defining it, community-engaged learning has quickly become one of the most popular trends in higher education across Canada. In fact, in a 2004 issue of *University Affairs*, the editors declared community-service learning to be "the biggest thing to hit undergraduate education in the last decade" (qtd. in Van Styvendale et al. i), and it seems that the momentum has continued. The website of the Office of the Provost and Vice-President Academic at my own institution recently listed community-engaged learning as one of ten high-impact pedagogical practices. And for good reason. Like other institutions, my university adopts student-engagement expert George Kuh's understanding of high-impact practices as those that increase student retention and classroom engagement. The literature on community-engaged learning, however, suggests that, more than just increasing retention and engagement, this particular set of practices increases students' civic engagement, their sense of civic responsibility, and their political awareness (Lenton et al.). In short, the research suggests that community-engaged learning helps students to become better community members.

Whatever form it takes, and there are many (see Lenton et al. for a comprehensive overview), community-engaged learning aims to trouble the distinction between the classroom and the community beyond it or to get students "out of the classroom," so to speak. Understandably, then, research on community-engaged learning focuses primarily on community projects or collaborations that occur *outside* the classroom. For example, the two-year study conducted by Ronda Lenton and her colleagues for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario focused on practical considerations: instructors' "motivations, strategies and challenges associated with incorporating experiential education approaches to their teaching" (6). The spring 2018 issue of *Engaged Scholar Journal* focused entirely on community-service learning and provided a forum for scholars to share their experiences of what these projects actually look like and the challenges of designing, implement-

ing, and then evaluating them. If research in this area centres on the work done outside the classroom, discipline-specific discussions of the core subject matter upon which a course is based also tend to ignore the classroom. For example, discussions on pedagogy rarely make it into academic journals devoted to literary studies. There are some notable exceptions, of course, such as *Canadian Literature*'s CanLit Guides Project. However, despite the increasing focus on and resources put into teaching and learning across campus, a glance at the tables of contents of these journals and those devoted to teaching and learning shows that the separation between our research selves (our outside-the-classroom selves) and our teacher selves (our inside-the-classroom selves) is as alive as ever. The problematic result, in my view, is that in the discussion of both community-engaged learning and literary studies more broadly, the classroom itself as a key learning environment often gets overlooked.

Using Murakami's book as an invitation to do so, I explore the possibilities that emerge when the uncovering of local histories — including traumatic histories — becomes a collaborative reading project in the classroom and how *reading*, then, can be understood as a project for community building. Using the lens of classroom-community engagement, a key objective of community-engaged learning (see Kahne et al.; Lenton et al.; Van Styvendale et al.), I consider the demands that *Rebuild* places on readers and how those demands initiate a particular kind of reading as a strategy for encountering unfamiliar histories and experiences. Simone Weil Davis, co-founder of the Walls to Bridges program and associate director of Ethics, Society and Law at the University of Toronto, insists on the importance of dialogue, creative exploration, and meta-reflective practices to community-engaged learning. Using Murakami's poetry, I explore how this work can happen in the classroom by extending Davis's understanding of "the space between" (219) as a strategy for readers to confront all that they don't know as part of the work of reading and learning.

Davis, whose Walls to Bridges program puts traditional postsecondary students in classes with incarcerated students, emphasizes the potential for community-based learning to "make more muscular the collective imaginations of students, community participants, and faculty" (214). This "imagination," she argues, is what is required to facilitate real and sustained positive change in our communities. Importantly, though, Davis acknowledges that this kind of learning cannot happen when a community-based project simply reduces a community group

or organization to an object of study, to be approached as a set of objectives, to be "understood" in a way that incorporates experience into an already established way of knowing. Rather, Davis says, to be productive, community-based learning projects must allow all those involved to confront their assumptions and to make use of their unique skills and wisdom (214). This necessarily involves recognizing their knowledge gaps. She describes community-based learning projects as happening in a liminal space — typically a space between institutional contexts (the university and the prison in her programs); but it is the liminality of this space, its very indeterminacy, where potential lies, where students confront "painful moments [that] will come as opportunities not to flee, but to stay in, to question and observe" (221). This is a space for dialogue, and as Davis argues the quality of that space is determined by "*how* emotion and stories are welcomed and met, along the way" (221). Significantly, it is a space for *story*. Davis insists on the disruptive, and therefore transformative, power of story as she describes "the profound discomfort of staying, together, in the presence of stories that will require us to change, to stay connected, to connect, and to change ourselves and the encounters that help to create our sense of what's possible" (222).

