Improvising Reconciliation

Confession after the Truth Commission

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For May and Georgine, and William, in memory.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Introduction

'This Thing Called Reconciliation'

> As new facts emerge and new truths are brought to light; as old opinions disappear and others take their place; the image of an ideal and always fleeting perfection presents itself.[1]
>
> —Alexis de Tocqueville

Reconciliation is regularly hailed as decisive to the resolution of modern conflict. For those places and people emerging from a history of internal violence, it is understood to be a vital mechanism in their transition to a peaceable and more equitable future. Deployed in an uneven but broadly global fashion since around the middle of the twentieth century, from Germany 'after Auschwitz' to Liberia's more recent reckoning with the atrocities committed under Charles Taylor's regime, reconciliation is now the principal language as well as the conceptual ideal through which post-conflict societies are conceived. But as a goal as much as a method of transitional justice, what are the conditions required for reconciliation to proceed? The cessation of state violence rarely also means an end to the more fundamental structures of injustice and inequality that enable such abuse. Nor does it promise any alleviation to their combined effects, whether traumatic or otherwise. But even more uncertain is the question of what precisely reconciliation constitutes. Early in reconciliation's conceptual elaboration, Johan Galtung, founder of the *Journal of Peace Research*, sought to overcome this epistemic insecurity with the seeming certitude of an arithmetic equation: 'reconciliation = closure + healing'.[2] As coefficients, however, both closure and healing suggest a decidedness that is rarely ever borne out by their solution, especially amid the competing priorities of state and society. More often, the language of reconciliation is made to calculate a symbolic resolution that runs in tension with the insecurity of its lived, demotic experience.

In this, South Africa is exemplary. The vision of national unity conjured up in the dying days of the twentieth century still flickers on occasion across the

contemporary democratic imaginary. New facts emerge, new truths are brought to light, and old opinions continue to be overhauled. And yet, even as the faint spirit of reconciliation remains, its wider reality does not. Indeed, the whole regime of transitional justice appears encumbered by disillusionment. Its flashes of non-racial perfectibility are now witnessed with such diminished regularity as to seem hubristic. To follow the words of Justice Albie Sachs, democracy appears to have consummated at the very same time as it has also extinguished one of South Africa's most precious assets: its hope for the future.[3] But whatever the intense disappointment that may now countermand images of the long, sanguine queues that amassed outside polling stations in anticipation of the country's first democratic vote in April 1994, there is perhaps no sharper bellwether (or more prominent target) for the regret that rolled in to dim this initial glow than the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Inaugurated in 1996 with a hopeful appeal by its chair, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, for 'light over darkness', it now stands among the most discredited of the democratic regime's early enterprises, a formal mechanism of the transition that in many critics eyes has done more to defer than enable 'this thing called reconciliation'.[4]

There are, of course, many reasons for the Truth Commission's widely held miscarriage. And, certainly, the determined criticism it has received is only in part a consequence of reconciliation's imprecise, regularly incongruous agenda. In actively measuring the terms of its own success, as John Borneman elsewhere describes, in terms of 'the recuperation of losses that are almost impossible to recuperate', however, the Commission did much to advance precisely those quietist and exculpatory ends that tend to discredit reconciliation's other plausible achievements.[5] Finding the past an object to be overcome, reconciliation was arguably introduced as a broadly ideological rather than strictly moral end. In this, systematic racial oppression was revised according to an entirely therapeutic logic. 'REVEALING IS HEALING', read placards on display at its public hearings. 'THE TRUTH HURTS BUT SILENCE KILLS', claimed others, mobilising the psychoanalyst's 'talking cure' as a putative means of national recovery.

Under these terms, it was not just reconciliation that suffered. Personal truth too was evaluated according to its moral virtue—that is, in terms of its potential to offer a humanising corrective to the inhumanity of the past. Certainly, this model of 'negative commemoration' empowered the voices of those many victims suppressed under apartheid.[6] But it also depended on a rights-based agenda organised around individual abuse, to the general exclusion of the apartheid state and its system of racialised oppression. The result was, as Mahmood Mamdani puts it, a 'truth diminished', a mode of partial reckoning with the past that too

often mistook discrete acts of violence for the 'social catastrophe' underpinning the apartheid regime.[7] It is unsurprising therefore that critics like Deborah Posel were quick to deride the Truth Commission's 'creaky conceptual grid'.[8] For 'without the truth', to follow Gerhard Werle, 'there [could] be no reconciliation'.[9]

Improvising Reconciliation does not retreat from these fundamental critiques. In its efforts to secure from the aesthetic sphere a more supple commemorative form, it begins regretfully, circumspect about the Truth Commission's many procedural deficiencies as well as its moral shortcomings. That said, there is also much among these preliminary remarks that demands further scrutiny. For one thing, it is not my intention to discredit altogether the Commission's basic confessional structure of telling and collective listening. Whatever else may be said of the Commission, the fundamental urge to speak out and share one's suffering with others remains just as vital to the scenes of public reckoning that I analyse in this study. I am conscious too that amid the swollen body of largely corrosive commentary (which began to emerge even before the Commission's first hearings) there is a certain merit in Erik Doxtader and Philippe-Joseph Salazar's cautionary observation that 'the question that asks for a definitive judgment is not the question that sheds the most important light'. As they elaborate: 'The rush to determine the TRC's ultimate success has come at the expense of a larger reflection on the Commission's historical roots, its relationship to the constitutional transition that took shape between 1990 and 1994, and the precise details of its work'.[10] Their own belated scholarship goes some way in compensating for this expediency. But equally there can be no ignoring the many other serious challenges that have also emerged with the subsequent relief of time. To regret the compromised political settlement that appears to have determined, say, the Commission's narrow attitude to truth does little to dissipate the enduring sense of disempowerment that its 'transcendent moral philosophy' ultimately delivered.[11] Indeed, in the two decades or more that have passed since the Truth Commission's first public hearings in 1996, the adverse effect of this moralism has only proliferated. Even the Commission's most widely lauded adage—'no future without forgiveness'—has proven itself more of a shackle than a spur to liberation, binding the country to a pristine and, as such, intolerable self-image. As Bhekizizwe Peterson laments, this 'deification' of forgiveness has all but severed the public sphere from its 'moral moorings', enabling the unjust remains of apartheid to drift from everyday view.[12] Viewed under this light, it remains hard to frame the Commission as something other than a tool of social domination.[13]

Rather than attempting to recover the Commission's monumentalized ambitions from the weight of their present defeat then, this study intends to locate

from within this gloomy prospect several ancillary flashes of ethical and political possibility. By this, I mean to approach the project of national reconciliation from a position of partial scepticism. As such, there are no prescriptive calculations here to solve the problem of what reconciliation should otherwise aggregate. It is an idea as much as an ideal held in suspension, a language maintained in my analysis for strategic but not essential reasons. What emerges over the course of this study is, I intend, a mode of reconciliatory possibility interwoven at all times by uncertainty. In other words, I turn to the aesthetic sphere in pursuit of a subjunctive form, or rather a set of plural, specifically devised forms of reconciliation liberated from the orthodoxy of national healing and historical closure. As a point of departure, such an improvised model provides few guarantees. But it is precisely improvisation's threat of failure, its perilous way of thinking as well as doing, that conditions its possible success. Risk is, I want to stress, a vital part of what here links the reconciliatory to the improvisatory. At its most fundamental, improvisation moves to open up the notion 'that failure doesn't matter'—at least, not in the context of what it also attempts to make possible. As advocates of improvisation like Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow elaborate, it is precisely this liability at the heart of an improvised agenda that encourages us 'to avoid the reflex of trying to make [a thing] into something you think it *ought* to be', in favour of fostering 'what it *can* be'.[14]

Such a distinction may appear prosaic, even subtractive at first glance. In prefatory terms, however, these two modalities are indicative of the wider separation between the certain and the uncertain, or the credible and the incredible, that this comparatively risky form of reconciliation must traverse if it is to assist in bridging apartheid's racial divisions and undo its legacy of injustice. Moreover, this incipient distinction arguably alerts us to the ways of alternative being towards which the improvisatory also tends, its disruptive as well as its recreative outlook. To follow theorist Gary Peters, improvisation regularly produces a 'fixing of the unfixed', even as it also pursues a corresponding 'unfixing of the fixed'.[15] This too is more than some glib volte-face, even if, like the improvisational, it likely courts a pejorative judgement. Rather, as Peters elaborates, an improvisatory attitude involves itself in the negotiation of a series of such correspondences, each act making co-existent origin and originality, certainty and doubt, as well as fixity and unfixity. In this, it is perhaps profitable to think, as Peters does, in terms of the 'compossibility' towards which improvisation arguably aims—that is, following the metaphysician Gottfried Leibniz, the imagined co-presence of compatible but also separate ways of possible being that sit outside what is actual. For one thing, the term anticipates the otherwise stark

seeming divides, whether conceptual or ethical, that this study finds in relatively close correspondence as part of any improvisational attitude. This may be seen in improvisation's proximity to failure or, separately, its determined attachment to the provisional in the field of meaning making. But the compossible is also an abstract explanation of the many specific contradictions that rise up as part of my subsequent effort here to retrieve the language of reconciliation from its more general dissolution in the field of racial justice. Ultimately, improvisation's compossible attitude works to expand what was delimited and even denied by the otherwise impoverished approach to reconciliation adopted institutionally in South Africa after apartheid.

