

## **Jane Doe: Counter Memory Against the Silence**

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For Theatreaгора

Multimedia public installation, performance, digital media, poetry, and bricolage

History versus memory, and memory versus memorylessness. Rememory as in recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past. And it was the struggle, the pitched battle between remembering and forgetting, that became the device of the narrative. The effort to both remember and not know became the structure of the text.

Toni Morrison, from *Mouth Full of Blood: Essays, Speeches, Meditations*, 2020.

### **1. Objective**



The objective of Jane Doe: Counter Memory Against the Silence project explores, across iterations, how unidentified women and girls (who are identified as “Jane Doe”) are remembered and acknowledged using media activism (Stillman, 2007), rememory (Morrison, 1987), and spatiotemporal translingualism in liminal spaces (Canagarajah, 2018; Schneider 2011, 2017, 2018). The battle between remembering and forgetting is located in the discursive anonymity of “Jane Doe,” a bureaucratic pseudonym which is often entrenched in violence, fear, and shame, and thus individual stories are disavowed and rendered insignificant. The aim of this work is to vitalize disenfranchised beings in the public imagination by activating epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies of lived lives and refusing social memorylessness and gender-based violence by opening portals for a gathering of remembrance, a meeting place for meditation, and a knowing that is invested in change.



## 2. Project Summary

In 2007 I read an article that changed the direction of my research creation process and deepened my conviction about the importance of critically and creatively exploring the intersectional silences set in historical and contemporary everyday systems. Michel Foucault (1972) would identify these silences or gaps as “discontinuities.” Sarah Stillman, in her essay “‘The missing white girl syndrome’: Disappeared Women and Media Activism,” shares her story about witnessing a Florida news report that disenfranchised an individual as an unnamed “body.” Stillman raised the question: “When it comes to body counts, which bodies ‘count(491) ’?”. The query led her to develop “three practical methods for engaging in feminist media activism: the ‘diagnostic’, to provide a cultural vocabulary for unveiling and resisting media biases; the ‘theatrical’, to revive the lives of disenfranchised bodies in the public imagination; and the ‘archaeological’, to dig proactively for the human stories that have been buried beyond the margins” (491). Stillman’s approach moves in tandem with my positionality as a mixed race woman (Indonesian Dutch) which informs my research creation process, pedagogy, and public activism. All of these elements materialize in multimedia research creation projects such as “The Writing Names Project” (2008, 2014) which was adapted into “Bridge: Remembering the Lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit People” (2015 to present), “Mad Meg: Remembering your name in Domestic Violence” (2019), “Every 9 Seconds” (2023), “365 Days: you will never know” (2020 to present), and “Rückenfigur: 365 Days” (2021 to present), among others.

In each project, a pattern of silence erupts to the surface with more questions: Who are you? Why don’t I know your name? How do I remember you? The performance and projected media installation of Jane Doe: A Counter Memory Against the Silence continues to explore these queries and is designed to be installed for a public gathering, a meeting place to witness a rupturing of the administrative container of “Jane Doe” that continues to sustain gender-based violence with objectification, normalization, and control. To observe the battle of memory ver-

sus memorylessness, as described by Morrison, the work sets out to make the inherent discontinuities visible in public discourse and thus disrupt a linear framework of perception which is socially validated and exercised. As Rebecca Schneider elucidates in her 2017 conversation with Lucia Ruprecht:

But it is interesting to me how often we forget the imbrication of one time with other times, or, put another way, how deeply we, as late moderns I suppose, are conditioned to acknowledge only the idea of a linear time that flows in a singular direction from past to future, as if liveness were only a matter of disappearing and not reappearing (112).

This proposed work attempts to move beyond a linguist structuralism and linear cognition with a spatiotemporal translanguaging (Canagarajah 2018) to locate “communicative interactions in space and time [that] accommodates diversity and unpredictability” (33). Because, as Suresh Canagarajah (2018) explains “structures are abstracted from the messiness of material life and social practice” (33). In response to the normalized abstraction of living beings, “Jane Doe: A Counter Memory Against the Silence,” is a tactic (De Certeau 29, 1988 ) using media activism (Stillman 2007) to redefine space | time according to emerging translanguaging understandings of “silence” with the question: “What is without context?” The layered simultaneity in the work as a multimedia bricolage and an exploration of liminal space is navigated by the figure of the astronaut. The work’s aim is to transcend “the text | context binary by accommodating resources across space and time as shaping meaning” (Canagarajah 46) and begins to demarcate a visible and performed testimony toward a knowable remembrance and the value of a being.