Although, like other scholars who write about community-engaged learning, Davis focuses on projects outside the traditional classroom, her consideration of story, and the importance of listening to story, as fundamental parts of the growth possible in community-based learning resonates with my understanding of the community-building potential of reading. It is an attitude toward story that some scholars describe as "narrative ethics," increasingly seen in the field of medicine, which traditionally has embraced confident, empirical knowledge making and paid less attention to story. An example is the work done by Sayantani DasGupta, a medical doctor and a professor in the Master's Program in Narrative Medicine at Columbia University, and her colleagues. Writing about "narrative humility," DasGupta explains that every story has some aspect of the unknowable:

> *Narrative humility* suggests an engagement with stories that acknowledges that stories are not objects we can comprehend or ever become entirely 100 percent competent regarding, particularly when those stories are oral interchanges with real live people on the other end. Taking a position of narrative humility means under-

> standing that stories are relationships we can approach and engage with while simultaneously remaining open to their ambiguity and contradiction and while engaging in constant self-evaluation and self-critique about issues such as our own role in the story as listeners, our expectations of the story, our responsibilities to the story, and our ownership of the story. ("Narrative Medicine" 7)

"Narrative humility," she suggests, requires an "inward orientation" in the sense that we remain aware of our own, sometimes changing, position in relation to the stories that we receive (7).

DasGupta insists that "listening and action are necessary partners" and, importantly, suggests that the telling of and the listening to narrative constitute a "call for community" ("Narrative Humility"). The "call" that she describes echoes the type of engagement with story, or practice of reading, that Roger Simon calls an "indelibly social praxis" (qtd. in Chinnery 588). What these authors foreground as they describe strategies for approaching the other, either through in-person collaboration or through text, is an acknowledgement of *what we do not know*, of our limitations and our blind spots. In many ways, identifying and calling out knowledge gaps — which lead to uncertainty — can seem to go against what is often the impetus of literary analysis when the emphasis is on answering questions rather than the questions themselves. We explicate texts to reveal their meanings, to understand them. We teach our students to do the same. Yet I suggest that we can productively place our focus on *un*certainty, on the questions, on admitting what we don't know, and that when those very human gestures are embraced opportunities for community open up. This is the productive "space between," a space defined by both knowledge and recognition of a knowledge gap.

This approach to story and its community-building potential aligns with the thinking of writers and scholars who work in the field of trauma studies and artists, like Murakami, who grapple with trauma in their creative work. The concern with *listening* is something that American poet and human rights activist Carolyn Forché stresses in her own writing about poetry and its transformative potential. Like DasGupta and other scholars interested in narrative ethics, Forché draws from Emmanuel Levinas's conception of *witness* as well as from her own experience working as a human rights activist to define a "poetry of witness." As she explains it in her essay "Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art," such poetry is not simply political or politicized poetry but "a mode of reading rather than of writing, of

readerly encounter with the literature of that-which-happened, and its mode is evidentiary rather than representational — as evidentiary, in fact, as spilled blood." In her description of this kind of poetry, the concept of witnessing plays a crucial role — a role played equally by author and reader:

> In the poetry of witness, the poem makes present to us the experience of the other, the poem *is* the experience, rather than a symbolic representation. When we read the poem as witness, we are marked by it and become ourselves witnesses to what it has made present before us. Language incises the page, wounding it with testimonial presence, and the reader is marked by encounter with that presence. Witness begets witness. The text we read becomes a living archive.