As a basic qualification, however, it is also vital not to confuse such a performative expansion of the (com)possible for a sphere of action liberated absolutely from those 'temporal, material, technical, genre-specific, linguistic, cultural or social' laws that, according to the likes of Edgar Landgraf and others, always also condition the improvisational.[16] Indeed, we might well remind ourselves of the 'scene of constraint' which, in a very separate context, Judith Butler appends to improvisation.[17] For her, there are always a set of necessary, inextricable conditions that guide its potential. This is equally the case in the field of collective being after apartheid. Any scene of improvised reconciliation cannot be thought outside the limits of South Africa's violent and divisive history, even if it also permits its 'conscious reinterpretation', to borrow from Tracy McMullen.[18] To this extent, the improvisatory is always performed in clear relation to the rules that define its unruliness. Or put differently, ignorance—the assumed 'predicament of the improviser'—has very little to do with improvisation.[19] Rather, it is almost always a deliberative act, a considered departure into the relative unknown. Central to any critical account of the improvisational, then, is a parallel scrutiny of the scene of constraint within and against which it knowingly acts. Indeed, under these terms, the act of improvisation offers itself up as an adjacent explanation for the conditions that prompt its own possibility.

Improvising Reconciliation is precisely motivated by this adjacency, both as method for evaluating the Truth Commission's pursuit of reconciliation and as a scene from which to imagine its alternative. As such, what follows is principally about the unsettled afterlife of the Commission, rather than the specific terms with which it was launched (as telling as these also remain). In recommending the improvisational as a guiding concept, this study responds to the Commission's comparatively narrow imagination not censoriously but as a prompt for the extemporary practice levied by theatre- and filmmakers in the years since. Put differently, the Truth Commission's manifold faults are arguably also what

make possible the parallel account of reconciliation privileged here. Reflecting upon the contributions made by South Africa's contemporary stage and screen, spheres uncommonly responsive to the logic of improvisation, I favour those performative works that move with and against the Truth Commission to imagine what might be otherwise. This is no necessary relief from the sense of excess and insufficiency that the Commission originally engendered—its seeming necessity as much as its futility. In the modest repertoire of creative works by the dramaturg Yaël Farber and filmmakers Ingrid Gavshon, Mark Kaplan, and Ramadan Suleman prioritised here, I do not propose a strict—and thereby unblemished—divergence from this field of disappointment. Even as these examples are separated by virtue of their conceptual distance from the Commission's vexed practice, they are still rooted in the same fundamental history of loss, pain, and injustice uncovered day after day at its hearings.

Staged and screened initially over a noticeably intense period (2000–2004) and just as the Commission's public hearings were coming to a formal close, these works maintain a temporal as well as affective proximity to this scene of national expiation. They are also stalked by a more general pattern of creative national reflection that would have us repeat and reinforce many of the Commission's limitations. By important contrast, however, the practitioners I choose to prioritise in this study neither deny the extreme divisions that apartheid generated, nor underestimate the challenge of incorporating these extremities into the democratic now in South Africa. Rather, they work to imagine, I propose, those reconciled ways of collective, reciprocal being that might be improvised from within this scene of historical suffering. Put simply, this repertoire offers up a parallel sphere of representation, an adjacent form through which to reconstitute in more provisional terms 'this thing called reconciliation'.

Reconciliation's Constraints

Before turning in detail to this repertoire of theatre and film, it is perhaps helpful to attend to improvisation's more generalised insecurity in the spheres of political and moral thought, to say nothing of the more specific domain of reconciliation. For one thing, few schematic accounts of these fields find in the improvisational an organising principal. Certainly, it is possible to cite prominent instances in which an extemporary attitude is also the most pragmatic one, as Martha Nussbaum and, more recently, Barbara Herman have argued of the 'mature moral agent' and their 'ability to navigate complex or changing circumstances'.[20] Indeed, in this, Herman returns us to the guiding root of improvisation, emerging

as it does from the Latin *improvisus*, meaning the unforeseen, the unexpected. For her, as for other situated ethical thinkers, improvisation marks less 'an abandonment of moral values' and more 'a way of extending them' in the face of unprecedented circumstances.[21] Such agility extends equally to the field of political advocacy, where improvisation has arguably long been a critical part of the way politics gets done. This is, for instance, what political theorist Yves Citton finds at stake in almost every attempt to secure from the volatile 'potency of the multitude' the type of 'compositional foresight' required to navigate the 'unavoidable novelty' encountered as the political sphere evolves.[22] In other words, there is often a democratic impulse at the root of improvisation. But in an effort to secure the value of this 'minoritarian intelligence', Citton also moves to resist any rhetorical move that might make improvisation into some benign 'structural necessity', insisting upon its peripheral rather than generalizable status. For him, its peculiar 'spirit of insurgence' is only ever derived from a certain 'margin of action', a certain 'margin of error'.[23] It is at its most effective, we might surmise, when it operates as a displaced actor, approaching its object not directly but askance. As such, improvisation's greatest constraint—namely its reluctance to inhabit a position of direct authority—is arguably also its chief asset.

To this extent, a critic like Sara Ramshaw is unusual in making improvisation a rule—most specifically, a rule of law. Embracing its irregular effects, its 'always changing and adjusting' form, she finds improvisation to be a necessary condition of, as well as for, the enactment of justice. For her, 'all law is improvisation'.[24] While her claim threatens to undo the insurgent agenda that Citton asserts, in making visible the gap between 'abstract notions of justice and the everyday practice of judging', Ramshaw also helps to uncover the ordinary improvisational action that determines even the most rational seeming of institutions. Reconciliation is arguably not much different. Like the law, it must maintain what Ramshaw describes as an 'aporetic relation between singularity and generality, repetition and alteration'.[25] If it is to serve as anything other than a mode of social domination, reconciliation is obliged equally to establish a normative framework within which individuals might act, while remaining open simultaneously before the exceptionality of their experiences. It is with this 'aporetic relation' in mind that the improvisatory might offer up a method for integrating the latent volatility that arguably also inheres within 'this thing called reconciliation'.

Indeed, in its timidity, this very phrase, first uttered by Cynthia Ngeweu as part of her testimony before the Truth Commission, is precisely indicative of the uncertainty and imprecision that informs its subjective pursuit. For despite being evoked at every turn of the Commission's public hearings, rarely was

reconciliation straightforwardly understood or uniformly adopted by those in attendance. As Paul van Zyl summarises:

> Certain victims stated that they would be reconciled once they discovered the truth about human rights abuse. Others said that reparation and monetary compensation for past abuse were indispensable to reconciliation. Some victims felt extremely embittered about amnesty for perpetrators, stating that they would not be reconciled unless justice was done, while other families stated that would be satisfied if the perpetrators made a sincere apology and showed genuine remorse.[26]

For a theorist of reconciliation like Andrew Schaap, such uncertainty is merely indicative of the fact that it 'means too many different things to too many different people' to be imposed as a coherent ideal.[27] Adaptive before these seeming confusions, however, the improvisatory arguably works to contain reconciliation's experiential plurality without necessarily diluting the merits of its potential iterability. In this, improvisation also provides a specifically performative variety of the broadly scientific notion of 'experimentalism' that political theorists like John Dewey favour.[28] Both are a type of learning by doing, ways of knowing *how*, rather than knowing *that*. But where this experimentalism prefers a problem-solution method of inquiry, improvisation favours a more dynamic, reflexive model. It is under these terms, as a situated and 'recursively operating process', to return to Landgraf, that an improvised approach to reconciliation proves preferable to the more monumental pursuit favoured by the Truth Commission.[29]

All that said, in returning to survey the Commission's widely accepted aberrations, this study might reasonably be accused of tethering itself to a set of public feelings and political conditions at some distance from the onerous and separate seeming concerns of South Africa's democratic now. Amid the ongoing litany of corruption scandals, the murderous events at Marikana in 2012, and the repressive policing of public dissent that came to mark Jacob Zuma's presidency, for instance, the particular solecisms perpetrated by the Commission arguably pale by comparison.[30] Even with the subsequent election President Cyril Ramaphosa and a programme of targeted reform, this recent turbulence continues to mutate many of his ambitions into their opposite—political and economic stagnation. It is not my intention to distract from this contemporary damage. Rather, to adopt the long view that this study encourages, I want to suggest vital evidence of the continuities—whether structural or emotional or both—that arguably bind the country's present grievances to democracy's earliest shortcomings.

For one thing, the two decades or so that have elapsed since the Commission's end have not only offered up new instances of injustice but they have also furnished us with a more considered prospect, I contend, from which to engage with the lingering and deep-rooted effects of white rule in South Africa. As such, we might begin to take greater note of the ways in which apartheid was not just a legal framework, not merely a fact of policy to be repealed or overcome; it was also a racialized way of individual and collective being that has proven itself much more stubborn to undo. With the relief of time, it has become more and more clear that, when conceived in strictly political or national terms, reconciliation remains an insufficient remedy to apartheid's manifold 'afterwardsness'.[31] So, while I insist upon reconciliation's failure as a specific miscarriage of the Commission, I do not want to distract from the fact that, under a separate light, its insolvency is also testament to the noxious and, indeed, obdurate structures of racial injustice that emerge unbidden in South Africa even still.