### 3. Method

**Research Process** My research creation process, as outlined in the Project Summary, resonates with my ongoing work to identify discontinuities or silences within Western social systems. The name “Jane Doe,” for example, appears in *Bridge: Honouring the Lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit People* in its annual installation. During the installation’s opening the names of the missing and murdered individuals are read orally. There are over 50 individuals identified as Jane Doe because their name, history, ethnicity, origin, and story are missing. Each Jane Doe (as a name) is read and acknowledged. As with my earlier work, I questioned “who are you?” I set out on a parallel path to remember these individuals with a public installation as a counter memory against the silencing of their lives. My initial step delved into the etymology of the pseudonym, “Jane Doe.”

**Etymology** The origin of the alias “Jane Doe” remains by and large a mystery. What is known is that the designation arrives from an early 18th century British legal process called the “action of ejectment” (Soniak, 2023). The OED claims the name as American in origin appearing as slang in 1703. The now defunct British act permitted landowners to take alternative action against squatters because the existing process was deemed too tedious in the court system. The action allowed landowners to use anonymous plaintiffs and defendants to force ejectment.

For example, the landowner would create two parties “John Doe” as the plaintiff and “Richard Roe” as the defendant (both designations reference deer). The names were chosen, it is believed, because they were common at the time. In the 21st century the monikers remain as placeholders for figures who are unidentified, anonymous, or used as hypothetical parties (Soniak, 2023). Four examples appear in the OED (2024) public archive: 1) In 1703 “A Devise of Rent to Jane Doe for Life, and if she Marry or accept of any Legacy [...] the Rent shall cease and return to the Executor” appeared in *Of Last Wills and Testimonies*; 2) An 1855 article published by the Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Daily Sentinel describes “A warrant against Jane Doe for breaking the windows of the complainant's dwelling;” 3) The New York Times published a 1913 account that reports “The first count charges the three officials with an assault, shocking, and the burning of Jane Doe—correct name unknown—one of the four women burned to death”; and 4) The 1991 edition of the University of Chicago Law Review published, “A plaintiffs' attorney should be allowed to bring ‘Jane Doe’ or ‘Richard Roe’ complaints on behalf of a class or corporation.” The underlying substance, among others, that begins to appear is how power is distributed in the use of “Jane Doe,” as well as the issue about how, and why, fear is leveraged using anonymity. Why is the person absent from the discourse? What is being hidden? To explore these questions, I began to consider how performance could be used in a liminal space to prompt these questions further: one vehicle came to mind.

**Performance** The astronaut as an avatar continues to generate, for me, creative potential as a traveller to navigate liminal space (literally). Linguistically translated from Greek “astro”(star) and “nautēs” (ship), the star-ship or space-traveler appears in 1929 during a period of scientific speculation and continues to be an archetype to survey “the unknown.” The figure of the astronaut was popularized from 1961 by the U.S. space program to investigate “outer space,” or (for me) outside | inside of spaces. (“astronaut,” OED, 2024). Symbolically, the astronaut is an alien in form, and alienated by being “neither here nor there” (Turner 95); the helmet allows the voyeur to see, but not to be seen. The solitary figure remains anonymous while present. A spy, watcher, eyewitness ...