Forché argues that the experience of witnessing, in which we are marked by the other, sets the groundwork for community in part because it presumes a responsibility to the other and an understanding that "humans come into being through relation." Her consideration of reading as witness echoes Davis's privileging of story as transformative encounter and reminds me that the classroom can be part of this work. Community, including community that extends beyond the classroom, can be forged within the walls of the classroom — that is, if we think about the responsibilities of reading, and of listening, and of doing so carefully.

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Sachiko Murakami's poetry collection *Rebuild* is rooted in place, specifically in Vancouver, a city located on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musquem), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples. To some extent, the book is about the ongoing problems of and conflicts in the city: the cost of real estate, the difficulty of making human connections, the challenge of living in a place where, as the speaker of "Hole (West, facing East)" says, "smaller and smaller / are our breathing spaces" (22). But Murakami is not interested in just the City writ large or an abstract or theoretical city. With varying degrees of intimacy, the poems refer to the appropriation of Indigenous land, the forced relocation of Japanese Canadians, missing and murdered Indigenous women, and crises of poverty and homelessness. Throughout the collection, the poems insist on the geo-

graphic specificity of these problems — these are *Vancouver* problems. And often they are *personal* for the speaker as much as they are political.

Murakami has said that the book was inspired by one of her almost daily walks through the city when she was living there, and as the poet-speaker takes on the role of urban observer she asks us to read Vancouver through a number of specific and conflicting lenses: the city embodies both archive and erasure, past and future, map and labyrinth. As we move through the collection, we can trace the poet-speaker's attempts to find the centre — a centre that continually escapes her — at the heart of the labyrinthine city. Again, this archaeological work is both political and personal, and, importantly, it places particular demands on readers who, like the poet-speaker, must also engage in a frustrating project to *find the centre*. This is where the classroom emerges as a key site for this work: if the demands that the book places on students, particularly students in the Lower Mainland, work to expose how little we know about our communities and our communal spaces, the book also reveals the potential of the literature classroom as both a specific site for learning, a site where the Lower Mainland's specific histories can be uncovered or recovered (as reader becomes student), and a specific site for the establishment of community — even if it does so provisionally, even if problematically. Seen from the perspectives of the classroom and of reading, *Rebuild* thus demands new kinds of attention.

From the start, *Rebuild* challenges our understanding by evoking an uncomfortable familiar/not-familiar feeling; as we read through the poems, we become aware that our recognition, or lack of recognition, is a key political register as Murakami foregrounds all that is absent from the cityscape and makes this familiar place strange. Her strategy for achieving this defamiliarization, ironically, is partly how she situates her poems in, and saturates them with, local content. For example, several of the poems in the third section, "If the Shoe Fits," mention shoes and feet (72, 75, 76, 77) — references, I think, to the strange phenomenon of dismembered feet and sneakers washing up on BC beaches in recent years. In making these somewhat oblique local references, the book presumes community; at the same time, it taxes readers' knowledge, challenges their understanding of context, and questions the existence of community. As the poems seek to unearth or reveal the city (its layers of history, conflicts, inhabitants), they simultaneously foreground the impossibility of doing so. And so, as the poet-speaker searches, we are aligned with her — navigating the labyrinth, trying to figure things

out. But our map is incomplete, we are confused, and the city is made strange. In the poem "Where's the Square," for example, the speaker answers that question (where's the square?) with a series of negatives:

> Not in Starbucks (not in that Starbucks either)
> Not in Stanley Park (an on-leash park)
> Not on the reserve (not Granville Island)
> Not in Victory Square (it is nothing to you)
> Not Centennial Square (blank stare)
> Not Japantown (not on current map) (19)

Like the speaker here, we are standing in the city, utterly disoriented. In another poem, "Marathon," the speaker admits that "my history's a bit sketchy" (47). This is our experience as readers: we realize how "sketchy" our own understanding of local history is too. And no wonder, given the city's driving impulse, which, as the speaker says, is to "Clear chips of stucco, broken shards of home. Clear away debris of the long dead. Bin / that shit. Heave history away. That's not ours" (60).