Under these terms, the potential that might otherwise be rescued from reconciliation's improvisation cannot be altogether disentangled from apartheid's manifestly corruptive remains. Indeed, even where a relatively sanguine critic like Njabulo Ndebele lobbies on behalf of the type of aesthetic risks and, with them, political possibilities embraced by such an improvisatory agenda, he cannot avoid alighting upon the 'long, unrelenting, jagged' material conditions within and against which such risky acts must also venture.[32] Of course, it is precisely because of these stubborn inequities that a more deliberative and, above all, situated approach to reconciliation arguably retains its urgency. As Ramshaw has it, improvisation's general heterodoxy is precisely what 'keeps alive the possibility of . . . ethics, democracy and justice'.[33] But this should not be confused for efficacy. To this extent, the 'unfinished business' of the apartheid past does much to explain the hesitancy with which I approach my task here. In short, it is impossible to step past the fact of reconciliation's chronic deferral. At worst, this historical record risks discrediting the basic impulses driving my analysis. At best, it delimits the claims I might reasonably offer.

Nonetheless, as far as I understand them, the continuities and constraints made evident during the past two decades are also a vital condition for this study. More expressly, it is reconciliation's plainly imperfect possibility that guides my analysis through what is an otherwise polarising atmosphere of euphoria and despair, and what prompts my less strident, more equivocal approach to the discordant claims of liberty, on the one hand, and liberation, on the other. This is not to dilute the potential insurgency of my chosen repertoire. It is, instead, to take reconciliation as an ideal that has itself been compromised. But it is also

to admit the serious historical constraints against which the pursuit of racial justice after apartheid is compelled to operate. Put differently, I do not discount the possibility that the Commission's own faulty approach to 'this thing called reconciliation' was itself constrained by the injustice handed down by the past. In attending more directly to the shortcomings of the Commission itself, then, it is important to consider how these failures also offer up a lesson for reconciliation's adjacent improvisation, how it too suffers beneath the weight of exactly those unjust material conditions that make its pluralised pursuit at once so vital and so difficult.

Situating the Truth Commission

As suggested already, this study does not intend to repeat the exhaustive analytical and evaluative work pursued elsewhere on the Truth Commission. Instead, I attempt to set things apart from this critical industry by responding to the implications of its general failure. Part of my mission, then, is to understand the Commission as more than some faulty legal mechanism, reflecting as much on its profound cultural, political, and moral legacies as its procedural shortcomings. Examined in this context, however, the Commission should also be valued for its symptomatic rather than essential significance. At their most enlightening, its limitations help adduce both the national brinkmanship and the global imperatives that were driving the country's democratic transition. And while much has been made of its local political constraints, South Africa's Truth Commission also registers the particular priorities of an international human-rights agenda that was pressed upon other transitional, former authoritarian states in Eastern Europe and South America during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

By the time the Commission's ten nominated commissioners first convened under the chairmanship of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Cape Town on 16 December 1995 to debate its formal organization, twelve other nations had already staged similar such commissions.[34] This latest commission was made to line up behind international orthodoxy, corroborating the supposedly universal tenets of transitional justice. But it also enhanced elements of this paradigm. For one thing, South Africa's Truth Commission chose to stage the majority of its hearings in public, even televising its proceedings as part of its reputed aim to deliver the full facts of the past into the nation's consciousness. Under the auspices of three separate committees, the Human Rights Violation Committee (HRVC), the Amnesty Committee, and the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee, the Truth Commission spent more than three and a half years travelling across

the country to hear testimony from some eighteen hundred victims of human rights abuse and almost two thousand amnesty applicants.[35] Journalist Max du Preez's weekly review of the hearings, 'Truth Commission Special Report', which ran on the national broadcaster, SABC, from 1996–1998, became compulsive viewing for many. Such public scrutiny was historically unprecedented and remains a large part of the reason why the Commission was held up as pivotal to the nation's transition. It also why the Commission garnered so much critical, often caustic attention. Nonetheless, the basic decision to make public its proceedings was a self-evident departure from the privileged investigations undertaken, say, by Chile's otherwise comparable National Commission of Truth and Reconciliation (1990–1991). And just as this latter example has been blighted by accusations of suppression, conversely the sense of justice delivered (or not) by the South African Truth Commission cannot be extricated from its public character.

To observe South Africa's Truth Commission through this comparative lens is to recognise the ways in which it blended its generic appeal for national unity with more situated ambitions, like its call for *ubuntu* rather than victimization. As a southern African philosophy of communitarianism, ubuntu was hailed as a uniquely immanent response to the racial estrangement handed down by the apartheid past, a 'prophetic moral culture', as Michael Onyebuchi Eze puts it, 'in which all South Africans, irrespective of race, [could] find a home'.[36] Accordingly, it was often summarised at the Truth Commission by way of the Nguni language proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabuntu*—'a person is a person through other persons'—and was taken to provide a generally humanistic, mutually determined and indigenous ethical framework within which to situate the pursuit of national unity. Like almost everything attempted by the Commission, however, this particular agenda has also come under censorious attack. Christian Gade, for one, challenges the ways in which the Commission actively distilled the meaning of ubuntu. Insisting that it circulated in this specific, proverbial form only rarely before the Commission, he casts this institutional use of ubuntu as an invented tradition of sorts, one used to 'sell' a particular version of reconciliation to the country.[37] As such, it flattened out the term's philosophical complexity, attenuating its regional as well as interethnic variety, Gade argues.[38]

Whether or not we follow Gade's claims, the Commission's deferral to a concept like ubuntu is also illustrative of the 'self-conscious contingent' operation of transitional justice more generally. As Ruti Teitel elaborates, in the aftermath of endemic state violence, it is necessarily the case that 'the concept of justice that emerges is contextualised and partial'.[39] In other words, we would do well

to take transitional justice as always also conditioned by the type of injustice that precedes it. With specific respect to the Commission's controversial amnesty clause, however, such a situated elasticity arguably proved pernicious. For unlike other transitional regimes, the conditional immunity from prosecution for perpetrators of abuse was entirely unique to the general praxis of South Africa's Truth Commission. This was not a decision born of some abstract investment in the values of tolerance and forgiveness, even if it has been defended subsequently as such. It was, instead, the express result of the settlement negotiated some years earlier during the drafting of the Interim Constitution in 1993. Produced under the heading of National Unity and Reconciliation, the Constitution stated that:

> In order to advance such reconciliation and reconstruction, amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of the conflicts of the past. To this end, Parliament under this Constitution shall adopt a law determining a firm cut-off date, which shall be a date after 8 October 1990 and before 6 December 1993, and providing for the mechanisms, criteria and procedures, including tribunals, if any, through which such amnesty shall be dealt with at any time after the law has been passed.[40]

No comparable dispensation was made for the victims of abuse, financially or otherwise. Nor was there any specific requirement for a wider commission of national inquiry. The mandate was designed merely to indemnify those individuals otherwise exposed to future criminal as well as civil prosecution. This included, most obviously, the National Party (NP) government and their bureaucratic subordinates, but it also extended to members of the African National Congress (ANC) and other political dissidents who had committed their own acts of violence as part of the co-ordinated resistance to apartheid. This is not to presume a moral equivalence. It is to admit to the expedient, singularly political ends towards which amnesty aimed.

Doubtless, in the burdensome aftermath of a history as divisive and damaging as apartheid, any attempt at future order is compelled to negotiate several such competing, even insuperable ethical as well as political demands. There is rarely a compromise sufficiently refined for a society emerging from the trauma of such prolonged state violence and entrenched racial subjugation. As Martha Minow argues in *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, the drive towards unity is everywhere risked by the parallel danger of 'too much memory or not enough; too much enshrinement of victimhood or insufficient memorializing of victims and survivors; too much past or too little acknowledgment of the past's staging

of the present'.[41] Each seeming accomplishment threatens its own attendant failure, every potential resolution chancing a capitulation to an injustice of a different order. To this extent, it may seem that the amnesty clause merely made evident the perilous concessions that were required to avert the larger injustice of historical impunity, on the one hand, and violent reprisal, on the other. Even after President De Klerk's unbanning of the ANC in February 1990 and the formal end to the armed struggle, the will to revenge and insurrection appeared everywhere in evidence. Stoked by secessionists like the Inkatha Freedom Party in Natal, as well as by a reputed Third Force made up of death squads directed by the NP, the years leading up to Nelson Mandela's election as president in April 1994 were among the bloodiest in the Republic's history, with unofficial reprisals ongoing from all sides. In the end, the cut-off date for amnesty had to be extended to include the events surrounding the first democratic vote, so unrelenting was this violent agitation.

