

MEMORY THEATERS, VIRTUAL WITNESSING, AND THE TRAUMA-AESTHETIC

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Gernet describes customary law in ancient Greece as a “system of conventions in which the signifier tends to absorb the signified” (Gernet 1981, 226). By this he means that the construction of proof does not lie in the recovery of a referential situation in an inquiry; rather, truth lies in the dramatization and ritualization of gestures and discourse that establish the authority of the witness as a guarantor (ibid., 229). In this customary legal system, the act and role of witnessing is structured as ritual passage, as an ordeal. According to Gernet, the demarcated space of witnessing is characterized by oath taking which involves proximity to a polluting yet sacralized substance.

—C. Nadia Seremetakis (102)¹

The production of biographical narrative, life history, oral history, and testimony in the aftermath of ethnocidal, genocidal, colonial, and postcolonial violence occurs within specific structural conditions, cognitive constraints, and institutional norms. As Hayden White has taught us, biography emerges as a narrative media within state structures,² and within the cultural requirement for jural and political subjects.³ Historical inquiry must attend to the conditions under which such narratives arise—the political agency that such narrations refract, replicate, and authorize—and yet also account for the wide-ranging circuits that filter and consume the biographical artifact. As I shall briefly discuss below in reference to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), this tension between the scene of testimony production and the sites of narrative screening and consumption can encompass not only a single testimony, but also an entire archive.

The dissemination of biographies and testimonies of political terror, whether in the context of human rights violation inquiry or commodified

readership markets, is itself a historiographic problematic. For the biographical artifact, from its putative origin in violence (transacted and/or structural) to its possible terminus in law, medicine, and readership markets, traverses a terrain of legibility and credibility that must be considered part and parcel of the cultural construction of human rights practices in our times. To enclave the human rights violation story at a primordial scene of violence is already to preselect the restorative powers of legal, medical, media, and textual rationalities as post-violent. There is a normative and moralizing periodization built into the post-violent depiction of violence. Where violence is and is not positioned in the narrative of witness and the witnessing of narrative is the concern of this essay.

The human rights narrative arrives pre-encoded as a conduit into history—through its relay of the invisible or the unthinkable, through mourning, through the ordeal of its very enunciation and inscription. Thus it functions as a medium for historicity, but a medium that interposes itself between the witness, reader, auditor, adjudicator, and anamnesis. The testimony has a doubled density and *gravitas* due to its historiographic vocation and artifactual status; it is a window of historical visualization and also a historical object, midwifed from materialities of pain and suffering. But the question remains: How does this double status as both medium and artifact orient its relation to the historical? And wherein lies its authenticating status—as first-hand evidence of harmful acts, or as a product of institutional cultures of witnessing?

Many of the essays in this volume interrogate the conditions under which life histories of human rights violations circulate, examining those conditions for their emancipatory potential and their capacity for instituting dialogical forms of historical consciousness between testimony donors and communities of witness. The contributors to this volume do not assume that emancipation or the authentication of suffering is guaranteed by content alone. Testimonies and narratives that purport to witness violence are subject to protocols of authentication within various regimes of truth: legal, medicalized, psychotherapeutic, and economic. These essays are thus concerned that the modes of publicness and consumption through which these biographies pass will simulate a cathartic affect that too easily transcends the violence described, as the biography is inlaid into a juridical or therapeutic resolution.

The utility of human rights or therapeutic agendas here does not abrogate the need to confront how certain presentations of history-effects either hinder or enable a political ethic of anamnesis. Politicized anamnesis constantly requires the re-auditing of “residual” marginal, repressed, denied, and unreconciled historical fragments that can call the present into question, and

to political accountability. The residual historical fragment is an event or a collage of events, artifacts, and accounts about events that are not easily integrated into such master narratives as the idea of progress, collective reconciliation, or evolution to human rights equity. I use the term “residual” keeping in mind Raymond Williams’s distinction between the residual and the archaic, and their differential relations to what he called the emergent. For Williams, an archaicized past is a convenient signifier that has been too neatly stitched into the dominant ideologies of the present, and which does not disrupt, but enforces the linearity of historical time and promotes history as teleological continuum without ruptures or alterity. Sandra Young in this volume describes this pattern in the context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

The official discourse in particular is driven by a unilinear conceptualization of time. Metaphors claiming a gradual or dramatic break with the past abound: when the enabling Bill was introduced in Parliament, Minister of Justice Dullah Omar said it would “provide a pathway, a stepping stone, towards the historic bridge . . . whereby our society can leave behind the past of a deeply divided society . . . and commence the journey towards a future founded on the recognition of human rights.” Formulated this way the TRC becomes a means of containing the disturbing reality of South Africa’s history of human rights abuses. It all but vindicates the impulse towards amnesia by promising the opportunity to “leave behind the past” in the interest of present-day politics. (158)⁴

Following a redressive and curative trajectory, human rights frameworks and quasi-medicalized tropes of trauma circulate and archive the experiences of terror and abuse as episodes scheduled for eventual overcoming through redemptive survival, recovery, and restorative justice. Does this prescriptive plotting “archaicize” terror, creating museums of suffering? The museum format freezes the past, transforming it into discrete units of time, and petrifying it within classificatory labels, all of which situate the past as an object of spectatorship, no matter how empathic this gaze may be. The spectator in the museum-archive of suffering is also a witness, but this is witnessing at a remove: in controlled conditions, and within spatial divisions between life and death, viewer and the observed, now and then.

In a 2002 exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York City of recent art about the Holocaust, “Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art,” the spectator was offered a choice between two galleries. The first contained materials engaging Holocaust themes that according to the curators were “disturbing,” as any artwork with such themes would be; a second gallery held art that the museum feared many viewers would find extremely offensive. As they reached the limen that separated the first gallery from the second, viewers

were confronted with a sign warning of the visual threat of the artwork in the second space, and offering an intervening passageway that would protectively detour visitors out of the gallery and back to the souvenir sales counter of the museum lobby. Though I personally could not find any difference between the two galleries in terms of possible offense, on crowded days two adjacent lines emerged and parted as visitors chose and followed the corridors proposed by the museum. This spatial bifurcation, this division of witness into two, was far more haunting and disturbing than the actual art in the second stigmatized gallery, as the two lines eerily evoked the concentration camp rite of “the selection,” where lines of prisoners were moved in opposite directions to death or to precarious existence. But in this museum, in this post-Holocaust world of anamnesis, rather than roads to death or fragile survival, curatorial logic offered a choice between admissible and inadmissible memory.

Those invested in the trajectory of historical redress, therapeutics, and completion may be ill at ease with historical content that cannot be reconciled with narrative closures. Consider the Argentinean Plaza de Mayo mothers who refuse a final state-sponsored memorial for their disappeared children precisely because such commemoration would subject the politically deleted and absent to biographical closure, and thus excuse the state from ongoing historical accountability. These women defer formulaic memory lest it lend the state a moral stability embodied in the petrification of their children’s names on a collective gravestone. In this way, the women reserve the right to recall and make public irreconcilable residual historical content that bears upon a present that cannot fully consume or dismiss its problematic past.

In this issue, Wendy Hesford draws on Ulrich Baer to stress the importance of this act (114). Unless we view the past as “an unfinished rather than a stable referent in the service of the present” (Baer 107), we could “indulge the illusion that we might somehow be able to assimilate [atrocities such as] the Holocaust fully into our understanding” (Baer 177). Baer continues: “Unless viewers suspend their faith in the future, in the narrative of time-as-flux that turns the photographed scene into part of a longer story (whether melancholic or hopeful), they will misconstrue the violence of trauma as a mere error, a lapse from or aberration in the otherwise infallible program of history-as-progress” (Baer 181).

The remainder of my essay responds to many of the contributions to this volume—a response mediated by my own fieldwork in South Africa and Northern Ireland, and by an archeology of witnessing fragments, cobbled together from other locales and historical periods. These last sites are not

exemplary because they provide a linear history of witnessing; they offer nothing of the sort. Rather, they are residual and nonsynchronous episodes of witnessing that sketch another tale than the one found in contemporary human rights practice concerning the place of violence, the place of narrative, and the force of authentication. I pose the question: Does the cultural intelligibility of the biographical and witnessing artifact depend on the violence of the signifier—by which I mean repressive authentication by various expert knowledge practices, truth-claiming procedures, and mass media circuits? And if so, how do we witness *this* particular violence? Can communicative equity attend to cultural/historical difference, and be written into human rights norms and guarantees? At stake here are diverging notions of historical time, different concepts of the speaking subject and political agency, and as I shall discuss, the consequences of a visual culture of witnessing that stratifies suffering, memory, and embodiment. I am less concerned here with performing a content analysis of narratives of human rights violations, a task I have performed elsewhere, and more concerned with the social being of narrative truth: the politics of narrative circulation, emplotment, and interpretation. These biographical artifacts may write histories of terror and harm, but they themselves are written into a history. What history that might be is an object of my concern.

ENLIGHTENED PLOTS

Both human rights inquiry and the current cultural predilection for confessional trauma narratives are themselves technologies of memory that generate biographical archives or are grafted onto the biographical artifact, transforming the latter into juridical and emotive currency. Human rights inquiries, grounded in legal realism and/or trauma-tropes, evoke an amorphous specular and quasi-medical realism—an opening of not only the speech, but also the body of the political victim, in the form of accounts of terror and pain. In this manner their collation and public archiving is inflected with a post-mortem aesthetic akin to the public anatomic dissection theaters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both performances enacted a common Enlightenment speculum that opposes culture, hierarchical vision, and diagnostic intervention to unruly material violence, dis-ease, and the pathogenic.⁵ As Francis Barker states:

contrary to post-Enlightenment humanist, liberal, and conservative theory, “culture” does not necessarily stand in humane opposition to political power and social inequality, but may be profoundly in collusion with it, not the antidote to generalised violence, but one of its more seductive strategies. (viii)

Human rights testimony and medicalized or psychoanalytic talking cures currently function as Enlightenment stand-ins, morally polarized to the murky density of embodied suffering and institutional indifference and denial, and to the mutation of state apparatuses into deterritorialized killing machines. These technologies of memory, jural reason, and psychomedical therapeutics are expected to rectify respectively the polluting exposure of the victim and his/her auditors to violence experienced and/or violence virtually witnessed in narrative and other media.