In her experimentations with form in the first section of the book, called "City Build," the poet interrogates the physical spaces of the city themselves: towers, holes, boundaries, mountains, maps, even building materials. Yet, despite her attempt to describe it in physical detail, the city itself remains slippery and ambiguous. The first poem in the collection, "The Form of a City," captures the many contradictions that define the city: Vancouverites' "wealth" is defined by their "debt" ("one could have fed a village for a century"); clothes are pajamas; the village is "no village"; space is vast and narrow (13). The poem ends with a desire to escape as the speaker seems caught up and overwhelmed. Happily, the contradictions identified here are set aside momentarily: "Forgotten, already, with the first grateful sip (How finite.)" (13). Far from providing any lasting satisfaction, however, this escape is undermined by what seems to be a wilful forgetting achieved through consumption and consumerism. The reference to coffee, which pops up again in the sixth poem, calls out aspects of Vancouver's urban culture and arguably conflates consumerism and our related need for instant gratification with drug use. As readers, we feel the speaker's disorientation, and thus the poem easily leads us to feel complicit in her turn away from complexity as she inoculates herself from thinking too much about the past and the problems of the "site" by embracing an emphatic present captured in the commanding sensory experience of the first, hot

sip. The third poem, "Boundaries," reinforces the speaker's experience of a powerfully, almost violently, compelling present moment. Repetition in this poem forces readers to ignore past and future, to ignore context as it insists on the specific ("*This* is dream city," "*This* is a city") and on the current moment ("the time is now, and now, and now") (15; emphasis added). In delineating the city's boundaries, the poem seems to elide its complex and violent past, as though erasing it from the current map. Only, the violence of the past faintly shows through in a kind of palimpsest that is at once narrative and spatial. The speaker's identification of the land "taken there, taken again from another family," is an example (15). This double-mapping presents readers with two conflicting versions of the city and therefore two conflicting ways of identifying themselves within the city. In her recent discussion of Murakami's book *The Invisibility Exhibit*, which addresses missing women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Erin Wunker uses similar terms. Drawing from Fredric Jameson, she suggests that in *The Invisibility Exhibit* the absent presence of these women "makes other public memories possible" (16). Ultimately, "Boundaries" addresses the challenge of confronting our knowledge of the history of this place, not just in the face of conflicting public memories but also in the narcotic pull of the present, of a "now" that seeks to erase any sense of a past.

As the poems foreground absences and processes of forgetting, we are left with only holes; ironically, however, the holes themselves become defining features of this city. There are four "Hole" poems in the first section of *Rebuild*. "Hole (West, facing East)" and "Hole (East, facing West)" appear on facing pages early in the section. "Hole (looking in)" and "Hole (dig it out first)" appear later. Taken together, these short, sparse poems challenge the idea that the city is being developed for humans. In fact, the holes themselves seem to eradicate any room for human experience, or human bodies, for that matter: "Room to breathe is not the point" (52). Like the momentum created by repetition in "Boundaries," the momentum that these poems strategically create through repetition and short lines stands at odds with those moments of and spaces for pause that define human connection and communication: "family" and "protest" here are overwritten by "mortar mortar mortar mortar mortar" (23). "Hole (looking in)" repeats the same question:

What was here before?
What was here before? (32)