The effect, however, was to make amnesty—with all its obvious moral hazard—an indispensable seeming condition of the formal transition. Moreover, under these terms, everything that followed thereafter, generally scripted as a concern for the 'truth about the past' and for 'the restoration of human and civil dignity' (to follow the terms of the subsequent Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995), was also arguably contrived to facilitate this politically necessary but morally intolerable end. In other words, much of what the Commission was eventually oriented towards—and, indeed, has found itself most heavily criticised for mishandling—were broadly strategic inventions, devised in order to mitigate the specific injustice of the amnesty clause. This is corroborated by the fact that the Commission had no legal authority beyond this clause.[42] Its recommendations for reparations to victims of human rights abuse were heeded only in part and with much delay. Moreover, certain of these victims were compelled to abide by court injunctions that prohibited them from naming alleged perpetrators in their submissions. If these specific miscarriages do not sufficiently signal the institutional tide against which the Commission's wider aims were set, then we need only recall the much wider pattern of self-interest and ideological acquiescence also ongoing at a governmental level, with the ANC presiding over what John Saul figures as a 'beggaring of [its] historical imagination'.[43] Not only did government officials seek to discredit many of its findings against the ANC, but in refusing the Commission's implicit call for targeted economic redistribution, the ruling party also betrayed its capitulation to the arguments made and inducements offered by neoliberal elites at home and abroad. Ultimately, it is for reasons of this sort, I aver, that the Commission's

pursuit of reconciliation must also be understood as a form of 'bureaucratic legitimization', as Richard Wilson phrases it, a progressive alibi devised for and by an inwardly regressive, largely unreformed state.[44]

By rhetorical extension, the Commission's 'poorly constructed conceptual grid', to return to Posel, may be explained alternately in terms of the 'national political constraints' that, as Wilson further elaborates, 'dramatically redefined' the international orthodoxies of its rights-based agenda.[45] Indeed, as Posel concedes, 'the historical crucible of the truth commission [. . .] is inherently paradoxical', for even as each 'share a central epistemological and ethical challenge', every individual 'truth commission is a situationally specific political intervention'.[46] It is here that the language of improvisation proves to be at its most expressive, for it arguably cites as part of its situated logic precisely the compromised and expedient politics from within which the Truth Commission's impoverished drive towards reconciliation emerged. Without revising wholesale its praxis to conform to the logic of improvisation, it is enough to understand its shallow and symbolic pursuit of reconciliation as conditioned in large part by the moral deficit it was obliged to offset, if also ill-equipped to correct.

In contriving a version of reconciliation that pretended to justice, but presided over injustice, the Commission makes clear the constraints that threaten to corrupt the concept beyond repair. Of course, reconciliation is not always complicit with injustice. Nonetheless, as a situated pursuit, it necessarily remains vulnerable to those contradictory possibilities that, for a theorist like Peters, define all such acts of improvisation. As such, the tendency towards discord as much as concord, towards expediency as much as efficacy, captures precisely the riskiness that surrounds reconciliation even as a condition of its improvisation. In short, wittingly or otherwise, the Commission offers up its own cautionary tale in the extemporary, a record of reconciliation's potential complicity with injustice that this present study cannot deny, even if it works hard to moderate.

Improvising the Archive

In highlighting improvisation's imprecise and possibly hazardous effects in the field of reconciliation, I do not want to distract from the fact that this insecurity is also crucial to its disruptive agenda. For the improvisational necessarily supposes a degree of incalculability that does much to unsettle even the most decided of ideological ends. If nothing else, it sees the world, Landgraf advises, as only ever 'constituted temporarily'.[47] By comparison, one of the more troubling consequences of the criticism levelled at the Truth Commission has been the

way in which, collectively, this dismay has served to harden its general enterprise into an entirely calculable, durable space. In other words, such has been the depth of complaint that any residual kernel of reconciliatory possibility has been effectively discredited. Of course, this is not just the fault of expedient analysis. The sheer scale of the Commission's enterprise raised expectations and deepened its subsequent disappointments. One crude measure of its ambition is the three kilometres of archival material that the Commission reputedly produced during the six years or so that it took to complete its investigations. These materials, which included individual and institutional submissions, amnesty applications, as well as the transcripts and video recordings of each day's public proceedings have since been collected by the National Archives in Pretoria. Yet, for all the attention its original hearings garnered, very little has been made of this sizeable resource in the years since.

There is much to lament in this general neglect, not least in terms of the collective sense of injustice these stories tell and the implicit claims for historical reckoning they make as a consequence. In this very specific sense, I am not entirely unsympathetic to commentators like Charles Villa-Vicencio, national research director for the Truth Commission, who seek to remind us that its official mandate was to *promote*, not *enact* reconciliation.[48] Certainly, the Commission did much to help collapse this delicate distinction, volubly stressing those individual instances of professed reconciliation between perpetrator and victim that emerged on occasion at its hearings. Nonetheless, to reanimate this view of reconciliation as an open, continuous and deliberative negotiation, rather than a closed event, is also to prioritise those radically diverse circumstances under which it might begin to emerge. It is to remake reconciliation into a partially incalculable end. I say this not to rehabilitate the Commission. Its corrupted reputation has arguably done much to distract from the wider pursuit of racial justice in South Africa. But there is little value in dismissing its action absolutely.

For example, even accepting the partiality of its public hearings, these were still spaces of comparatively uncommon as well as shocking historical exposure. Those victims given opportunity to give testimony to their experience under apartheid offered up a record of the national past that has rarely been matched since, either in historical detail or affective intensity. There are, of course, many prominent instances of autobiographical writing and social history that add in vital ways to this record, but arguably little that compares either with the evidential weight or the emotional depth of the Commission's HRVC hearings when taken in sum.[49] And where much has been made of the consensual understanding of the past that supposedly emerged from this space of 'hearing and healing',

many of these acts of personal anamnesis also retain a much more urgent, even belligerent historical charge.[50]

This is precisely what oral historian Sean Field identifies amid the 'disappointed remains', as he puts it, that patterned the HRVC's hearings. Like those theorists of reconciliation who resists its tendency towards closure, Field contests the therapeutic regime into which victims' suffering was more often interpolated. Instead, borrowing from David Lloyd, he reflects on the potential of those 'melancholy survivals' that refuse recovery—that is to say, the claims to justice that might follow from 'the injunction to mourn'.[51] I return to these disappointed, melancholy remains in more detail elsewhere in this study. Here, I want to draw attention to the latent force to be recovered from the Commission's archive. For in disrupting the violently erasive logic of apartheid, the Commission also 'engaged archive, rescued archive, created archive, refigured archive', as Verne Harris, former deputy director of the National Archives, has described.[52] If nothing else, its hearings provided an archival defence against a ruinous national amnesia, the submissions made by many victims of abuse performing 'an archival intervention' of sorts.[53]

There is a divide, however, between the embodied life of the Commission's public hearings and its flat archival afterlife. Harris, for one, questions the way in which the 'stories shared through the TRC have been woven into the collective memory of communities', finding them restricted to elite, often academic debate, rather than public discourse and discussion.[54] This is partly a problem of transmission. For while the Truth Commission maintains unrestricted digital access to its public hearings, these reports and submissions are for the most part dense, heavily descriptive or discursive documents. This was by no means the daily experience of the Commission itself. Its public hearings were dynamic spaces conditioned by outbursts from grieving family members and traumatised victims, as well as the collective interjections of the hearings' overwhelmingly black audiences who gathered at town halls across the country to bear witness to their mutual suffering.[55] Such contingencies are not part of the Commission's archival transcripts, at least not self-evidently. Instead, critics have been compelled to search out traces of this 'liveness', reflecting on the intense emotional atmosphere underwriting each individual submission.

In Catherine Cole's reading, this is equivalent to the divide separating 'a site-specific performance event' from its scripted record.[56] More than merely metaphorical, this performative lens accounts for much of the Commission's public praxis, providing a framework to explain the use in its hearings of 'restored behaviour, expressive embodiment, storytelling and retelling', Cole insists. This

sense of performativity helps us makes sense of the ways in which the Commission served 'as a ritual for addressing a massive breach in the social fabric . . . how, in sum, the TRC served as a literal and figurative stage for South Africa's political transition'.[57] As Cole notes, there is a theatricality implicit in international human rights jurisprudence, from the Eichmann trial to Slobodan Milošević's appearance before the International Criminal Court at The Hague. Each insists upon the public performance of justice, in the ritualised rehearsal of guilt and legal redress. At South Africa's Truth Commission, however, this theatricality was intensified by dint of its self-appointed ambition to 'make visible that which had been unseen'—that is, Cole advises, its seeming invocation of theatre's essence as 'a place of seeing', as derived from the Greek *theatron*. Giving a stage to 'the large-scale, mostly hidden abuses of the past—in particular, systematic abduction, torture, and murder—it exposed', she declares, 'a secret theatre to public view'.[58]

At its most searching, this performative model asks us to query the 'special form of transitional justice that South Africa brought into being'.[59] For Cole, it is the ritualism of this process that appears to have taken precedence, not least in the subjunctive possibilities that it arguably affords. But as a method of justice, there is also something about this ritualism that fails the stubborn durability of apartheid injustice. This is also Yvette Hutchison's complaint with the Commission and its 'archive of memory', as she puts it.[60] Without repeating her engagement with the relatively familiar archival theories of Diana Taylor and Jacques Derrida, it is enough to note that for Hutchison the experiences documented by the HRVC make evident the gap between memory in action and its 'public formulation' in the archive, a gap through which the gestural, the emotional, and the unspeakable regularly fall. Silence, for instance, is not recoverable from the textual archive, even though it was a regular feature of the Commission's hearings and remains a necessary condition, as Hutchison advises, of the racial trauma around which reconciliation must turn.[61] As much as the Commission was a place of seeing, then, its archive has often become a space of unseeing and partial forgetting. The point is a relatively familiar one, especially for those also conversant with Paul Ricoeur's distinction between history and memory.[62] Even so, it is far from arbitrary, especially in the context of South Africa's enduring struggle against racial injustice. For whatever the relative success of the Commission's live hearings in conditioning an empathic, engaged audience, its archival afterlife has tended towards something of the reverse, namely neglect and unfeeling.