Ironically enough, part and parcel of the mutation of the state into an apparatus or site for chronic violence are the very institutional rationalities of law, medicine, and psychology that are *ex post facto* expected to provide redress and therapeutics in their adaptation and cooptation of the post-terror biographical artifact. The repressive role of the judiciary in totalitarian societies, or of medicine and psychiatry in the treatment of dissidents and various interrogation/torture scenarios, such as in Northern Ireland, Argentina, the Soviet Union, and South Africa, to name a few sites, are well known and need not be detailed here. The ritual of staging the moral opposition between abusive legal and psychomedical rationality and post-violent corrective legalities and medicalized therapeutics is a necessary moment in the reinstatement of a post-violence reason: a moment in which reason divides itself in two, exiling its double through convenient periodization.

Despite the repeated complicity of enlightenment rationalities in the programming and excuse of political terror, the human rights project has not been deterred from evoking its notions of truth claiming as the framework for post-terror biographical disclosure. Thus at the University of Cape Town in May 1994, in addressing the conference "Democracy and Difference," Alex Boraine, who was eventually appointed Vice Chairperson of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, declared that the proposed commission would "hold up a mirror to South African society that would allow the nation to confront its past and then make a clean break with the past."⁶ Here Boraine's notion of the break would correspond to Williams's model of the archaization of the past. Applied to historical inquiry, Boraine's metaphor of the mirror becomes, in the words of Reinhardt Koselleck, "an unflinching index of . . . naive realism, which aims to render the truth of histories in their entirety":

The image provided by the historian should be like a mirror, providing reflections "in no way displaced, dimmed or distorted." [Lucian, *How To Write History*, chap. 51] This metaphor was passed down from Lucian until at least the eighteenth century . . . as in the emphasis by the Enlighteners on the older moralistic application demanding of historical representation that it give to men an "impartial mirror" of their duties and obligations. (133)

Related to the Enlightenment's ocular metaphor of the mirror was the notion of "naked truth"—unadorned testimony and discourse in which events and actors are allowed to speak for themselves without ornamentation or mediation. These metaphors installed spectatorship and vision into the core of historical witnessing, and I shall later return to what type of vision is being pitted against the dense materiality of violent history. The enlightenment visual model of knowledge and truth claiming reappears in the mission statements of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for the notion of naked truth correlates to the commission's ethic of "transparency" as a process of disclosure heavily dependent on the authenticated witness salvaging an occluded past through both the public performance and the content of his/her pain and testimony.⁷

By examining modes of transmission, circulation, and reception, the essays gathered in this volume query this transparency effect, for they recognize that there are residues of meaningful experience that resist the rapid interdiction of juridical rationalities and optimistic therapeutics. However, the exigencies of local terror are both required and quickly surpassed in the prescribed human rights dramaturgy of witnessing. All terror is local, and the universalization project of transnational human rights, or the unifying anthropology of the victim, seek to elevate these narratives from the particular, and from the opaque materiality of state, ethnicized, gendered, or racialized terror. Locked into the materiality of the violent particular, the victim of political terror cannot be deployed for moral edification, cannot be retooled into a commodity artifact for a marketplace of public emotions, until the biographical artifact itself is resituated in a framework of legal redress and/or psychic therapeutics. Yet it is in these dense political particularities and gross practices of atrocity that may never be redressed or therapeutically treated that the cultural and political logic of such violence can be encountered. Nevertheless, decontextualization is the first movement in the universalization of the narrative of victimage. We are told we cannot understand violence unless it is first legally processed or therapeutically exposed and treated.

The newness of human rights legality or the sensitivities of therapeutic insight do not fully dispense with the historical legacy of asymmetric theaters of witnessing. In *Impossible Witness: Truth, Abolitionism and Slave Testimony*, Dwight A. McBride writes:

I examine this metaphor of the discursive terrain in order to understand the situation of discourse into which the slave narrator enters when he or she takes pen in hand. . . . [T]here is a language about slavery that preexists the slave's telling of his or her own experience of slavery, or an entire dialogue or series of debates that

preexist the telling of the slave narrator's particular experiences. How does one negotiate the terms of slavery in order to be able to tell one's own story? . . . The discursive terrain creates the very codes through which those who would be readers of the slave narrative understand the experience of slavery. (3)

When a biographical narrative is processed through prescriptive expectations—that is, expected to produce healing, trauma alleviation, justice, and collective catharsis—it is emplotted. Emplotment is advanced quite frequently from outside, even if this is an exteriority or expectation that is internalized by the author so that biography can be transmuted into moral currency. More often than not, this contemporary emplotment follows a medicalized syllogistic structure: 1) the identification of a pathogenic situation—chronic violence, racial, gender, ethnic, or sexual inequity and oppression; 2) an inventory or symptomology of the aberrant situation, usually in the form of critical life incidents; and 3) a set of prescriptions to effect redress, cure, and historical completion, a component of which is the very recitation of biographical narrative and its public dissemination for a forum of witnessing. This linearity is meant to culminate in the cathartic “break” with the past—establishing the pastness of prior violence, and managing and controlling the conditions and terms of its periodic reentry into the present, usually through appropriate commemoration. This medical subtext is an apparatus of both memory and forgetfulness, to the degree that inevitably certain acts and events are not readily integrated into the structure of judicial or therapeutic emplotment. In Ernst Bloch's terms, such resistant narratives remain nonsynchronous with juridical or therapeutic resolution (97–116). Bloch's theory of the nonsynchronicity of historical identity and experience raises the issue of the descriptive adequacy of those narratological strategies that reduce the evidentiary to a transparent linear event history.

To the same degree that such disseminated narrative products may be viewed skeptically as having a distorted relationship to historical knowledge, we have to acknowledge that neither human rights inquiries and commissions, nor the consumer media markets for trauma narrative, absolutely dictate the condition of narrative production from political emergency zones where multiple forms of political agency have emerged and survive. The legal formalization, media virtualization, and commodification of witnessing constitute cultural-economic formations, rehabilitation agendas, and patterns of denial and forgetfulness that can foreclose our recuperation of historical depth and complexity. At the same time they also navigate, and unavoidably open for potential critical inquiry, an ambiguous and often horrific historical terrain that is not easily contained by legal rationality, curative resolutions, and consumer desires.

SUBJECTIFICATION: THE WAR FOR EVERYDAY LIFE STRUCTURES

It is crucial to compare the contexts out of which many post-terror biographies unfold, the conditions of their production and possibility, and why such historiographic impulses take the form of biographical narrative as a mode of political and linguistic agency. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith write in this volume:

By the last decades of the century, the modernist language of rights had become a *lingua franca* for extending—sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly—the reach of human rights norms, not everywhere but across an increasingly broad swath of the globe. Post-World War II struggles for national self-determination and equality for women, indigenous peoples, and minorities within nation-states led to the rise of local and transnational political movements and affiliations—movements for Black and Chicano civil rights, women’s rights, gay rights, workers’ rights, refugee rights, disability rights, and Indigenous rights among them—all of which have created new contexts and motivations for pursuing personal protections under international law. . . . Emergent in communities of identification marginalized within the nation, such movements embolden individual members to understand personal experience as a ground of action and social change. Collective movements seed local acts of remembering “otherwise,” offering members new or newly valued subject positions. (3–4)

The postcolonial and post-World War II emergence of new subject positions reorganizes the relationship among the political, violence, and everyday life. Alain Tourraine, the French sociologist of social movements, termed this process subjectification. Tourraine discerned a difference in the methodology of social change in the post-World War II period. Previously the Enlightenment agent of social change was the *bourgeois/citoyen* of the French Revolution, the male progenitor of what Habermas terms the public sphere of bourgeois democracy. From the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of this century, the male proletariat was theorized by Marxists and anarchists as the primary agent of social transformation, and reciprocally, the factory site as the axis of revolutionary action. However, the post-World War II period experienced an expansion of who or what could be a political subject. Previously inadmissible social categories—women, ethnic and racial minorities, peasants, the colonized, sexual minorities, fauna and flora, the disabled and the diseased, youth and children—emerged as political agents with their own political agendas and diverse sites of political struggle. The emergence of new political subjects attests to the multiplication and decentralization of the sites of political antagonism in a society. The process of subjectification likewise points to the emergence of new targets of counterinsurgency activity, new

objects for the mobilization of repression, and new venues for the cultural construction of intimidation and terror. Everyday life, a heretofore devalued and hidden terrain excluded from serious political struggle, emerges as a political-military object of internal colonization. This was the fundamental characteristic of state violence in Northern Ireland, in South Africa, in Central America, and elsewhere: the violent territorialization by the state of the taken for granted, culturally spontaneous, and mundane sites of social transaction and symbolic exchange that nurture identities and give rise to counter-narratives of social reality.⁸

STRUCTURAL FORGETFULNESS AND THE NECESSITY OF BIOGRAPHY

In local sites of struggle, a culture of disbelief and cynicism about “official” or normative narratives of history, identity, and nation motivates people to narrate as well as read stories that contradict, complicate, and undermine the grand modernist narratives of nation, progress, and enlightenment. (Schaffer and Smith 14)

In many zones of political emergency, the normalization and routinization of violence was accompanied by structures of deniability built into the very strategy of violent enactment. In other words, political terror not only attacks the witness but also the cultural capacity and resources needed to bear witness, particularly if we consider cultural memory as a performative medium requiring agents, spaces, and reserved temporalities for anamnesis. These social institutions disappeared in the general attrition of social securities achieved by political violence. The impetus for biographical visibility and its public presentation was precipitated from the militarization and erasure of the structures of the everyday, through which personhood was once sustained. Biographical expression was the creation or reclaiming of public space that had never existed or had been radically curtailed. The articulation of biography was an entry into a historical space previously controlled by state apparatuses or other agencies of violence that coercively assigned and/or jettisoned subject positions.