The work's ballast is the performance element which presents me as a passenger (space traveller) on the Toronto Transit System dressed as an astronaut. While Guy Debord's 1967 “Spectacle” is evident: “Everything that has directly lived has moved away into a representation” (1), also at play is Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1995), Garcia Lorca's “duende,” (1933), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow (1990), and Victor Turner's “liminality or the “rites de passage” “to point up the contrast between ‘state’ and ‘transition’” (2017, 94). As Turner explains (borrowing from Arnold van Gennep, 1909), “ during the intervening ‘liminal’ period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the ‘passenger’) [...] or of liminal personae (‘threshold people’) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of class-action that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (94-5). Reflecting upon Turner's statement, I can draw from two encounters during my performance work: First, when I sat down on the subway station platform it was only a matter of minutes before the police arrived (not TTC se-

curity, but the the police). Meredith Evans, the project photographer, and I stood up as they approached. The police did not address me. In fact, they avoided looking at me. Secondly, when I explored the busy meeting place in downtown Toronto, Sankofa Square (formally Dundas Square), I stood up upon a riser. What seemed remarkable to me in this posturing of power was my paradoxical need to speak yet my inability to do so. However, there was also the potential to leverage this abstracted power. An onlooker asked to have a photo taken with me: I



gestured “no” by shaking my head. I am still in the process of reflecting on and documenting the nuances of the performance experience.

**Bricolage** My approach used bricolage to connect the elements together. I used a diverse range of archival components that included remaking objects that were found with or near unidentified figures (objects of memory and recognition). My photographer documented the performance on transit, and my videographer captured sequences at the Lake Ontario shoreline. My conceptual framework was built using the landscapes, environmental facets, the general public, and ambient details. The use of titles such as “Jane Doe” in the font of *Courier New* symbolically located the administrative nature of a “label.” In editing, I manipulated the original digital media using a “Silent Era” filter to point to the silencing of individuals; however, I mixed in the sound effect of a heart beat with the voice over. The video concludes with a “Bloom” effect. The creative writing was designed and built over a period of two months and was originally inspired by several Uber drivers asking me questions about my name. My name, Sorouja, is Persian and is popular in Indonesia where my mother was born. I reflected about how strangers would tell me the meaning of my name and it sounded like poetry: “the sky,” “a star system,” “a chandelier.” From this experience came: “My name is ...” a phrasal repetition to convey the depth of meanings in a name, and the maelstrom of fragmented stories that constitute a life.

**Voice Over: Poetry** Written by Sorouja Moll

My name is my name

My name

My name

My name is

My name is the ghost you loved as a light that makes my shadow

My name is the willow tree's shade on a river's shoulder leaning  
its way through a southwestern town

My name is a place circled in red on a coffee stained map that you left behind  
so someone else could find their way

My name is a book read a thousand times and you gave to me on my fifth birthday  
(remember how I drew a yellow sun in the corner on the second page of everything)

My name is the ingredient to remember a taste that can't be savoured here

My name is in a language I don't know how to speak

My name is a city that broke your heart but fed your soul

My name is the curve in a gravel road  
somewhere in Skye.

My name is that girl reading Dostoevsky in the November rain

My name is an ancient chant you hum on the edge of belonging

My name is a world that slipped from the grip of a moon's gravity

My name is the small yellow flower you picked when lost in the woods

My name is written in pencil on a folded piece of paper that you carry  
in your front pocket.

My name is the wind that rushes through birch leaves  
and sounds like rain.

My name is the crack in a stone weathered open  
and sings my song.

My name is a tattoo melting blue  
on my mother's wrist

My name is the yellow green sky casting a premonition on a wheat field  
before the storm

My name is the colour of falling snow at midnight

My name is the reflection of a girl riding a northbound subway  
longing for home

My name is a prayer spoken into the palms of your hands

My name is the cresting inhale of a wave before  
it says goodbye

My name is a joy buried in my mother's bones  
My name is a heartbeat stranded in an unfinished hymn

My name is an autumn cloud fiercely soft against the hard blue sky  
My name is a girl on an 80s sitcom that turned away your loneliness on a Thursday night  
My name is a poem my sister read knitting the scarf I wore  
on the day I left  
My name is the sound of June swallows that gather inside the wings  
of my father's cherry red barn

My name is the bread that rises like a widow after mourning  
My name is the bridge that hides the monster you befriended

My name is the lucky penny you worry in your red mitten

My name is the line in the sand you made with the sword of your body  
My name is the path at the edge of the city you thought you knew  
like the back of your hand  
My name is the secret spring running free beneath the earth I press my ear to  
My name is a boy's name that saved me from the comfort of war