This is a theatrical complaint as much as an archival one. But for all their incisive probing into the theatrical qualities driving the Commission's public

hearings, neither Hutchison, nor Cole take the historical record as 'always in the process of being made', as Harris describes it.[63] To this extent, they also neglect the related contribution that a more improvisatory attitude might yield, particularly in relation to the Commission's archival afterlife. This is as much about expanding upon the improvised activity the Commission arguably licenced (directly or otherwise), as it is about untethering its praxis from any strictly recuperative agenda. As far as the former goes, Cole does at least note the unpredictable character of its hearings, with many victims departing, sometimes radically, from the written submissions they provided ahead of their public appearance before the HRVC. Commissioners too made ad-hoc interventions. Referencing Wendy Orr, vice chair of the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee, Cole describes how those charged with weighing up the evidence and responding to victims 'had to improvise on the fly'.[64] As Orr herself puts it, '[t]here were no precedents to fall back on, no policies to guide decisions. We learned by making mistakes'.[65] For Cole, this 'improvisational uncertainty' merely added to the general theatrics of the Commission. Hutchison goes a little further, casting the Commission's live hearings as something akin to 'an improvised theatre piece', albeit one 'where all the participants have a sense of the basic plot outline and their roles'. For her, the hearings admitted to moments of individual impulsivity, but, ultimately, 'what the audience see [was] being created for them' according to the imperatives of the new democratic regime.[66]

If critics like Hutchison appear to stall before the Commission's monumental claims, then they succeed in tracing the general limit point for this type of theatrical diagnosis. In the face of such concrete ideological ends, the promise of its performative spontaneity appears beyond recuperation. However, this should not be taken as reason to dispense either with the Commission's fundamental findings, its embodied history, or, indeed, the basic claims that improvisation upholds. As noted already, *Improvising Reconciliation* is motivated by its conceptual contiguity with the Commission. This must be understood too as a performative relation. And in the repertoire of theatre and film that drives this study, many of the Commission's theatrical tenets continue to thrive, in particular the confessional model that motivated its public hearings. What distinguishes this repertoire is its willingness to undo the strategic political ends that this model was made to calculate. Less an improvisation in the act of telling, these works attempt, instead, to unsettle the national imperatives that condition their reception, redeploying the Commission's archive in ways that revise our sense of what this performance of the past might otherwise achieve and, ultimately, what reconciliation might otherwise constitute.

Towards a Confessional Pact

To put things in more strident terms, I disagree with those who insist that we simply get 'beyond the TRC'.[67] For one thing, reconciliation's more general defeat is a burden borne not just by the formal mechanisms of the transition. This miscarriage arguably filters into the everyday political landscape in South Africa, delimiting the field of national, democratic possibility. However serious and justifiable our misgivings may remain, then, there is something to lament in the Commission's overhasty demise, not so much as a legal mechanism but as comparatively unique arena for the collective negotiation of apartheid's unjust remains. And in moving here to defend my chosen repertoire of theatre and film, I would begin by stressing their general return to something of a similarly deliberative arena. Sharing in its fundamental culture of telling and listening, of confession and expiation, these works all attempt, as Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela also argues of the Commission, to make intimate the nation's otherwise estranged collective life.[68] This is more than the state of collective immanence for which reconciliation is sometimes confused. As I understand it, the intimate serves as a summary for the mutual vulnerability that, according to the likes of Ndebele and others, must be chanced if any of the 'new, interpersonal solidarities' essential to a 'broader, more affirming social solidarit[y]' are to emerge. As a beginning point for reconciliation, it depends on the same 'risk of self-exposure', as Ndebele puts it, as the confessional sphere, rather than the self-preservation that has more generally determined South Africa's democratic order.[69]

As a pilot for this process, the Commission remains beyond repair. The related acts of public confession that it helped inaugurate on stage and screen retain, by contrast, a less decided appeal. Even if I cannot deny the taints that sometimes afflict these works by simple virtue of their temporal and formal nearness to the Commission, there is opportunity still to recover from their adjacent, extra-legal action a space within which to pursue this risky enterprise. By contrast to the Commission, however, these works have also been hindered by their marginal status to date. Yaël Farber, for instance, is fast becoming a dramaturg of serious international repute. But her early theatre remains as peripheral to the national debate as the documentary film tradition that I also analyse here. Loren Kruger, for example, citing Farber's *He Left Quietly*, claims that the Truth Commission has not 'generated theatre to match the complexity of prose such as Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*'.[70] This dismissiveness should not be taken as signal of an essential inadequacy. As far as I understand it, the broad omission of my selected repertoire betrays the relatively cursory thinking by which the Commission

and its afterlife has been dispatched. Even among those commentators who afford them credence, these works are largely reduced to mere analogues of the Commission and its public praxis. For example, Hutchison, who pays comparatively sustained attention to Farber's testimonial plays, finds them animated by the self-same regime of truth—that is, 'the different ways of telling various truths'—that led the Commission to distinguish between factual or forensic truth, personal or narrative truth, social or dialogue truth, and healing or restorative truth.[71] Certainly, Farber finds much nourishment in the Commission's terms of reference. But like the other works addressed in this study, she has little interest in maintaining such an artificial taxonomy.

In his analysis of those creative works performed 'after the Truth Commission', Shane Graham provides a more telling assessment, citing an expanded approach to the 'iconic "truths" produced by the TRC'.[72] For him, it is the 'ambiguous truths', the paradoxes and contradictions upheld by this allied arena of embodied performance that prove most compelling. As far as I am concerned, however, it is their 'displaced' agency, as Graham also has it, that is primary.[73] As a form of adjacency, this displaced agency spatialises the degree of difference that separates this creative repertoire from the Commission itself. But this displaced agency also incorporates the supplanted, volatile associations that structure their broader synchrony. Under these terms, this repertoire might also be understood as staging the Commission's struggle with its own repressions, as giving action to the complex, often contradictory feelings of anger and forlorn expectation underpinning its ambition.

At this stage, I do not wish to propose a more lucid, decided relationship between the formal activity of the Commission and its theatrical and filmic afterlife. For one thing, such a move would diminish the proximate, knotted motivations that, in large part, determine the specific interventions that I attempt to outline in the chapters that follow. Doubtless, at first glance, the degrees of separation may be troublingly slight, but it is the intricacies of their relationality that prove vital, I suggest. For this repertoire upholds a generally displaced, deposed sense of what the Commission might otherwise achieve, eschewing the national imperatives driving the state in favour of those emotional and material claims that motivate apartheid's many victims. In this, they confront the risks taken in the act of confession, the failures as much as the possibilities that it implies for the field of reconciliation.

In centring this 'scene of risk', to borrow again from Ndebele's more general description for South Africa's transitional cultural milieu, this study necessarily remains cautious in its claims. This is as much a condition of the serious

structural constraints that I list above as it is of the formal insecurity that structures the specific repertoire I privilege below. For not only are theatre and film—my fundamental objects of inquiry—listed prominently on South Africa's register of endangered aesthetic species but, in their confessional praxis, this repertoire also constitutes an especially vulnerable genus. Indeed, in many ways, there is arguably no more perilous a discursive act. As the literary critic Peter Brooks has it, confession remains one of 'the most complex and obscure forms of human speech and behaviour'.[74] Despite its reputed status as one of the oldest of human longings, it is no less difficult to domicile for its centuries-long gestation or, indeed, its seeming cross-cultural appeal. Like autobiography, of which it might be considered a more ritualised variety, confession contains a series of 'generically hybrid' impulses, whether legal, sacramental or, indeed, psychoanalytical.[75] Given this institutional labour, it is hardly surprising that it so often refuses to retreat into the comparative security of the fictional. Its claim over the real, over 'what hurts', is too fundamental to its character for any such a withdrawal.[76] But neither can confession necessarily aver the type of self-assurance that comes with the articulation of fact. It tends to abut equally the referential and the representational, subsisting at the border between these two provinces but refused full entry to either. In short, confessional works like those included here are always, as Christopher Grobe elsewhere affirms, 'on the move'.[77]

As such, it is precisely the mobile claims delivered by the act of confession, over and above a seemingly more stable discursive terrain like testimony, that encourage the expanded approach to intimacy, solidarity and, ultimately, reconciliation that I favour here. For unlike witness testimony, the confessional acts under analysis in this study cannot be calibrated merely according to their evidential authority. Certainly, they retain a testamentary ambition. The *OED*, for instance, makes plain confession's shared interest in 'making known', in disclosing 'something previously held secret'. But in endlessly 'chasing the letter "I"', to borrow again from Grobe, the performances privileged in the chapters that follow are also in pursuit of an end that lies beyond the reach of any strictly legal or historical regime of truth.[78] Without deferring to those more everyday confessional environments that have come increasingly to dominate the popular media, it is perhaps enough to note the 'compulsion to confess' as also contingent on something approaching recognition.[79] Whether motivated by guilt, as is assumed of the few criminal perpetrators analysed here, or by a suffering so intense as to feel overwhelming, as is more common among the many victims' experiences I survey, this confessional imperative derives, in part, from a desire to unburden the inner self, to have it acknowledged and publicly dignified.