South Africa under apartheid was also inflicted by structural forgetfulness. The fragmentation of public recollection was an institutionally manipulated effect that emanated from 1) the secret knowledge systems of the state; 2) the apartheid culture of deniability that extended from the upper echelons of apartheid’s ruling organs—government, armed forces, police services, and intelligence services—to the everyday class, racial, and geographic insularity of most white South Africans; 3) the spatial atomization of social knowledge imposed upon communities of color by apartheid’s geographical sequestration, race-based inequitable education system, and linguistic stratification;

4) the cultural decimation of violently urbanized rural populations; and 5) media censorship and deliberate disinformation campaigns. These factors created a public culture of knowledge fragmentation and provisional memory, which overlaid a dense mosaic of privatized memories and local knowledge, informalized oral culture, and cults of secrecy in both white and black communities. This was the effect of information stratification by race, class, locale, mendacity, and archives of secrecy. The biographical witness at the TRC struggled with the atomization of social knowledge and the imposed grids of invisible experience. In turn, the moral imperative of historical attentiveness—the ethical responsibility to know and to be accountable for what is or can be known—underwrote the TRC’s notion of “truth,” and its project to interdict an institutional culture of deceit promulgated by the former apartheid state.

In South Africa between 1996 and 2000, the role of confessional witnessing, though subsequently popularized as a variant of therapeutic talking cures, had a theological origin, and thus a motivation more in line with the witnessing dynamics of Africanized Christianity, whose performative modes could be experienced in many of the hearings. Here it was institutional biography that was meant to be revealed through the offices of individual biographic witnessing. The discursive role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can be seen as both heir to, and an elaboration of, the Reverend Beyers Naude’s adaptation of a *status confessionis* to South Africa. The strategy and ethic of the *status confessionis* originated in the 1934 Barmen declaration, when German churches opposing Fascism formed themselves into a confessing synod.⁹ The forum of the confessing synod was revived by the South African Cottesloe Consultation (1960), a meeting of anti-racialist churches that challenged apartheid and its theological justification by confederations of Afrikaner churches.¹⁰ The condition of *status confessionis* mandates a process by which the “confessing” institution confronts its own complicity with evil and untruth, and compels a parallel internal confrontation of identified evils and human rights violations by other institutions. In many ways, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was intended as the *status confessionis* writ large to compass the entire nation as a collective witness and mass confessing agent.

Through the model of *status confessionis*, the initial communalizing of witness was meant to mobilize individuals to testify for and/or against themselves in order to provide a new moral foundation for the nation. And to a certain and always unsatisfactory degree, this was done in both human rights and amnesty hearings by both the “securicrats” of the state and members of resistance organizations. Confession and disclosure were programmed as

both an institutional and individual modality, each framing the other. This process encompassed most major South African political parties, guerrilla and paramilitary units, the armed forces, the police, the medical and psychiatric establishment, and the media. However, the ANC backed away from such frankness as the commission drew to a close, and the upper echelons of the apartheid government never admitted to authorizing terror, a denial that could be sustained due to the coded directives of the regime and planned gaps in the command structure.

ANTIPHONIC WITNESSING

When reading the TRC reports, which radically adumbrate a complex six-year hearing process, the commission superficially appears to be a mass biographical project. From its 21,000 individual submissions to the Human Rights Violations Committee, and its more than 7,000 submissions to the Amnesty committee, one would infer that the commission's stress was on individualized testimony and on private suffering. Certainly some of the rhetoric of the more religious and social-work minded commissioners stressed the confessional dynamics of the talking cure, a concept that the white-dominated media readily latched on to as a palatable substitute to black revolution. But this was not the whole story. The view that there was an overreliance on victims' statements, which skewed history by individualizing suffering in psychotherapeutic terms, omits the fact that victims' testimonies before and after public airing were subject to documentary corroboration. The commission deployed investigative departments, using Scandinavian and local police investigators and local human rights lawyers with powers of subpoena to assess evidence and locate corroborating documents and testimony. State archives were regularly consulted, and a good deal of pre-hearing and post-hearing interviewing of both hostile and friendly witnesses took place. There was a concerted attempt to evaluate in terms of available supportive material each testimony about a human rights abuse experienced, witnessed, or indirectly known, though this could be quite difficult due to the anonymous orchestration of terror by the apartheid state. The status of testimonies was established by evidence analysts working with exhaustively researched evidence "bundles" comprised of official documents from government archives, and media files, medical reports, and other personal testimony about the same event by witnesses of diverse political persuasions. During the hearings, "context statements" were often elicited from local ministers, educators, journalists, and academic researchers who had knowledge, often both personal and professional, about the surrounding events and back stories which provided

a frame for discussing specific episodes of violence. The popular and media-generated view that the TRC hearings were planned and conducted by weepy psychotherapists was far from reality.

Rather than fetishizing the atomized biographical narrative, during the hearing process testimony was authenticated in two ways: 1) through historiographic and legal evidentiary assessment before and after testimony; and 2) through community validation, since many of the hearings, located in communities of color, took on the atmosphere of church witnessing call and response and call-outs, choral singing and the dancing of the *toi-toi*, as other survivors in the audience supported the witnesses through public expressions of feeling. Eminently performative, these displays do not appear in the commission's official transcripts, occurring as they did between and around the speech of individual witnesses. The commission presented acts of testimony on the proscenium stage, in this case reinforced by video cameras and microphones aimed in directions that only obliquely incorporated the audience. This proscenium format only held partial spatial and perceptual authority for the African audiences, who imported church and other communal "testifying" congregational forms into many of the hearings.

From the limited vantage point of the TRC Report, and its rather loose and vague use of the term "trauma," arises the impression that certain administrators of the hearings were focused on the psychopathology of political victimage. The degree to which this was uniformly the case (and it was not a pervasive norm) begs the more important question of the extent to which indigenous witnesses and audiences of color accepted or acceded to this Eurocentric psychological perspective. The talking cure model may or may not adequately describe the legal intent of the TRC in theory, but in practice the use of this model obscures what I call the *Africanization of remembrance*.¹¹ With few exceptions, Human Rights Violations hearings were held in local communities that had experienced chronic states of violence over decades, and the actual venues were community-based institutions like churches, school gymnasiums, and community centers. In many hearings, sizable segments of the local community turned out and functioned as informed auditors. Many victim-witnesses of color who took the stand were positioned as speaking from and for the community—speaking for familial, township, religious, and political filiations that had undergone common political terror.

As Young notes in her essay on the Truth Commission (154),

The presence of witnesses sets up the possibility of testifying, but the witnesses too are beneficiaries in the complex dynamic at work. Writing about dramatic representation of trauma, T. W. Adorno argues that the "ability to be horrified"—the

“shudder”—is an affirmation, ultimately, of the humanity of the *audience*: “The subject is lifeless except when it is able to shudder in response to the total spell. . . . Without shudder, consciousness is trapped in reification. Shudder is a kind of premonition of subjectivity, a sense of being touched by the other.” (455)

But in the context of African kinship and community, it might be better to describe this “shudder” of the other as antiphonal call and response. TRC testimony by many people of color enacted a dynamic of antiphonic witnessing and performative and collective authentication. A significant number of witnesses were women of color who represented not just themselves, or fragmented nuclear families, but extensive networks of filiation, of real and symbolic kinship. These women functioned in their communities as “social mothers.” Ruth Wilson Gilmore has defined “social motherhood” as a repertoire of roles and “techniques developed over generations on behalf of black children and families within terror-demarcated racially defined enclaves” (30). These women did not take the stand as atomized traumatized victims, but as representatives and embodied signifiers for the disappeared and the dead. In addition to the acoustic and gestural antiphonal dynamics between these women’s accounts and the community-based audience’s response, the entire call and response performance existed in an emotionally powerful relation to absence—to the silenced and the dead who would never testify. The presence of these women, and the shadows they brought into the hearing room, evoked the historical depth and recesses of their witness that could not be captured in literal speech. Refusing to ground their language in individualized knots of the traumatic, these women invoked a dialogic of presencing the unreachable, of giving “impossible witness.”

C. Nadia Seremetakis parallels this African form of virtual witnessing in the context of Greek rural women’s death rituals and lament singing:

Antiphony has been described as a prevalent pattern of Greek lamentation from antiquity to the present. . . . [I]t has been understood by commentators as an aesthetic device, and a literary genre. . . . [A]ntiphony is (1) the social structure of mortuary rituals; (2) the internal acoustic organization of lament singing; (3) a prescribed technique for witnessing, for the production/reception of jural discourse, and for the cultural construction of truth; and (4) a political strategy that organizes the relation of women to male-dominated institutions. (100)

Antiphonal witness and biography, the alternation between self and other, sound and silence, the person and the collective, the visible and the invisible, emerges in situations where authentication of self and discourse has been withheld and refused, whether through racism as in South Africa or sexism as Seremetakis documents in Greece. The stratification of speech economies

goes hand in hand with the social stratification of truth claiming. Such communicative asymmetries are frequently countered in oral cultures by language and performance that leads the auditors to tacit domains of moral inference. Antiphonic representation replicates the structure of violent intrusion through the conveyance of the deleted. This antiphonic modality is akin to Freud's magic writing pad of overlapping and discontinuous, visible and less visible, strata of memory transposed through antiphonic dyads into historical representation; here, overt communication transfers an undercode, an afterimage, a shared emotional substance, that renders a testimony collective speech—speech ethically and emotionally accountable to a wounded and defaced collective. The present audience uses antiphonic response to provide the confirmation of speech that the dead can no longer offer the solo witness:

The truth claims that arise from the ritual, then, depend on the emotional force of pain and the jural force of antiphonic confirmation. . . . Antiphony is a jural and historicizing structure. Its dyadic structure (soloist/chorus) guarantees a built-in record-keeping function. (Seremetakis 120)

Here embodied and expressive pain is not a debilitating blockage or disability of traumatization, but rather a cultural tool for collectivizing truth claims, while antiphonal response is an active recording and historicization of the presence, pain, and speech of the witness. In Xhosa the word *phfumlo* means soul. *Phfumlo*, the verb form, means “to breathe.” A person in mourning, a person harboring great suffering and emotional stress, experiences a heavy weight on the chest and shoulders, and cannot breathe easily. *Phfumlo* has a moral connotation, for to breathe is also to speak of painful events that weigh on someone. It can also mean the strong empowered speech of the traditional healer. This speech is the exhaling of the soul, the release of blockage, and an emergence from social death that is incomplete unless it is witnessed and historicized by congregational modes of performance, rather than passive recording.