My name is the pencil lines on a doorway that opened and closed my seasons

My name is a sudden deer that appears on the untraceable horizon line at dusk  
My name is a house that haunts your question like quarrel  
My name is the web of silk that catches you by surprise  
at the doorway of your morning  
My name is a gold locket that shines like dying star at the bottom of a well

My name is the river that flows across the broken shoreline of my collarbone

My name is the one that will not burn  
My name is my father's hand that caught me when he didn't know  
I was falling

My name is a stone in a fallow field

My name is a key that you pinned for safety to my dress  
My name is a torn page from your unlocked diary  
My name is a small red heart you found at a bus stop

on your way to someplace else.

My name is a ribbon you saved from a gift you left behind

My name is the shape of my face as I slept on your lap  
before it was too late

My name is the folded corner of a page in a book I loved (in blue ink I wrote:  
[I was here](#))

My name is a blue wool sweater with wooden buttons found  
near a highway you never travelled

My name is the scar you wore proudly but told no one about

My name is the typewritten letter with words that fell  
between the lines

My name are the beads you wear like the story you carry of me

My name is

My name is

My name is  
my name.

### **Images (samples)**

Digital Photography: Meredith Evans (downtown city and transit scenes)

Videography | Video Stills: David Milner (Lake Ontario shoreline, and street scenes)



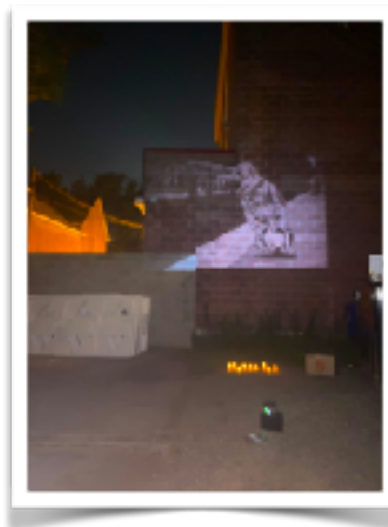




#### 4) Outcome: Public Installations (Unsanctioned spaces)

The final edited media work runs 8:51. As with most of my work, I installed it as a projection in unsanctioned spaces (areas without permission). The projected media against a wall sets out to insert itself into public discourse as a counter memory recognizing those who have fallen into the administrative category: "Jane Doe." The locations for the public installation include projections at the abandoned Coach Bus Terminal in Toronto, Ontario; Toronto's City Hall, an alleyway in Leslieville (Toronto), among other locations.

Nine candles are placed in front of the work to demarcate the US statistic: every 9 seconds a girl or woman is physically assaulted (Emory University School of Medicine, 2023). In Canada, based on 2022 statistics, one woman or girl is killed every 48 hours primarily by men (Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, 2022). Anne P. DePrince research in her book *Every 90 seconds* found that "every 90 seconds a woman is sexually assaulted. In that same minute and a half, another is a victim of domestic violence" (2022). Nine stones are also placed alongside the candles. The stones appear from my earlier work "365 Days: you will never know" that is installed as a counter discourse and counter memory recognizing the first 365 days of the 2020 pandemic (a time that is largely unacknowledged and individual experiences remain not only overlooked but negated). The stones symbolize the profound complexity (accreted narrative sediment) that constitutes each individual life and how we will never know the experience of others: *My name is a stone in a fallow field* (Moll, 2024). My reflections about the work's outcome is ongoing as the project (as an iterative process) is still unfolding.



Images (left to right): project poster; installation Toronto, Ontario; street scene Toronto (photo credit: David Milner)

## Social Media

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/lvTw8P1xHcQ>

Instagram: nineteenthcenturygirl

Facebook: Sorouja Moll

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e) Statistics (2024) from Canada Unsolved, 2024. Statistics vary across regions and are greater than indicated because they do not account for those who are identified as "missing."

Canada (Unidentified Females Geographical Index)

Alberta 4

British Columbia 19

Newfoundland 2

Ontario 15

Quebec 5

Saskatchewan 2



To those with names I do not know: I remember you.