The simple question compounded by the white space on the page poses a challenge to readers. The empty space glaring at us throws up our lack of answers, our lack of knowledge, even while the repetition of the question refuses to let us off the hook. The final "Hole" poem deliberately and expertly defamiliarizes what should be so familiar to students in a literature classroom, alienating readers even from their own reading practices. Made up of fourteen lines of the word *hole* repeated ten times per line, the poem, at a basic level, is organized as an English sonnet (40). We recognize this in the classroom and experience the thrill that recognition produces. Yet, of course, recognizing the poem as an English sonnet, while providing some level of self-satisfaction, does not help us much. In fact, it unsettles our reading by asking us to think about art's ability to grapple with violence. The point here is that holes throughout Murakami's book manipulate that familiar/unfamiliar pattern and explore the implications of our frustrated desire for something neat and tidy. In doing so, *Rebuild* implicates us in the process of "heav[ing] history away" for the sake of a numb attunement to the "now" only. Wunker argues that *The Invisibility Exhibit* is explicit in its implication of the reader in the problems that it explores: "It is not enough for the reader to walk with the poet while she waits, rages, and frets. Murakami's poetics demand that the reader examine her own complicity in rendering the missing women unmarked" (31). I would argue that *Rebuild* places the same demands on the reader by virtue of its insistent probing of our understanding of history. In discussing one particular poem from *The Invisibility Exhibit*, Wunker argues that the "syntax of the poem refuses the reader relief; if you are reading this, it suggests, you are part of this community" (32). The speaker of "Hole (looking in)" and many other poems in *Rebuild* commit to the same refusal of "relief."

Despite the gaps and the holes that these poems draw our attention to, at times they seem to be equally desperate for something to ground or orient them. And it is here where the political intersects with the personal in ways that highlight the desire that so often drives our reading. The desire to address absence, the need to fill in gaps, and the work that doing so requires are never dismissed in the book as futile or superficial. In fact, this challenge embedded within the book is registered at a personal level and has much to do with the practice of witnessing. In

"Civic Claims," for example, the speaker links claiming — that is, staking a claim — with speaking and with occupying space ("I'm not going anywhere.") and evokes the value of witnessing: "I am making claims about the relationship of the house / To the postulation of the city. It's this one. This one right here. / My right to witness" (74). Deliberately moving from the abstract ("postulation") to the concrete ("this one right here"), the speaker strives to make her voice, her presence, her perspective felt. "Boundaries," the third poem in the collection, which I discussed earlier, similarly insists on presence as individual and family experience collide with the political. Here the poet-speaker moves from city to family to father:

> This is dream city, built on shores
> still not ceded. This is a city of tourists
> with mouths agape, these are my boundaries:
> the islands in the Gulf, the sea they might call Salish,
> the land taken there, taken again
> from another family, that line nearly faltered.
> And now a nephew with my father's grin, the last one. (15)

The violence simmering between these lines is left implicit, and we see that the family history of the poet-speaker is here, in the city, in the poems. The centre that she seeks might be many things, but it is also her father, who passed away not long before the book came out.

Many poems in *Rebuild* follow a similar vein as the speaker's searching or longing for home coincides with a recognition of past violence. The poem "Rebuild" offers another perspective on homes violently taken: "names are changed, a farm's, / and the official memory. Now a child born in exile. / Now he becomes a father" (81). Here, for this speaker and her family, the experience of exile is inextricably wrapped up with family, informing and complicating any opportunity to feel "at home" in the city. In the first of three "Return Home" poems in the book's final section, the speaker's complex desire to return home is informed by a problematic sense of nostalgia:

> I want to return to the home   that doesn't   call for me (83)

Again repetition is a key device, and the repeated words *call me* and *call me home* articulate a desire (for home, for connection and community) that can never be satisfied. In doing so, they bring to mind the violence and dislocation that the speaker has been grappling with. "Moving Day"

similarly captures this doubleness of wanting resolution and finding it impossible as it, too, collapses distinctions between the personal and the political. Referring to the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement of 1988, the poem poignantly points out that what was lost cannot be recovered: "the official redress, rolled up, not hung / ever on the walls of the home / he didn't own" (85). In a book in which so much is about puzzling over a map, or navigating a labyrinth, this poem and others like it rest in indeterminacy, like the redress document that is there but left unhung. By the end of the book, and in a return to the personal and therefore most painful, we can read the father as the minotaur at the heart of this labyrinth. In "Return Home," the speaker finds "not minotaur / Just the body on the floor" (92). And so the process of finding the centre of this troubled city is also a personal process of uncovering traumatic histories of violence and dislocation. It is personal for the speaker, and the book asks us to consider where we are in relation. This is the work that we can do in the classroom.