Kin and survivors often took the stand demanding to know the circumstances of death and disappearance of relations and comrades, because among the Xhosa and Zulu, locating the remains of a deceased kin, and knowing the circumstances of death, are part of pre-Christian purification rituals that set the dead on the path to becoming ancestors for an entire collectivity. The dead may have died as isolated individuals within the structures of the state, but their witnessing by the social mothers was a ritual of social reincorporation, and due to the dead's potential but unrealized status as ancestors, a rite of re-origination for the surviving kin-groups, from which the dead had been subtracted by violence.

Seremetakis's study of gendered mourning looks to affective communities organized around social pain as a strategy of resistance. Whereas Foucault and Scarry examine pain as a political technology dominant institutions use to impose subject positions through somatic intervention, Seremetakis looks at how the performative, embodied, and biographical manipulation of pain can create a rupture between the embodied self and dominant institutions:

The social impact of individual emotional communication is based on moral inferences shared by social actors. . . . Such shared inferences are activated by the fusion of affective force and prescribed communicative media. The latter provoke validating responses and emotional reciprocation from others, a process of consensus building. . . . The personal communication of pain, synthesizing emotional force and body symbolism can vividly dramatize the dissonance between self and society. This discontinuity can attain a collective dimension by exploiting the moral capacity of emotional inference to generate affective enclaves, i.e., communities of pain and healing. . . . Composed of entire categories of persons in conflict with the social structure, such communities of shared emotional inference and reference correspond to Bauman's (1977) notion of performance spaces as disruptive and disjunctive and as alternative social structures within or at the margins of a social structure. This model points to the link between communities founded on the dramaturgy of feeling and the construction of resistance spaces. (4–5)¹²

The production and reception of the witness discourse were not monolithically determined by official commission protocols, or by psychologized theories of trauma expression, but were frequently mediated by in-place Africanized institutions—particularly church rituals of witnessing, pre-Christian beliefs concerning the ancestral status of the dead, even of dead children, as well as various political ideologies.¹³ The witnesses were not deculturalized, depoliticized, and medicalized victims of violence. Many had accumulated long-standing political biographies in “struggle institutions,” going back to their childhood, that mediated their narration of violence. Many who testified were capable of analyzing the institutional logics at the roots of the violent episodes they had experienced or witnessed, or that were shared indirectly through the political memory of their peer communities. A process like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission does not simply harvest disabled and politically naive witnesses, susceptible to opportunistic objectification strategies, but inevitably engages and mobilizes people who have been political actors in their own right. And many political activists in South Africa are loath to assume a victimage status, because an ethic of stoic endurance and resistance characterized ANC political postures in regards to imprisonment, torture, pain, and terror.¹⁴ Many witnesses rejected the biographical

nomination of “victim,” with all the passive and depoliticizing connotations this term implies, choosing instead the term “survivor,” which allows for a sense of political agency. Submitting testimony was not therefore seen as wounded persons showing their scars in public, but rather as an act of political and historical intervention: setting the record straight after the systemic mendacity and disinformation of the former regime. For the first time in their lives, impoverished shantytown mothers could place their discourse, perceptions, moral evaluations, and experience on the same jurial, normative, and authoritative plane as those of the police and army officers who also testified, and who once held arbitrary sway over these women. Former monological authority was now being vehemently contested and delegitimized by Black and gendered voice. Victims of not only violence, but of invisible deleted history, were able to restore their materiality as historical actors who had been submitted to violence because of their political agency.

We all participate in ethnocentrism when we confuse the individual testifying voice—whether in a truth commission forum from a South African black community, or from a Guatemalan Indian collective, or from many other post-colonies—with the juridical monadic subject of the West. Crude applications of Foucauldian models of bio-power, or Agamben’s theory of the sovereign exception (based on extermination camp dynamics), lead to an extreme theoretical individualization and atomization of the victim of state violence. However, this atomization is part and parcel of the dehumanization process built into state violence, and is actively resisted in societies with alternative legacies and resources of communal filiation. In this context, projects like the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission may not be successful in reconstituting national community, but they do offer performance sites through which anti-statist, kinship-based bereavement breaks into public culture and into the space of the nation-state as a critical political discourse, perhaps for the first time in the history of the post-colony.¹⁵

THE ROAD

No one I spoke to associated with organizing the TRC’s Human Rights Violations hearings assumed that the mere enunciation or collation of spoken testimony would produce personal or national healing. Healing was theorized in the context of fiscal-social reparation, and as a long-term process, not an event. Reconciliation more often than not meant reconciling experiences and historical facts that had been silenced or distorted by state secrecy and propaganda. Social healing was always advanced not as a cathartic episode, but as a longitudinal diachronic spectrum. Draped as a banner over

most of its public events, was the TRC motto “Truth. The Road to Reconciliation.” The single word sentence indicated where the commission saw itself in historical process—at the edge of a passage. There is no promise here of a definitive cathartic resolution. Truth telling and fact setting were seen as correctives to the apartheid era’s official mendacity, historical falsification, and clandestine counterinsurgency, but not as activities that would mechanically bring resolution, comity, or conciliation. For the road to reconciliation—to societal healing—is exactly that, a time-mediated route that in the thinking of many of the commission staff was intimately tied to socioeconomic development and to the special place that victims of human rights violations would assume in that development. The commission actually redefined development beyond its economic frames to address its social, symbolic, and cultural dimensions, particularly to the degree that victims of human rights violations could be recuperated as valuable human resources, and not be discarded as disabled traumatized victims. In the commission’s envisioned future, healing was intimately tied to social movement notions of disability rights, societal integration, and economic empowerment. And that movement was explicitly understood as the biographical trajectory of survivors of human rights violations, and not an effect simply of holding hearings, letting people talk, and publishing reports; social healing was a terminal possibility of a very conditional process.

Further, there was no rush to circulate or publicize trauma in the proceedings of the TRC, though this restraint was often overwhelmed by the horrific nature of many of the events narrated. Those who testified to human rights violations had skilled counseling prior to, during, and after their testimony. This counseling was not meant to address long-term issues, but to reduce the potential harm entailed in giving witness in a public forum to personal, horrific experience. Rather than viewing the giving of testimony as healing, the commission was concerned about the harmful and stigmatizing effects of testimony-giving. Though the commission’s “witness handlers” proposed that this counseling process should be extended to the communities from which the witnesses originated, and which had been the site of the human rights violations aired in the hearings, this suggestion was constrained by lack of funds and planning.

Catharsis comes from the Greek *kathari*, which means to cleanse or purify. Yet most of the testimony in human rights violation hearings concerned perpetrators who were anonymous, unknown, and could not be confronted, or who for a variety of reasons would or could not be brought to public scrutiny. Where was the cleansing in this? In amnesty hearings, recipients of human rights abuse often had to witness the indemnification of their abusers,

because the latter had met formal amnesty requirements. Indemnification of the perpetrator, however, did not advance personal healing, nor was it expected to achieve reconciliation. A major function of amnesty was data collection facilitated by the criteria of full disclosure. There was some level of satisfaction that the deeds of perpetrators were made part of the public record. But there was little healing occurring or expected from the amnesty process. In the most publicized cases of public apology, where the perpetrator faced his victim(s), the latter often demanded fiscal compensation and/or voluntary labor, though these customary demands for compensation did not advance cathartic healing. The Commission's public exhumation of the bones of victims of covert political assassination and torture by the police were events that precipitated intense communal mourning, not cathartic healing. The impact of much of the testimony in any one hearing or exhumation, therefore, was to build a sense of unreconciled history and to produce more questions than answers.

There were, however, other tendencies present in the TRC and in its wider media reception that did authorize a premature, skewed foreclosure of the events and wounds that the commission had opened in public inquiry. This foreclosure revolves around some of the commissioners' preferences, in their hearing summations, for certain utilities of memory over others. These utilities were rapidly grasped by a media desperate for quick fixes on the complex reams of data issued daily by the commission. Whether or not the commission's role players fully accepted the utility of the talking cure, many did view recollection as inherently beneficial precisely because of their need for data, and because so much memory had been muted in the apartheid state's culture of secret knowledge. This perspective on the act of recall could easily slip into a metaphysics of the talking cure. But cultural memory is not transparent, and in the hearings held by the commission, manifold memory formations collided and contested for narrative space and definitive powers of naming. As I have written elsewhere:

By treating memory as a utilitarian and unproblematic transparency largely residing in individuals or fragmented communities or as a neutral juridical technology the TRC ignored social memory as a normative institutionalized formation with its own political history. And in doing so the TRC ended up stressing memory's therapeutic possibilities at the expense of establishing its pathogenic connection to institutional violence and that violence's inherence in economic racism, a connection that would more explicitly relate the TRC's project with the historical evisceration of apartheid's economic and spatial violence. In neglecting the hegemonic contours of institutional memory the TRC failed to develop a self-reflexive relationship to its own technologies of memory and failed to confront the human

rights danger in not recalling the disproportionate character of so-called politically motivated institutional violence. The TRC has left an ambivalent and contradictory moral legacy to the degree that it has ceded to future generations an important archive of political terror and violence, witnessed largely from the previously unwritten perspective of black history and embodiment, and yet failed to adequately confront the institutional procedures that reproduce and bureaucratically routinize such violence—an important prophylaxis for future democratic institution building in South Africa. (“Strange Fruit” 260)

The valorization of memory as inherently beneficial lies behind the disagreement of Andrew J. Gross and Michael S. Hoffman with Claude Lanzmann’s understanding of excuse and reason in the concentration camp. For Lanzmann the act of Shoah remembrance as transmission is a priori validating. Transmitted memory is eulogized without exploration of its historical etiology, and without any other authorizing ground for truth than the inmate’s tattoo and voice. Truth is the result of transmission and does not precede it, an understandable position within the epistemologically murky space of death. Transmitted memory is already the rehabilitation of experience; transmission is agency out of an ecology where the project of the inmate was only to suffer, waste, and die, and where he/she is denied the status of speaking subject. But as Gross and Hoffman discuss, Lanzmann and Eli Wiesel elevate transmission to a heuristic paradigm of Holocaust discussion and analysis. This centralizes the act of giving testimony as the core ritual of Holocaust anamnesis—a centralization that can also be found in the post-hearing summation of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but which does not refract the full dynamic of collective recollection.¹⁶ Any truth commission’s acts of recall and recuperation must necessarily contend with how social memory functions in the midst of the very human rights violations and atrocities the commission excavates. If a society is to come to terms with a terror-ridden past, then it must be through a knowledge of how certain memory formations contributed to the creation of that violent past. We need here a sociocultural history of anamnesis, a critical memory of memory in order to remember a future that moves beyond the pathogenesis of political terror and human rights abuse.