Certainly, there is a related hope of healing, or, in the sphere of guilt and sacramental rites, forgiveness. But, to follow Leigh A. Payne, these confessional performances emerge more often from those moments when '[e]motion overpowers reason'.[80] Put differently, they are prompted by an affective rather than strategic urge to have the diminished and suffering self mediated publicly.

This is not to liberate such confessional acts altogether from the claims of authenticity, especially when mobilised in the sphere of historical inquiry. Rather, it is to propose a shift in emphasis. As such, I want to suggest a tentative route past a longstanding tradition of traumatic analysis that is, in large measure, sustained by its efforts to theorise the historical claims that such subjective acts may be thought to provide (or not). In working out the historical dimensions of trauma, critics like Cathy Caruth have tried to shield the subject from undue positivist interpretation by figuring the extreme experiences that individuals regularly reference as, ultimately, 'unsayable'. By this, she means to cast the trauma of, say, apartheid abuse as precisely 'constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence'.[81] Under these terms, the capacity to translate extreme suffering into speech—in other words, to confess—is also 'the capacity to elide or distort'. For Caruth, this is 'not a denial of a knowledge of the past, but rather a way of gaining access to a knowledge that has not yet attained the form of "narrative memory"'.[82] It also marks out something of the discursive distinction that might be drawn between the act of confession and witness testimony. As far as the latter is concerned, Sanders makes specific its traumatised opacity when he centres the ambiguities inherent to the Truth Commission and 'the difficult public space of [its] hearings'.[83] Sustained by a typically Derridean mode of critique, for Sanders the type of witness acts prompted by the Commission made a quasi-judicial demand upon the verifiable even while they were 'strictly speaking, *unverifiable* at the moment that [they were] elicited'.[84]

The same attitude need not apply to the act of confession, however. At least, the question of its verity is altogether secondary. Central to the confessional mode is, I contend, the creative possibilities that also emerge by way of this self-recital. As Ndebele elaborates, such rehearsals of the past are much less about deciding history as they are about the pursuit 'of meaning through the imaginative combination of the facts'.[85] Confession's reliability is only a serious concern when it threatens to disrupt the possibility for such imaginative meaning making. In other words, confession is best judged in terms of the imagined new ways of being it makes possible, rather than any evidential burden. Indeed, 'whether or not we make them up', as Grobe puts it, 'confessions make us up—they make us real'.[86] This is, I contend, equally applicable to confession's public circulation

as it is to its private function. For the constitutive claims of confession do not end with the confessing 'I'. Rather, they maintain the potential to promote, as John Beverley has elsewhere described, an 'affirmation of the individual self *in a collective mode*'.[87] Even as it issues from the privileged sphere of subjective experience, each act of confession works to evoke, Beverley continues, 'an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences'.[88] Gayle Greene puts this differently (and incisively) when she imagines the 'community restored' by confession.[89] For her, as indeed for other feminist critics like Rita Felski, confession speaks not just inwardly but also outwardly by 'encod[ing] an audience'.[90] In short, the act of confession both presumes and produces its own confessor or interlocutor, addressing a type of imagined community who often share actually or empathically in the experience of the confessant.

Of course, it must also be said that this confessional community is not always benevolent, not always implicated sympathetically, especially not in the wake of a history as divisive as apartheid. Even within the type of progressive social movements that Greene and Felski address, the act of confession circulates within an unstable affective economy, one that is liable to elicit a range of responses, censorious as well as compassionate. This is likewise true of the predominantly black female voices privileged in this present study, who have been more generally disqualified—as they were under apartheid—from public debate. But such volatility is broadly implicit to any such a confessional exchange. To confess and make public what otherwise remains private and privileged is necessarily to enter a space of vulnerability. It is to expose the self to judgment, positive or not. Ultimately, however, it is this inherent riskiness that arguably gives the act its measure of authenticity and, indeed, its potency.

In the wake of events as extreme as apartheid, this risk is doubtless intensified. For perpetrators of abuse, to confess is to subject the self to national reprehension, not just individual absolution. While for their victims, this threat of reproach is overtaken by a desire for restored dignity—what Gobodo-Madikizela names as 'empathic repair'—to confess in this context is also to risk its destructive opposite: indifference and apathy.[91] Yet, without these implicit threats of reproof, on the one hand, and disinterest, on the other, the act of confession is hardly a confession at all. Put differently, to confess in anticipation of reconciliation, as the Truth Commission arguably scripts it, is to run counter to the very logic of uncertainty that underwrites the confessional act more generally.

In reflecting upon the uncertain potential of reconciliation that emerges from this confessional sphere, then, I resist returning to those calculable ends like repair or forgiveness at which a critic like Gobodo-Madikizela ultimately aims.

For all the merits of her analysis and psychological insight, as a former commissioner who presided over HRVC hearings in the Western Cape, it is clear that she retains a certain faith in its recuperative technology. This is not something broadly tenable in the confessional acts prioritized in this present study. Instead, what defines them is the more modest, affective, and, indeed, intimate forms of communion that they sustain. Under these terms, it is the unspoken but compelling pact that the confessing subject brokers with their onlooking audience that counts. Much like its autobiographical equivalent, such a confessional pact demands that both confessant and confessor make an implicit promise, each to the other, a promise that if broken threatens to wreck too its intimate effects.[92] But unlike autobiography, the stakes of the confession are uniformly high. Any contravention of the confessional accord by one party violates the emotional endowment made by the other. I do not intend to resolve this risk. Instead, I approach this pact as a formal expression of the antagonisms that run throughout this study more generally, centring the difficulty of salvaging hope from disillusionment, of kindling new intimacies from old estrangements.

Confessional Modes

Where I have so far offered up the improvisational as a theoretical framework through which to reconsider reconciliation, and the confessional pact as a formal arena within which to trace its intimate pursuit, I elaborate in this final section on the terms around which each of the subsequent chapters are arranged. To a large extent, this also about the methodology required to coordinate a set of concerns that otherwise tend to disrupt the potential for regular order or evolutionary argument. At least, if confession is thought an act always on the move and improvisation is marked, in part, by its unfixing of the fixed, then the chapters that follow are inevitably sustained by a similarly itinerancy. To put this in more concrete terms, each of the works included in this study deviates in their particular approach to the question of reconciliation and the allied pursuit of racial justice. Notwithstanding their shared concern for the voices of apartheid's victims, they adopt dissimilar attitudes to the staging and reception of these voices. Take, for instance, Duma Kumalo's confessional performance in Yaël Farber's play *He Left Quietly* (2002), which I explore in chapter one. Kumalo was not a professional actor, despite his appearance in this and numerous other theatrical and filmic works in the first decade of democracy. For much of his early life, he was a trainee teacher. Arrested for murder under the law of common purpose in 1984, he was condemned to death before, ultimately, securing release as part

of the political negotiations leading up to the first democratic vote. Unusually, he appeared twice before the Truth Commission, first at a HRVC hearing in Gauteng in August 1996 and then again at a special hearing on prisons in Cape Town in July 1997, recounting at each the traumatic details of his arrest and imprisonment. The experiences described at these hearings provide the basis for *He Left Quietly*'s script, which was developed collaboratively by Kumalo and Farber over the course of a few intense weeks. The play is performed by Kumalo with a professional actor reprising for the audience the acts of torture and humiliation that the former inmate suffered. It makes for a deeply unsettling account, not least because Kumalo's confessional performance, night after night, threatens to reinscribe his own extant psychological trauma. And, as such, the play's reiterative structure asks us to reflect not just on the damage wrought by those melancholy survivals that Lloyd cites, but also their potential ethical charge. For Kumalo's compulsive repetition of the past serves to incorporate, rather than overcome, I argue, these melancholy remains.