Despite their lack of resolution, and though they challenge our ignorance of local history and context, the poems do not leave us with the idea that connection and community are impossible. And, as I suggested earlier, they do not dismiss the process of uncovering as futile — even if we never get there, even if we never find the centre. Rather, the *work* of reading the city in *Rebuild* points toward the city and its violent past as a problem, as an obstacle to community and to understanding, but it also points to the city as mirroring the possibilities brought to light in the classroom. If the classroom can be a place where we admit that we don't know, that — like the poet-speaker in "Marathon" — our history is a bit "sketchy," then it can also be a place where community is established through a collaborative process of learning and remembering. In this way, we might think about the literature classroom as being like Murakami's online collaborative poetry project *Project Rebuild*, which offers an alternative way of thinking about community in the city, particularly when it is read alongside *Rebuild*. The home page of *Project Rebuild* presents a series of poems, each represented by the image of a house — a Vancouver Special (a style of architecture particularly prominent in Vancouver neighbourhoods built between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s). Murakami explains that the project started as a single poem about the Vancouver Special, but because she was interested in the idea of inhabiting poetry, and renovating poetry, she sent the poem to other writers in Vancouver whom she knew and

invited them to "move in," so to speak, to "paint the walls, change the faucets, knock down whatever walls didn't fit their visions" as they edited her original poem (*Project Rebuild*). Seeing the new poems, or renovations, that resulted compelled Murakami to extend the project. Any reader can go online and move into a poem, change it, or edit it, and each iteration of the poem remains visible. There is an archive, then, even as new poets, new tenants, dream forward. It is an astonishingly creative way to think about literature and community and art in public spaces. Murakami insists that "Poetry is a community project in which we are all inhabitants: poems are written in context and in conversation" (*Project Rebuild*). She invites us to consider what happens when we as readers become participants, when we agree to meet in those liminal spaces, when we take on the role of witness and produce a living archive.

If tensions between archive and erasure, past and future, map and labyrinth cannot ultimately be resolved in *Rebuild*, the online project does gesture toward the creative possibilities of the city, and the possibilities for community in Vancouver, by establishing what Emily Ballantyne calls an "architectural poetics of community" (178). I suggest that, like the ideal classroom, *Project Rebuild* opens a space for communication defined by both respect for the archive (remembering) and the imperative of positive progress (dreaming forward). Ann Chinnery describes such a space in her discussion of Timothy Findley's novel *The Wars*, another text by a Canadian author that often raises important but difficult questions in the classroom. She explains how reading can create communities built upon shared memory rather than collective identity. In fact, she suggests that, despite the conflicts that will necessarily arise as such a shared memory is catalogued, these "communities of remembrance . . . can become transformative pedagogical spaces" (593). The radical potential of these spaces, which seem to be very similar to Davis's "space between," is how they implicate us as individuals even while they presume our inclusion in community, how they "make moral demands on us": "the educational potential of receiving texts in this way lies not in the experience of learning to empathize with and understand those whose lives are different from our own, but rather in learning to recognize our own existential indebtedness and ethical responsibility to and for the Other — for that which lies beyond our own actions and intentions, and even beyond our own understanding" (Chinnery 590). Chinnery asks us to make room in our reading and our teaching

for what extends "beyond," which I understand as the place that those others around us and the stories that they carry inhabit.