THE SPECULUM OF TRAUMA AND WITNESSING

However, in the context of structural forgetfulness and institutionalized cultures of mendacity, the biographical narration’s potential for healing is possible less because of its iteration of trauma, and more because of the assertion of enunciativa agency—the registering of both the narrator and previously

inadmissible experience into a linguistic community and a fractured ecology of truth. As Eric Santner writes about memory, mourning, and film in post-World War II Germany,

much poststructuralist critical practice views the figure of the mourner-survivor as a kind of arch-trope not just of what it means to be a citizen of postwar or post-modern society but, more radically, for what it means to be a member of a linguistic community. To be a speaking subject is to have already assumed one's fundamental vocation as survivor of the painful losses—the structural catastrophes—that accompany one's entrance into the symbolic order. . . . [The violence of the Western Tradition] may be traced to a repression of these catastrophes, to a disavowal of the opportunities for and necessities of bereaved thinking, speaking, writing. . . . The violence of history grows out of a refusal or an inability on the part of the members of a society to assume the vocation of mourner-survivor of what might be called the violence of the signifier. (9–10)

In the writing of numerous poststructural theorists, *historical* suffering is believed to spring from a failure to tolerate the *structural* suffering—the always already shattered mirrors of the Imaginary—that scars one's being as a speaking subject. . . . In this view, the speaking subject who has entered—or rather fallen—into the order of signification has crossed over a bar that separates him or her from the benevolence as well as the tyranny of nature and the imaginary relations of myth. She or he is marooned in a world of ruins, fragments, stranded objects, that thereby take on a textual aspect: they demand to be read. (12)

Santner's understanding of the post-violence chronoscape of ruins mandates a heterological history of both the artifacts and acts of witnessing, with memory as both an enabling and repressive cultural practice. Violence is doubled in the act of terror and in the repression of bereavement. Critical bereavement is a language of and about fragmentation, but it also thematizes the private as a cultural object, rather than accepting it as an imposed fetish such as trauma, and thus as a shelter for rigidified and pathologized subject positions.

Both the terms “language” and “community” invoked by Santner demand a politics of location, of topographic and contextualized speech economies, as I have discussed above. Rosanne Kennedy argues in this volume:

In developing an adequate response to testimony, the first task . . . is to recognize that Stolen Generations testimonies are “social utterances” which intervene in a present social context, rather than simple representations of a past event. . . . As Tzvetan Todorov explains, Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic foregrounds the social context in which communication occurs. Address is of course a central element in a dialogic approach, but the meanings of both address and response are produced from the entire social complex in which they are uttered. (49–50)

At the same time that we need to attend to the immediacy of the social context, in the face of transnational discourses of human rights and transnational media economies we also have to examine how local context is elided, marginalized, and even effaced as the survivor biography is rendered into symbolic capital in other discursive strata. Thus it is neither accidental nor a fortuitous misreading that the proceedings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission were reduced to a ceremony of cathartic trauma exposure, or that key actors in the TRC, as they negotiated their post-commission careers, rewrote the complex story of the research and the hearings in terms of the transnational cultural intelligibility of trauma narratives and confessional talking cures. I cannot track these post-commission entrepreneurial careers here, but I would like to explore the consequences of the trauma trope as a signifier of history, as something that short-circuits the opportunities of bereaved thinking through stasis. I can sketch the reductive force of trauma as it circulates both in human rights discourse and in such consumer markets as trauma narrative and “trauma cinema,” and more specifically the uncritical use of the term in academic analysis that reflects on truth commissions, human rights inquiry, genocide archives, and the biographical genres they collect and circulate.

The primary characteristic of the non-medical use of the term is its general lack of specificity. It is generically deployed as a description and as a diagnostic tool, and viewed as a pathogen—trauma is both an object and a method of analysis. Rarely are we informed as to what theory of trauma is being deployed when it is invoked: medicalized trauma as physical wounding, psychoanalytic definitions which locate trauma as static blockage or frustration or fixation of drives, an embodied stasis preserved in somatic schemata, a wounding episode that cannot be narrated without inflicting further harm, or the clinical certitude of post traumatic stress theory (which has recently come under substantive methodological and historical critique).¹⁷ In my fieldwork experience in South Africa, the media popularization and generic use of the term “trauma” ended up creating hierarchies of victims and suffering. Many black South Africans made distinctions between those recipients of human rights violations who were “traumatized” and those who were not. The male victim of torture and imprisonment was automatically viewed as traumatized; the local female head of a household who endured constant police raids, the disappearance of her men and children, and minimal economic subsistence as a caregiver for her disappeared/dead children’s children was frequently not viewed herself as having been “traumatized” in comparison to male activists. And of course the structural violence of apartheid, which tended to be seen in mainly economic terms, was not described as traumatic.

In academic, media, and human rights discourse, “trauma,” due to its labiality, actually functions as an aesthetic concept to the extent that it lends itself to creating a universalized human rights subject, enabling mass reception and commodification, as discussed by many of the essays in this volume. What are the ramifications of fusing an ahistorical medicalized, psychoanalytic, therapeutic, or aesthetic concept to historiographic inquiry and narrative? What occurs when historiography is grounded by a disciplinary concept that purports to exist outside of historical time to the degree that it is anchored in philosophical anthropology and its cognates medicine, psychology, law, or theodicy? The trauma-aesthetic signifies the irruption of the abnormal and the pathogenic. Trauma contravenes the homeostatic and the routine, and the recovery from trauma is implicitly posited as the return to a homeostasis of self and society. Trauma’s irruption is an historical fall, and detraumatized history becomes the restorative goal of juridical and therapeutic action. Trauma becomes an ante-historical and post-historical sign under which we place the new human rights history. In the trauma-aesthetic, history becomes epistemologically grounded in the ahistorical.

If traumatic intrusion presumes a non-traumatized prior self that was not disfigured, how is the imputed homeostatic concept of the state of self and society prior to traumatic intrusion reconciled with what we know of colonial and postcolonial histories, the *longue durée* of structural violence of racial, gender, sexual, and ethnic inequities, the historical norm and routine of Walter Benjamin’s state of emergency? As Seremetakis observes:

A group exposed to external and internal domination . . . experiences cultural fragmentation as the very condition of its existence. There can be no holistic experience in the margins, only the creation of refuge areas that provisionally assemble the holistic from fragments in order to intervene in the public structure of domination. The experience of discontinuity and break prevails in the margins. The myth of holism and continuity is the ideological creation of “centers” and of dominating groups. (2)

Jean-François Lyotard concludes that there is no continuity that traumatic history interrupts; what is wounding is the myth of continuity that the trauma-aesthetic implicitly reinforces. In reference to the Holocaust he states:

All these wounds can be given names. Their names are strewn across the field of our unconscious like so many secret obstacles to the quiet perpetuation of the modern project. (14)

As shall be discussed below, the trauma aesthetic is the continuation of the modern project, particularly its dependency on a politics of the body. The

trauma-aesthetic smuggles in a medical narrative as a philosophy of history; it projects cure by occluding the prehistory of trauma, by positing retrospective stability where none existed within human experience. Its ahistorical reductionism also ignores the structural difference of historical and political context, as Wendy Hesford discusses in terms of Catharine A. MacKinnon's feminist philosophical anthropology:

MacKinnon's conflation of rape, pornography, and prostitution across cultural and national locations (for instance, comparing rape warfare in Bosnia-Herzegovina with Linda Lovelace's coerced role in *Deep Throat* (25); comparing "ethnic rape" with brothels all over the world (26); comparing "snuff" films with filmed torture scenes in Bosnia; and comparing Bosnia with the Holocaust, and both with pornography and violence against women) ignores the complexities of cultural location and agency, and creates a universalized misogyny (as pornography) at work worldwide, with no distinction among sites. (121)

REGIMES OF TRUTH

To what extent do representations of human rights violations position viewers rhetorically as "voyeurs of the suffering of others, tourists amid their landscapes of anguish" (Ignatieff 10)? To what extent does a flexible, mobile rhetoric of listening reflect a generalizing of otherness, which depends, in Edward Said's words, on a "flexible positional superiority"? (Hesford 108)

I would propose that the trauma-aesthetic is but a recent incarnation of a "flexible positional authority." The facile fusion of trauma-aesthetics and testimonial display does more than archaicize violence, commodify the past, isolate the "traumatized" from peer communities, and promote short-term cathartic-empathic identification. I suggest that the trauma-aesthetic installs and smuggles into the human rights discourse a visual genealogy of witnessing and testimony-giving that sorts victim and witness into positions of hierarchical observation, compulsory visibility, and non-reciprocal appropriation of the body in pain. In order to tease out these visual codes that are obscured by legal realism and the psychologization of social suffering, I have to complicate the cultural history of witnessing protocols and their relation to regimes of truth. This will not be a linear, evolutionary narrative of fall and restoration; rather, I propose that the optic of the traumatic and its therapeutic and generalizing project is rooted in its own repression of memory and in consequent compulsive repetition disorders.