By comparison, Farber's *Molora* (2003), a revision of the ancient *Oresteia* and the subject of chapter two, reflects in more gestural terms on the will to vengeance and the question of racial justice. And while the Truth Commission furnishes the play with its mise-en-scène, *Molora* is structured as a cycle of familial retribution, a meditation on the violence inherited by one generation from another. We are not made witness to Agamemnon's tyranny, however. Instead, the drama begins with Klytemnestra's confession to his murder. Remorseless in reciting her crime, she is rendered typical of apartheid's white agents, many of whom refused to see their lethal actions as anything other than necessary and proportionate. Correspondingly, her black children, Elektra and Orestes, are made representational in their suffering, citing as part of their subsequent plot to avenge their father's murder something of the 'terrible spectacle', to borrow from Saidiya Hartman, that constituted life under apartheid for the black majority.[93] This withdrawal from the historical into the terrain of the mythical enables a more generalised meditation on reconciliation's 'enabling condition'—which is to say, following Schaap, the state of tragic conflict and insecurity that arguably also allows reconciliation to operate as something other than an exculpatory end.[94] So while *Molora* refuses, like *He Left Quietly*, those deceptive notions of recovery that motivated the Truth Commission, it also remakes reconciliation in terms that appeal to the country's ongoing racial divisions.

A similar separation between the abstract and the particular may be said to structure the contrast between the various documentary films that I analyse and the narrative, so-called 'TRC films' that make up my final two chapters. Like

He Left Quietly, this documentary tradition traces the impact of the Commission on those individuals given opportunity to testify at its hearings over and above any of the more epochal concerns that pattern their fictional counterparts. Indeed, Ingrid Gavshon's documentary *Facing Death . . . Facing Life* (2001), produced even before the Truth Commission had completed its work, also situates Duma Kumalo and his traumatic experience on death row at its heart. For this reason, I include it alongside my analysis of *He Left Quietly* in the opening chapter. But Gavshon's film and Farber's play are far from mere analogues. For Gavshon also grants important attention to the melancholy conditions of Kumalo's life since his imprisonment, reflecting on the material impoverishment that further inhibits his hope of healing. In this, Kumalo is not exactly unusual. As Gavshon makes clear as part of her film, his subjective suffering was exacerbated by South Africa's 'elite transition', which left the majority of its black citizenry behind.[95] Taken alongside Farber's play, Kumalo's performances centre the resistant, rather than therapeutic, imagination that melancholy arguably enables, mobilising its disruptive outlook in the field of racial justice and reconciliation.

Where my earliest two chapters are united by their relative fragility, chapter three is more resolute in challenging the claims made over the past by the Truth Commission. Extending the practice of community filmmaking initiated by Mark Kaplan and others under apartheid, his documentary *Between Joyce and Remembrance* (2003) begins as an investigative study into the torture and subsequent disappearance of student activist Siphiwo Mtimkulu in the early 1980s. His body was never discovered. Siphiwo's mother, Joyce, appeared before the HRVC in 1996 to lobby the state for information. Kaplan filmed the family in the months leading up to her appearance and after. As part of his investigations, he also interviewed Gideon Nieuwoudt, a former lieutenant colonel in the South African Police Service, whom the Mtimkulu family suspected of killing Siphiwo. At this point, Nieuwoudt has already been convicted and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment for his part in the murder of three black police officers and one informer, known as the Motherwell Four. However, he was also engaged in an appeal to the Truth Commission for amnesty for this and a series of related crimes. And while he denied murdering Siphiwo, he did appeal to Kaplan to arrange a meeting with his family in order to ask for their forgiveness.

Far from absolving the former police officer, his encounter with the Mtimkulu family at their home in August 1997 stirred up many of the most incendiary feelings of injustice over which the Truth Commission presided, with Siphiwo's teenage son, Sikhumbuzo, reacting violently to his appeal for clemency. Picking up a ceramic ornament, he smashes it over Nieuwoudt's head, fracturing

his skull. It is a shocking scene, not least in terms of the depth of ongoing and intergenerational anguish that it surfaces. However, Kaplan's treatment of this encounter also draws comparative attention to the melodramatic imagination that has motivated a set of more popular, narrative 'TRC films', as they have since been dubbed. And by contrasting Kaplan's documentary account with this popular tradition, my third chapter considers the emotional appeal that forgiveness has come to uphold over and above reconciliation.[96]

In reviewing this series of 'TRC films', my aim is not to dismiss out of hand what are almost certainly the most widely reviewed renditions of the Truth Commission, internationally as well as nationally. Melodrama, like tragedy, upholds its own moral ambitions, especially in the legislation of a new democratic national order. But as part of their sentimental architecture, these 'TRC films' also abet something of the Truth Commission's own dematerialising tendency toward unity over and above agonism. Included improperly among this tradition, Ramadan Suleman's *Zulu Love Letter* (2004) refuses these popular prescripts. But it also discards the Commission as a guiding moral framework, cultivating an entirely separate tradition of reconciliation that begins with the humanistic claims of Black Consciousness. Scripted in collaboration with the writer and critic Bhekizizwe Peterson, it is not quite the first black feature-length film of the democratic age—that particular accolade went to *Fools*, the pair's 1997 adaptation of Njabulo Ndebele's short story. Nonetheless, it maintains a similarly definitional appeal, cultivating an experimental, vernacular style that merits sustained attention.

Accordingly, in my fourth and final chapter, I trace *Zulu Love Letter*'s visual as well as ideological distinction, arguing on behalf of its ritualised way of thinking 'this thing called reconciliation'. This closing sense of autonomy is significant and not just for the arc of this study. For Suleman and Peterson's credentials in the sphere of black filmmaking contrast with the often contradictory, even complicitous status of those white theatre- and filmmakers examined elsewhere in this study, suggesting a vital future trajectory for the collective negotiation of reconciliation. Tethering their film to the fundamental principles of Black Consciousness, Suleman and Peterson are motivated by the comparatively liberating possibilities that might emerge from the sphere of black expression. This reflects a potentially vital shift in the expressive economy, one otherwise dominated under apartheid and since by white artists and writers. In appraising *Zulu Love Letter*, then, my final chapter necessarily favours those allied epistemological interventions made by the film, which is to say, the privileged ways of thinking and doing reconciliation that its black, specifically female characters enable.

Nonetheless, if a tentative continuity is first to be found across and between the repertoire included in this study, then it is in the way each challenge and even, on occasion, overwhelm their audience, both in the primary act of viewing and in the consequent process of reviewing. Indeed, in the scenes of individual suffering they relay all issues from a history so intense as to appear even to 'defeat the possibility of art' itself.[97] In this, they oblige an uncommon application of empathic engagement and, at the same time, critical deliberation that is difficult to maintain when confronted by such extremities of experience. Much like the 'intricate, oddly delicate' confessions that were also heard before the Commission, these public recitals of grief, anger, and guilt retain a complexity that, to follow Fiona Ross, arguably only 'emerges slowly over time, the product of careful sustained mindfulness'.[98] Perhaps this awkward admixture of emotional attentiveness and analytic dispassion is a large part of the reason why critics are yet to assume any serious responsibility for this adjacent sphere of confession.

In an effort to figure something of a formal passage through this demanding scene, therefore, I have been compelled to defer to the notion of genre as something of a rudimentary pilot. This may appear a somewhat unlikely proposal, especially accepting the attacks made upon the concept in decades past, with criticism regularly pressed to get 'beyond genre'. Without pressing for a retreat into the orthodoxies of genre studies, there is, nonetheless, a certain clarity to be found in genre's taxonomic system. As Thomas Beebee once put it, 'generic classification' is, in large part, what determines an object's 'meaning(s)'. Perhaps more significantly, however, it also what 'exposes its ideology'.[99] And it is genre's uncommon efforts to encode its ideological ambitions within its formal structure that ensure it provides this study with a potential illuminating framework through which to evaluate the various insurgencies and representational strategies pursued by these works.

That said, this is not a study *of* genre, even if it makes strategic use of its language and its ideas. Rather, I prefer to think more in terms of confession's potential modes—that is, partly generic, but also partly experimental and aesthetically digressive. In short, beginning with the melancholic mode of Kumalo's confession, I move from the tragic to the melodramatic, before concluding with the experiments with ritual that drive *Zulu Love Letter*. There are immanent reasons for this specific progression; for instance, I understand the melodramatic, following Peter Brooks, as motivated expressly by a failure of the tragic vision outlined in the preceding chapter. The melancholic, by contrast, is arguably latent in everything that follows, performing a series of uncanny spectral returns, as I suggest in my final chapter. But even while each of these four chapters finds

certain sustenance in generic laws, this is more often in order to decide upon the departures from, and resistance to, established rubric that these respective examples pursue. Instead of being bounded by generic concerns, then, this confessional repertoire experiments with the orthodoxies of genre, testing the formal possibilities left in the wake of the Commission. As such, I offer up these examples as interventions, rather than answers, to the enduring problem of racial injustice, finding in their improvised practice a framework through which to challenge its worst excesses.