Taken together, *Rebuild* and *Project Rebuild* ask readers — students and teachers alike — about our access to and knowledge of local histories, the impacts of those histories on any number of possible futures, and our relation to those around us. Searching for answers in the classroom and confronting our knowledge gaps presented me and my students with an opportunity to think differently about the spaces that we inhabit in a very local way. The work demanded of us by Murakami's book, the work of reading, initiated a new kind of attention. "Wrestling collectively with text," to use Ann Jurecic's words (qtd. in Fitzpatrick 123), the important work that we do *inside* the classroom, gave us a new and generative focus on questions, rather than on answers, questions that, though raised within the classroom, inevitably led us to look *outside* the classroom. And it challenged us to consider what our discoveries mean, personally and politically, as we read, teach, learn about, and live in and around Vancouver.

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The same semester that I was teaching *Rebuild*, my university hosted the *Witness Blanket* on one of its stops along a nation-wide tour. The *Witness Blanket* is a twelve-metre-long art installation created by master carver Carey Newman (Ha-yalth-kingeme) as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Commemoration Commission. This remarkable piece of work is made up of almost one thousand physical artifacts gathered from seventy-seven residential schools, churches, government buildings, and traditional structures from across the country. While it was on display, I worked as a volunteer docent, and in that role I spoke with students and community members about the work and about the history of Indian residential schools that it documents. These conversations were often difficult and emotionally fraught. One interaction stands out as being characteristic of the way that many people, particularly those of invader-settler descent like me, responded: After spending some time looking closely at all of the artifacts that make up the blanket, one woman approached me. She was clearly at a loss for words, and after a quiet minute or two she said, simply, "I knew, but I didn't *know*, you know?"

At the time, I was struck by how this response echoed my students' responses to Murakami's book. In fact, *Rebuild* and the *Witness Blanket* have much in common. Broadly, they use art to explore historical and ongoing trauma, but importantly the traumatic histories that they foreground are local to us at my university. Murakami's poems are set explicitly in Vancouver, and Newman's *Blanket* had particular impacts for many of us given that St. Mary's, the last functioning residential school in British Columbia, which closed finally in 1984, is close to us in the city of Mission. When I think about my experience working as a docent for the *Witness Blanket*, my own learning in the face of this piece of art, and my interactions with students and visitors while it was at my university, I can see more examples of how keen attention, synonymous in my mind with close reading, can bring us closer to the other, can move us from "I thought I knew" to "I didn't *know*." It is a move, I believe, connected to the work of bearing witness. This work is fraught, to be sure, given the histories of violence on the land that many of us are learning about even while we walk through it. And I acknowledge that the classroom is neither a politically neutral space nor always a safe place in which learning can happen for all students. Yet this is where I meet my students, and it is a space that shapes our understanding of public and of community. The role that the classroom plays in this regard is perhaps what gets missed in traditional definitions of community-engaged learning that are too quick to overlook the classroom itself as a part of the community that we seek to engage. I suggest that we can think about community-engaged learning less as a movement away from the classroom to the world beyond it and more as an intentional strategy that opens up that "space between" that Davis talks about no matter where we are. And, again, I see critical and collaborative reading as one key to doing just that.

I think that what we were experiencing as we sat together and worked to navigate our way through Murakami's *Rebuild*, and as we stood together around Newman's *Witness Blanket* and confronted many painful questions, was the "[e]mpathic unsettlement" that Kathleen Fitzpatrick describes in her recent book *Generous Thinking: A Radical Approach to Saving the University*: "Empathic unsettlement asks us to open ourselves to difference as fully as possible without trying to tamp it down into bland 'understanding'" (42). Fitzpatrick does not limit her discussion to the classroom, though. She extends the imperative of this kind of work to the university broadly. She argues, "this kind of ethical

engagement with one another, with our fields, and most importantly with the publics around us can be a hallmark of the university, if we open ourselves and our institutions to the opportunities that genuinely being in community might create" (42). This means, among many things, opening ourselves up to recognize all that we don't know, and perhaps those things that we cannot know, as we answer literature's invitation to "stay in," to use Davis's words again (221). Reading, Fitzpatrick reminds us, has a "profound connection to the social" (86). In fact, it always has. If we can situate the classroom within the discussion of community-engaged learning, then we can find opportunities to develop further the connections that this kind of learning seeks to engage.

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