In an important study of juridical torture in fifth-century Athens, Page duBois discusses how the slave, as an adjunct to the master, as a component of the master's juridical personality, would be tortured to produce testimony

that would involuntarily and objectively confirm or contradict the master's discourse in a court adjudication:

What kind of truth is the slave's truth? Aristotle says of the relationship between slave and master:

The slave is a part of the master—he is, as it were, a part of the body, alive [*empasukhon ti*] but yet separated [*kekhôrismenon*] from it. (*Politics* 1255b)

Thus, according to Aristotle's logic, representative or not, the slave's truth is the master's truth; it is in the body of the slave that the master's truth lies, and it is in torture that his truth is revealed. The torturer reaches through the master to the slave's body, and extracts the truth from it. . . . [T]he body of the tortured . . . on the rack, on the wheel, under the whip assumes a relationship to truth. Truth is constituted as residing in the body of the slave; because he can apprehend reason, without possessing reason. . . . Truth, *alêtheia*, comes from elsewhere, from another place, from the place of the other. (66, 68)

For duBois the practice of recovering text, testimony, and truth from the slave's body resides in other practices that place the slave body in a relation to writing and communication:

The tortured body retains scars, marks that recall the violence inflicted upon it by the torturer. In part because slaves were often tattooed in the ancient world, such marks of torture resonate in the Greek mind with tattoos, and with other forms of metaphorical inscription. . . . The woman's body was in ancient Greece sometimes likened to a writing tablet. (69)

The marked slave's body is also the space of transcription, and used to mediate communication between citizens. "This placement of the 'epigram' . . . on the *metope*, the forehead of the slave, makes the inscription a sign. The message of Herodotus's slave was concealed by his hair, directed to a specified other, the recipient who received the slave as a vehicle for his master's words" (73). DuBois traces the relationship of the authenticating torture and communicative deployment of the slave's body to a more generalized cultural construction of truth. The recovery of truth is opposed to *lethe*, forgetfulness. Truth, *alêtheia*, emerges from oblivion and concealment:

The dominant spatial model for the approach to truth appears to be the . . . descent into darkness and re-emergence into light. [77] [T]ruth is inaccessible in daily life, it is something hidden in darkness, something to which only the extraordinary man has access. [87] Lethe is a powerful concept referring not only to the forgetting of pain and suffering, but also to . . . being erased by time. . . . *Alêtheia* thus may have reference to . . . the truth of history, of accuracy about the events of the past, another realm, another scene. [103] The model of reporting suggests a

known truth that resides elsewhere, if only in the consciousness of the knower, that must be brought to speech and conveyed by the speaker; at another extreme of this spatial model is the idea of truth hidden and buried. . . . [S]eeking the truth may involve a journey, a passage through a spatial narrative . . . a sinking down into the past, into the interiority of memory. This model of truth seeking is consistent with other such paradigms already suggested . . . where . . . the violence of the torturer is thought to be necessary to enforce the production of truth from the slave. . . . The slave's body is thus construed as one of these sites of truth, like . . . the underworld, the interiority of the woman's body, the elsewhere toward which truth is always slipping. [105]

This dynamic is discernable in some of the earliest episodes of testimony-giving concerning violations of core human rights: the oral and written biographies of African-American ex-slaves as staged by the abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century. According to Houston A. Baker, these narratives

were, in great measure, extensions of the active oratorical and dramatic roles played by ex-bondsmen in the abolitionist movement. The most important presence at any public abolitionist gathering was that of the former slave. The proof of American slavery's horrendous effects could be dramatically exhibited by requesting the fugitive to turn his naked back to the audience, displaying for all to see the permanent disfiguration caused by the overseer's and the slave driver's whips. The less visible psychic scars caused by slavery could be made manifest, however, only through the vivid, thrilling, first-person oratory of the bondsman. Most authors of slave narratives had told their stories innumerable times at abolitionist meetings before committing their accounts to writing. They had to be skillful users of language indeed to convey their messages effectively at these assemblies. (10)

The fusion of linguistic performance and bodily exposure here unfolds as a rite of hierarchical observation and consequent authentication. The nineteenth century abolitionist audience, ensconced in bourgeois rectitude, clothed and relatively insulated from day to day personal violence, witnesses the slave's authentication of his/her spoken biography through the exposed and mutilated black body. The ex-slave is endowed with the status of speaking subject, but his/her *logos* both originates in and requires the supplement and the archive of the subjugated body. The full circuit of authentication requires not only the aural engagement, but the empathic yet objectifying gaze of the audience of removed witness.

Sojourner Truth appears to have acceded to this cultural logic of testimonial authentication in the body. In her famous "Ain't I a Woman" speech at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, she too resorted to the testimony of the body under hierarchical observation. According to one contemporary account:

Sojourner walked to the podium and slowly took off her sunbonnet. Her six-foot frame towered over the audience. She began to speak in her deep, resonant voice. . . . Sojourner pointed to one of the ministers. “That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much, and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?”

In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, Saidiya V. Hartman documents how for any white audience in a racialized American culture, the exposure of the slave’s body is invariably imbued with the aura of performance and pleasure. According to Hartman, this exposure cannot evade the “performing of blackness,” and its simulation “of black will only in order to reanchor subordination” (56). For it is only through this scopic regime, the peculiar legibility of the black body in a racist order, that the testimonial of the ex-slave attains cultural intelligibility and authenticating witness in the speculum of the abolitionist meeting. For Hartman, under slavery the performative display of the slave’s body is “the simulation of consent in the context of extreme domination . . . an orchestration intent upon making the captive body speak the master’s truth” (38). In the abolitionist theater, the slave’s body still confesses a truth about the master and displays the master’s will, which was always manifested through the slave’s body, whether as labor power, as token of submission, or in this instance, as a transcript of the master’s violence and coercion. As Hartman states, “These performances of blackness are in no way the ‘possession’ of the enslaved. They are enactments of social struggle and contending articulations of racial meaning” (7). The slave’s exposed body mediates between the Abolitionist and the slave master, between the witness and the perpetuator.

As in Page duBois, the abolitionist audience’s recovery of the ex-slave’s truth is a descending journey into material otherness, but here, in the rationalism of the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement, modern and pre-modern forms of witnessing and authentication converge. Does the presence of the primitivized other require this regression to older forms of authentication based in the instrumentation of the body and the virtualization of pain? And do not all recipients of terror and systemic violence partake in this projected aura of primitivization to the degree that their exposure to violence removes them, even temporarily, from the presumed civilized surround and

subjects them to a natal alienation? For in these earlier theaters of memory and regimes of truth, we can recognize the contemporary process of recovering an archive of human rights violations from postcolonial peripheries, from closed societies, and from subjugated, vertically positioned social strata and their respective subaltern groups. We do not have to demonstrate causality to recognize a profound homology. The truth that is revealed or unconcealed from these geographies of alterity is intimately linked to its authentication in material violence—here disorderly matter is elevated to, and controlled by, lawful speech. Trauma conforms to this buried concealed truth, hidden in darkness, the “known truth that resides elsewhere, if only in the consciousness of the knower” (duBois 105). Trauma as buried truth is located in the body, in forgetfulness, in the other denied the full status of speaking subject, and in alien geography, and must be brought up to the surface in modes of exposure and display, including pain and language. The testimonial *mise-en-scène* described by Houston Baker follows this vertical descent to the body and to truth.

The ex-slave has been brought from a geography of bondage, but even in the North, in welcoming but predominately white abolitionist circles, his condition is one of natal alienation.¹⁸ He comes from elsewhere, he is not intrinsic, he has no citizenship, he is an import from the outside. In recounting his biography of oppression, the ex-slave translates his/her body into speech, a speech that still must anchor itself in the exposure of the body, thereby enabling a gaze that descends into the body to access a past embedded and preserved in the materiality of the body. In this exposé the slave has attained an unstable and provisional subjecthood, but what type of subjecthood is this? In the context of South African colonial pictography, David Bunn dissects racially marked provisional subjecthood, explaining it as “a moment when for discursive or ideological reasons a figure is temporarily precipitated out of a background mass as though by brief metamorphosis. At the same time we are led to believe that this attention the native witness exhibits is not something that speaks of self-conscious agency” (46).¹⁹ The testifying ex-slave still needs to support his speech by virtualizing the violence he has been exposed to in the performance of the body. His speech and truth is precipitated from the mass of the body scarred by violence. In the colonial visual culture described by Bunn, “The condition of the figure (the provisional subject), in other words, is that of the native subject as landscape, a witness soon to subside back into the primary visual ground” (46). In the slave’s testimonial performance, this would be the vertical descent of subjecthood back into the primordial landscape of the racialized body in the aftermath of the giving of testimony.

The exposure of the scarred body in the abolitionist oration stands in relation to the exposure of the slave's body as commodity on the auction block. There is a reversal of the body and speech in abolitionist testimony. From the Middle Passage, through the journey of the slave coffle to the auction block, the slave moved from language to the body, from a speaking subject to a reduced mute bodily object, to chattel property. The abolitionist performance of testimony reversed that passage, moving the ex-slave from the body to language. However, there is a median locus where these double exposures of the slave's body, its authenticating status as productive labor or as credible witness to oppression, fuse into a stereoscopic moment, a dialectical image that situates the act of witnessing and the act of violence with a common site: a subordinated subject position, and a shared specular inequity. I would suggest this stereoscopic moment still shapes the act of contemporary human rights witness to the degree that such witness simulates violence in terms of the dynamics of authentication and the fixing of a subject position.

In the nineteenth-century abolitionist meeting, the witnessing gaze still required violence for authentication, even in surrogate and virtual forms. The witnessing gaze descends into memory and the evidentiary depths of the body for biographical truth. As in duBois's discussion of Greek torture, the ex-slave's body carries, in its scarification, an autonomous truth, independent of the slave's speech, memory, or subjectivity. These days the popularized and generic aesthetic of trauma carries this burden of disfigured bodily presence in the metaphor of painful and resistant buried memory/speech. Traumatized speech is more proximate to the body and disorderly matter than non- or de-traumatized speech; traumatized speech and speech from trauma are physicalized speech scarred by the history of the body. The victim's traumatized speech is a *logos* that is retrieved through a painful and heroic descent into memory and pain, a biographical journey that culminates in language, but which is also a more materialized and disordered speech than that of the truth commissioner, mental health therapist, or audience of witness, secure in the supposedly post-violent space of observation and adjudication.

To resist archaicizing the cultural legacy of slavery is to recognize the trace of mastery and subordination in the abolitionist and more contemporary theaters of witnessing. Within the formats of legal and traumatic realism, the act of testifying out of violence both exposes often hidden oppression, and ironically replicates the relational structure of that violence pathogenically. The imago of the perpetrator and the recipient of violence is replicated in the testimonial (in)formation of the victim, and in the specular and communicative circuit established between the recipient of violence and the *ex post*

facto audience of witness. The audience of witness and the perpetrator share the same visual culture of victimage. They both attain their subject position and relation to the victim through the display of pain, and they both use the marked body of the victim to construct memory, to restage truth. The historiography of memory is a record of reenacted horror, violence deployed to reproduce remembered or desired mastery, as much as it may be expected to produce beneficial recovery.

I stress the spatialized circuit and the differential speech that exists between the late modern human rights testimony and the audience of juridical or therapeutic witness because this relation bears the mark of typified postcolonial subject positions. I have commented on the imposition of rapid healing agendas on victim/survivors in the context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, though I have also indicated alternative cultures of witnessing that cut across the grain of the monophonic structure of the commission's proscenium, jural, and therapeutic formats. Many of the essays in this collection discuss the commodification of trauma/healing in certain readership markets. However, I have not yet considered to what degree the cathartic investment in healing agendas expresses the contradictions of the biographer's audience more than it describes the desires of the local chronicler of human rights violation. In his classic ethnography *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wildman*, Michael Taussig explores how the colonizer in Latin America sought healing from the colonized, and solicited cures from the most marginal, and sometimes almost extinct recipients of prior colonial violence: the Indian and the African ex-slave. The biography and vocation of the African and First Nation's healer in Colombian and Venezuelan shamanic traditions begin in the healer undergoing a prior violence or life-threatening illness that marks the healer and brings with its decentering the capacity to cure others. Taussig links these prior afflictions to the etiology of colonial conquest and structural oppression, and correspondingly sees the descendants of the colonizer expressing postcolonial contradiction in illness and dis-ease. The colonizer seeks emblematic victims for somatic cure and implicit historical resolution. Taussig's phenomenology describes this process as "healing through hallucinogenic creation of the anti-self" by which the "colonizer gains release from the civilization that so assails him" (327). Taussig's descriptions of socially and culturally stratified colonial and postcolonial healing resonate with duBois's description of the spatialized model of truth recovery as vertical descent, as a relatedness to spaces and personifications marked as beneath and as other. Taussig is quite clear about the possibility and fate of empathy/identification/recognition in

this dynamic, and his discussion is apropos of human rights testimony, its therapeutic dramaturgy, and its specular theaters of witnessing:

How often we have been told that rites enforce solidarity, bringing people together affirming their unity, their interdependence, the commonwealth of their sentiments and dispositions. But what are we to make of rites such as this wherein the Indian heals the souls of the colonist? Surely the healing here depends far more on the existence, the reproduction, and the artistry of difference as otherness and as oppression than it does on *solidarity*? . . . [Such a dynamic displays] the colonized turning back to the colonizer the underside of this hate and fear congealed in the imagery of savagery. (327)

All these unburied ghosts of domination—the slave master, the ex-slave, the abolitionist, the ill colonizer, and the curing colonized—bequeath us a countermemory of witnessing and an enchainment to violence that cannot be easily archaicized—that is relegated to a pre-human rights past. Instruments and media of authentication reappear like compulsion repetition disorder from place to place and epoch to epoch. Methodologies of truth claiming resemble a traumatic blockage wherever truth making occurs between those who are not coeval.²⁰ Truth claiming is historically subject to the transformations of media and modes of simulation, and yet the spatialized project of virtualized remembrance, the appropriation of others' memories, speech, and embodiment, and the use of the other as a theater of truth persist. DuBois's incisive study of fifth-century torture in Athens opens at a contemporary exhibition of instruments of torture in Rome in 1985. DuBois sees torture as emblematic of the Western civilization project's search for unitary truth, which is always somewhere else, always out of reach, and coextensive with the exportation, mounting, and display of civilizational master narratives on the figure and spaces of the other:

Though I will write of the etymology of torture and its meaning in ancient Greek culture, I do not want to reduce it to an etymology, or trivialize it as a literary topos. Rather, I want to show how the logic of our philosophical tradition, of some of our inherited beliefs about truth, leads almost inevitably to conceiving of the body of the other as the site from which truth can be produced. (5–6)

HISTORIES WITH AND WITHOUT A SUBJECT

I propose that the biographical artifact of human rights violations is a disemic text, performance, or enunciation in so far as it carries both the marks of the perpetrator and the trace of the historical survivor not only in its inception

but at the point of its reception, and in its modes of reception. Violence is not only written into its content, but into the action of the biography's endowment and receivership. The specter of the dyad—recipient and perpetrator—haunts every moment of witnessing, as a static nucleus or kernel that simulates antithetical subject positions at every moment of witnessing's repetition and relay. These narratives of human rights violation are testimonials to the irreconcilable. They neither refract a unified speaking subject, nor readily lend themselves to unification and instrumentation from without, despite the many orderings and reductions applied to them by law, media, and medicine. Asymmetric subject positions are not only figures within the narrative, but also are relationships inscribed into the symbolic economy of narrative transmission, response, and adjudication. The authoritative and monophonic application of a narrative closure can only instigate further asymmetric subject positions, further tales left untold, further forms of cultural violence, and further inequitable regimes of truth obtained from the condition of those who have been othered by violence.

The narrative of human rights violation is morally pathogenic because it resists and provokes all moral ends. There is both an existential and political necessity to the survivor of historical shipwreck resisting ends and final purposes. The survivor's story holds out a deferral for future historical reflexivity. The victim/survivor can never be totalized or exhaustively depicted, and resists descriptive adequacy as a necessary ethical recess. The political necessity of such an ethical reserve, deferment, and recess implies a critique of any history grounded in philosophical anthropology. Any exhaustive ideological appropriation of history's survivors should be an occasion for political wariness because of its potential to legitimate new victims and new excuses for assault and harm—to commit violence “in the name of.” No ideology of just war can function without the biographical totalization of the victim—the exhaustive ideological appropriation of the victim by moralized concepts such as trauma, the fact that the term “victim” or “trauma” permits definitive representations, propels the stranded historical survivor into a condition of fiction and fetishism, and bars the discovery of other truths and other subjects. Am I asserting that it was ethically wrong to violently resist apartheid in South Africa, for example? Not at all, to the degree it was an inclusive struggle for an open-ended political subject. However, I will ask to what degree did the exclusive chartering of national community on the commemoration ground of apartheid victimage legitimize the post-apartheid regime's denial of the human rights of persons infected and affected by HIV-AIDS—a denial by a new state apparatus that greeted the pandemic with a familiar

structural indifference once associated with the erased suffering of the victims of apartheid?

The recent wedding of historiography, archiving, and witnessing to projects of restorative justice entails instituting a proper subject of history, and thus the imposition of a master narrative, a temporal transparency, and a foreclosing anthropological limit that can exclude emerging minorities characterized by gender difference, sexual preference, and compromised immune systems. This insight, I believe, informed Foucault's critique of humanism in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

If the history of thought could remain the locus of uninterrupted continuities, if it could endlessly forge connections that no analysis could undo without abstraction, if it could weave, around everything that men say and do, obscure synthesis that anticipate for him, prepare him, and lead him endlessly towards his future, it would provide a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of consciousness. Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject—in the form of historical consciousness—will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode. Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous, and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action, are the two sides of the same system of thought. In this system, time is conceived in terms of totalization and revolutions are never more than moments of consciousness. In various forms, this theme has played a constant role since the nineteenth century: to preserve, against all decenterings, the sovereignty of the subject, and the twin figures of anthropology and humanism. (12)

The biographical artifact of historical horror is not the history of a single typified subject; rather, it bears traces of the relationality of violence, and as a text of mourning, the traces of the absent, the disappeared, and the dead. The biographical artifact anthropomorphizes the relationality of violence, and thus can serve as the embarkation point for an analysis of this relation, but it can only slip into further repression if allowed to languish in the rigidified form of a terminal legal, medical, redressive, therapeutic subject. For it is the fetish of petrified subject positions, dyadically polarized, subordinate to each other, imposing wholesale equity and inequity on each other, cannibalizing each other, surveilling each other, and witnessing each other in acts of empathy or retribution that crowd the historical spaces of death, and congregate in the archive of terror.

The fetish of the subject position is what Michel Serres would identify as the para-site of the relational structures of violence. It is what we often hope to morally salvage from the wreckage of political terror, and yet the rigidified subject position of the assaulted and aggrieved can readily serve as the ontological ground for justifying and replicating renewed violence. Human rights' legal, therapeutic, and media publicity may reinstall the traumatized subject at the center of historical process, but this installation will not disinstall violence from history. To move beyond this subject-centered history, and those agendas that propose to cure, restore, and indemnify the subject, we must look past the cultural mask and historiographic screens upon which historical personhood is permitted to project itself: those surfaces and facades of legitimated juridical-therapeutic narrative. The victim/survivor can never be exhaustively represented, and historically formed personhood cannot be contained within the limits of the utilitarian subject position. The latter is almost always an institutional and ideological objectification that allows persons to circulate in history as objectified substance that can be attacked, assaulted, defaced, restored, rehabilitated, forgiven, narrated, and commemorated.

In a transnationalized, interdependent world, what is the underside of the neo-liberal project of making history transparent, of resolving the contradictions of the globalizing violence and the impinging spaces of disorder that assail the neo-liberal world view? What is the moral genealogy of extracting or eliciting testimony of the other from historical, geographical, and economic margins afflicted by this violence? Taussig's ethnography suggests colonial relatedness haunts the postcolonial projects of historical clarification and civilizational cure. For Taussig, the postcolonial curative project is entangled with a complicity in historical violence that remains tacit but unacknowledged. What are the entrenched and uncomfortable memory formations that underwrite neo-liberal humanism's own contradictions and dis-ease in bearing witness to the afflicted other? Tikka Wilson cites the following remarks from one member of Australia's Stolen Generations:

I am not comfortable talking about myself, precisely because marginalised people are often called upon to do a kind of public confession. The others say, "If you speak to us about your personal experiences we can better understand your position." I often wonder why people from dominant groups couldn't understand my position by reflecting more on their own actions. (86)

The audience of witness places violence and its survivor before it, on front stage, and yet violence functions as the staging ground and the condition of possibility for its gaze. Authenticating auditing activates an unconscious figure/ground relation; historicized and transnational complicities of violence

constitute the effaced ground that enables the witnessing gaze. The cultivation of the scopic regime, the visual culture of watching the performed memory and virtual suffering of the other, the gatekeeping that cultural intelligibility imposes on diverse and heterological experience, are not necessarily identical with learning self-reflexivity from people who are arbitrarily positioned as the stranded objects of history.

In a transnationalized world, the need to demarcate, through performance and iconography, disorderly political matter and spaces of death and violence from supposedly civil terrains of order discourse and rationality becomes a political ceremony. David Harvey has called this the pathologization of social space, a demarcation that creates arenas of judgment and didactic spaces of disorder. It is no coincidence that recent post-9/11 discourses on barbarism/civilization have justified military interventions on the other side of the world as humanitarian aid, and that humanitarian aid itself has been militarized and transformed into a mode of policing. In many instances the mediatization of witnessing through commissions of inquiry or electronic circulation is but the creation, replication, and enforcement of such difference, marking virtual boundaries in a world rife with political complicity, leaky ideological borders, and interspatial accountability. The erection of virtual boundaries throws up virtual figures of disorder that require *cordon sanitaire*. These historical ghosts include faceless terrorists, teenage suicide bombers, elusive masterminds of disorder like Osama Bin Laden, economic refugees and asylum seekers, and liminal victims of human rights violations—they all partake in a provisional subjecthood that is polarized to enlightenment vision and lends itself to various objectification practices. Consider the political irony, and the complete lack of coincidence, that the bodies used for recent public dissection theaters—the epitome of the enlightenment medical gaze—by the notorious Dr. Gunther Van Hagan have been exposed as being those of deceased, maltreated, and in many instances executed Chinese prisoners, whose corpses were sold by their captors.

Part and parcel of this marking of spatial hierarchy is the perceptual stratification of subjecthood and narrative efficacy. These tend to be one-sided performative strategies that promise the politically afflicted a progression to civil dignity supposedly already possessed by those who manage the rationality of jural exposure and resolution, and the magic of raising trauma to the surface. In this the Cottesloe Convention was politically correct; the witnessing of human rights violations necessitates a “*status confessionis*” from auditors as much as it does from witnesses. Disclosing the violence of removed witnessing brings the figure of the perpetrator closer to home, and with that intimacy widens the scope of moral and political responsibility,

and more importantly widens the scope of memory-work that needs to be undertaken. Will those Western European and American governments who supported the breakup of Yugoslavia and posited Milošević as a stabilizing force in the region stand trial with him at the Hague? Will the American officials who armed Saddam Hussein sit in the dock when he is placed on trial? Will the British government abandon its neutral façade as arbiter of a peace process in Northern Ireland, and disclose its ongoing role in the production and reproduction of political terror? Where does the political intelligibility and stage of witnessing begin and end? Whether these technologies of memory can fulfill their utopian promise as empowering political technologies, as the means to create polity and community and to restore human dignity, may very well reside in a rare cultural capacity to shift the boundary lines between violence and post-violence, and to recognize and retrieve our own “traumas” of memory and self-serving dramaturgies of truth claiming, and their long occlusion of history and personhood.

NOTES

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I would like to express my appreciation for the rich dialogues and thoughtful feedback provided by the various members of the Center for Religion and Media at New York University, where I first aired this paper as part of their Human Rights Workshop in March, 2004.

1. Seremetakis's ethnographic and historical study of Greek women's lamenting is a seldom cited but seminal study on bereaved practices of signification and embodied mourning that contest social hierarchies through ceremonies of truth-making. Despite her regional focus, the implications of her work extend far beyond Greece, providing an ethnographic complement to Julia Kristeva's study of abjection, though not derived from it.
2. “Hegel insists that the proper subject of such a record is the state,” White writes: “When there is no rule of law, there can be neither a subject nor the kind of event that lends itself to narrative representation.” Neither “historicity” nor “narrativity” “are possible without some notion of the legal subject that can serve as the agent, agency, and the subject of historical narrative” (12–13).
3. See also my discussion in *Formations of Violence* of the exigencies of collecting oral history and life history in a political emergency zone, and the relation of biographical remembering of self to fragmented embodiment in an ecology of political terror.
4. As a government minister, Dullah Omar was involved in the legislative planning of the Truth Commission, but was not involved in the implementation of the TRC or its day to day activities. As I shall discuss, though part of the official rhetoric, his views about the rapid overcoming of the past were not uniformly shared by those intimately involved in the organization of the human rights violations hearings, nor reflected in the Commission's public imagery at these hearings.

5. See my discussion of the sensorium of narrative and visual realism in relation to political terror in "Violence and Vision."
6. I was one of the presenters at this conference. All discussion of the inception and procedures of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is based on my multisite fieldwork between 1996 and 2000 on the hearings and organizational dynamics of the commission. This fieldwork and analysis was funded by a series of Senior Fellowships from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation for the Study of Violence and Human Aggression, 1997–2000.
7. Transparency both signified the non-secretive public functioning of the TRC itself, and the optimism of reestablishing a factual basis to South African history and polity. See the section on structural forgetfulness below.
8. See my *Formations of Violence*, in which I examine local oral history as an excluded discourse of everyday life that possessed no truth claiming status in the linguistic economy of Northern Ireland's Republican and Loyalist political culture. Through oral history research I was able to identify embodiment as the material site and everyday life-world where political violence invested its semiotic and transformative energies.
9. After Hitler's seizure of power in 1933, Protestant Christians faced pressure to "aryanize" the Church, expel Jewish Christians from the ordained ministry, and adopt the Nazi "Führer Principle" as the organizing principle of church government. The Barmen Declaration was a call to resistance against the theological claims of the Nazi state.
10. After the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the South African member churches of the World Council of Churches (WCC) met in the Johannesburg suburb of Cottesloe to discuss human rights violations in South Africa. At the end of the week-long consultation, the delegates drafted the "Cottesloe Statement," condemning racial discrimination, affirming the legitimacy of multiracial worship, calling for an equitable justice system, and affirming the validity of interracial marriage. In the following years non-Afrikaner churches, especially the South African Catholic Bishops Conference and the SACC, became increasingly critical of apartheid, issuing numerous declarations and pronouncements about the racial injustices perpetuated by the apartheid regime. They also challenged the theology of apartheid that had been constructed by the Afrikaner churches. In 1981, the black Reformed churches declared that apartheid was a heresy.
11. For a fuller exploration of African countermemory vis à vis the proceedings and protocols of the TRC, see my essay "Strange Fruit."
12. See also my discussion of the signifying body in *Formations of Violence*.
13. Unfortunately, despite the significant presence of Muslims as witnesses, the TRC indulged in vaguely Christian symbolism and made little effort to incorporate publicly Islamic perspectives and ethics, even though Muslims were represented on the commission staff. This occurred despite the fact that between 1960 and 1992, with sanctioning from their Imams, many South African Muslims engaged in resistance activities because of their religious beliefs.
14. Stoic endurance hindered the expression of suffering by ANC activists. Most denied breaking under torture, and those that did were stigmatized and excluded from the movement as informers. Many women activists did not want to speak of violations of

their bodies under torture and in captivity, for fear of being restigmatized by the existing gender hierarchies of post-apartheid South African society. ANC women activists demanded closed hearings in order to testify in front of the truth commission, but these were not considered successful due to lack of participation.

15. For the relation of victim biography to public mourning as a cultural/political practice, and for the extensive history of state and/or church repression of kinship-based mourning in public space, see Seremetakis, Loreaux, and Aries.
16. The camp guard's refusal to rationalize does not, however, remove rationality from the Shoah, but points to the programmed absence of rationality, of excuse, or explanation as the core administrative logic of the camp. The indifferent administration of the arbitrary is integral to the social death the camp is designed to produce on a mass scale. Indifference and the arbitrary is a mechanized effect of the camp; it defines subject positions, or rather the absence of one, for the inmate. Reason requires an intra-human recognition which is impossible in the social organization of the camp. The camp inmates' fates are to be exiled from difference and individual address: they are, as Adorno states, meant to be both finished off and leveled off as specimens. Indifference as an administrative *dispositif* is a power effect, but it should not be confused with a cosmogenesis of the Holocaust. It is not an *arche*, an origin point, nor a diagnostic metaphor that possess an exhaustive descriptive adequacy. Indifference is an administrated technical rationality that reduces the inmates to bare life, as Agamben put it. But to understand this is to understand how institutional amnesia and anesthesia is reproduced in the camps to bar history, memory, and biography from the inmates; and it is to recognize the extent to which this institutional indifference is being politically replicated in post-Holocaust state violence. Elevating indifference to a cosmological *arche* is to efface its political utilities in the present as a methodological motor of human rights violations.
17. See Alan Young, and Hacking.
18. For a discussion of natal alienation, see Patterson.
19. Bunn focuses on the inability of the colonial gaze to separate the black body from the landscape, and the inability to see black agency independent of the agency of landscape. There is a metonymic relationship between landscape and the black body that renders the latter as a negation of agency and personhood. In the context of the natal alienation of chattel slavery—that is, in the absence of natal landscape—the black body assumes this vocation of the inhibition of agency. It functions as primordial landscape in the racialized gaze.
20. For a discussion of the distorting effects of temporal stratification and asymmetry, and the resulting denial of coevalness in ethnographic dialogue and witnessing, see Fabian.

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