CHAPTER ONE

Apartheid Acting Out

Duma Kumalo and Reconciliation's Melancholy Scene

Reconciliation demands my annihilation.[1]

—Njabulo Ndebele

There are no mirrors here—
but in the bathroom by the basin there is a frosted steel plate.
I can just see my outline—fading away.[2]

—Duma Kumalo

Of all the performative claims that the confessional act presumes, rarely is it more assured than in its avowal of the confessing 'I'. Whether of a broadly judicial or sacramental variety, the confession is nothing if not an embodied act of self-revelation and, as such, an actualisation of the subject's sovereignty. Of course, this is by no means a uniformly positive act. Within the courtroom or the oratory, to confess is more often to expose the otherwise veiled, internal subject to the recriminatory eye of the jurist or the priest. It is to assert a shameful self to be acknowledged only so that it may be reprimanded. This is, nonetheless, as much a salving process as it is a reproachful one. To follow Freud in an early reflection upon the logic of these rites, the confessional compels the subject to articulate and, thereby, sluice the guilty secrets that otherwise threaten to disable them.[3] In this way, confession is conceived as a powerfully enabling act of self-making. The 'privileged communication' of the confessant, as civil and common law generally names it, serves to verify as well as fortify the speaking subject. In religious custom too the potency of the act resides in its capacity to perform and, to follow the ritual orthodoxies of the confessional outlined by the literary critic Peter Brooks, 'in a sense create' the unified inwardness of the confessant. In short, 'speaking guilt' is precisely constitutive of the sovereign self.[4]

But what claims to subjective sovereignty are available within a moral sphere from which religious instruction has begun its ineluctable retreat, or, more decisively, in the aftermath of the law's catastrophic failure, something typified by South Africa's capitulation to racial injustice under apartheid and, indeed, arguably after? This is one among a small host of exigent questions implicit to the opening of Yaël Farber's *He Left Quietly* (2002), an intense theatrical work first staged just as the Truth Commission's public hearings had come to a formal close. Entering onto a tenebrous performance space, Kumalo appears before the audience in starkly immaterial terms. Only the outline of his frame is visible against the soft, low backlighting that guides his languid progress to a chair at the centre of the stage. Sitting down, he then lights a cigarette and stares out meditatively towards the audience. Over the course of a noiseless but also perturbing minute or so, time appears to stall. The silence is only broken when he asks portentously:

> When does the soul leave the body? . . . At which precise moment? Does it leave with our last breath? . . . Or the final beat of our heart? Is it possible that I stayed here amongst you—the living—long after my soul quietly left my body behind?[5]

It is a stoical deliberation upon the desolate 'I' that appears in body but deprived of spirit before the audience, one that precipitates yet further metaphysical insecurity:

> In my life I have died many times. But here I am again and again—alive. I am Duma Joshua Kumalo. Prisoner Number V 34-58. In 1984, I was condemned to death for a crime I did not commit. I spent three years on Death Row, and [served] a further four years of a Life Sentence. I have been measured for the length of my coffin; the size of the rope for my neck; I took the last sacrament. . . . And with each of these moments, my soul left my body.[6]

Bearing public witness to his own suffering on death row, Kumalo is not engaged in any confession to wrongdoing. Whatever we choose to understand of his culpability, this is no act of guilty self-articulation in either the legal or the spiritual sense. And yet, in line with all such acts of confessional disclosure, he appears desperate to avow before the audience the markers of his existence—his full name, his institutional alias, even the dimensions of his physical being—and with each such marker a plausible claim upon his own otherwise fragile sense of selfhood. But rather than any individual actualisation, he manages only to contour the shape of a subject for whom, it seems, the 'deep, recessed, secret self', to return to Brooks, has been hollowed out.[7]

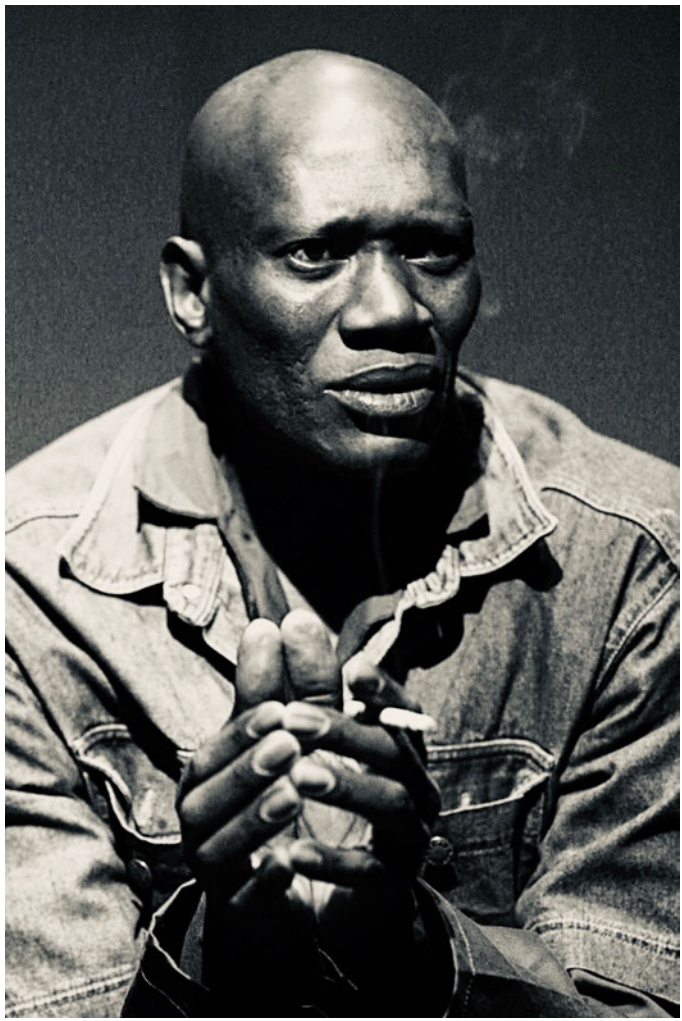

FIGURE 1. Duma Kumalo delivers his confession in Yaël Farber's *He Left Quietly* (2002). Photo courtesy of John Hogg.

This scene of subjective insolvency is deeply unsettling, and not just for the audience made witness to his trauma. For Kumalo's faltering claim here over his own internal sense of self also challenges the confessional technology made fundamental to the Truth Commission in its pursuit of reconciliation. Inaugurated as a quasi-judicial instrument to undo the schisms of apartheid, the Commission was deliberately organised into something of a 'public confessional', soliciting the

testimony of both victims and perpetrators of past abuse in an effort to confront and, thereby, help repair the damage inflicted by the apartheid regime.[8] More than a mere place of seeing, then, to return us to the claims set out by Catherine Cole, the Commission 'embraced performance' in an effort, as she also puts it, to help society and subject alike 'cope' with the history of racial injustice.[9] In this respect, Cole suggests that we read it as a prototypical 'social drama', a descriptor that, following cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, makes central the Commission's investment in the cathartic but also collective reconciliatory ambitions of its confessional praxis.[10] It was, she insists, an attempt at 'redressive action'—the third in the four ritual phases that, for Turner, culminates in social reintegration.

While its hearings were indeed styled as spaces of healing, the actual stories that the Commission solicited also tested the remedial limits of such ritualised public action, often reaching deep into the intransigent terrain of the traumatic. For example, examining the eighteen hundred statements provided publicly by victims of human rights violations in his review of the Commission, Richard Wilson profiles such a litany of individual and collective abuse, from systematic torture and murder to widespread disappearances (few of which have ever been resolved), as to challenge the very notion of redress.[11] This, to say nothing of the deeply embedded structures of racial division around which the Commission was compelled to navigate, but with little authority to disrupt. Whatever Cole's conviction, whether in the expressions of enduring anger and suffering that emerged at its hearings, or in the questionable efforts made nationally since at structural reform and economic redistribution, there is much evidence to suggest that the Commission was, in fact, ill-equipped to 'cope' with the injustice of the apartheid past, let alone repair it.

To say all this is not to deny the theatrical form structuring, for instance, the Commission's Human Rights Violation Committee (HRVC) hearings, particularly what Cole identifies as the layers of 'restored behaviour' underwriting its confessional procedures.[12] Nor is it to disclaim in principle the remedial possibilities upheld by such a ritual performance. Rather, it is to challenge the reparative imperatives that so deeply, even violently determined the Commission's confessional form. Indeed, in the years since it has proven untenable to uphold the conclusions made by its final report. Here, the Commission claims to have given public exposure to 'experiences that had been repressed or shut out for years', to have 'alleviated feelings of shame' and 'restor[ed] dignity and self-respect'.[13] Even if the HRVC hearings were broadly affirmative for some, this is not also a defence for its prescriptive reconciliatory agenda, which depended,

as John Borneman is at pains to point out, 'on the recuperation of losses that are almost impossible to recuperate, the reconciliation of an end to which there is no end'.[14] As such, any of the inductive sovereignty prioritised by the Truth Commission as part of its confessional praxis only ever serviced the emergent democratic state, discounting, if not also further violating, the internal desolation of apartheid's many victims.[15]

Such misgivings are by no means exceptional. As I have suggested already, the Commission's compromises, its unevenness and, ultimately, its failures as a space of healing and reconciliation have been detailed at such length elsewhere as to have become almost hackneyed.[16] However, they bear some repetition here, not least for those left wrestling with the interminable feeling of injustice that the Commission helped to sustain. And it is in the context of this wider pattern of disconsolation that I centre Duma Kumalo's experience. For not only do his confessional performances in both *He Left Quietly* and Ingrid Gavshon's equally challenging documentary film *Facing Death . . . Facing Life* (2000) offer up an adjacent record of the Commission's ritual impasse, but, more significantly, they stage an account, I want to claim, of confession's alternative, seemingly negative potential. Contingent upon a seeming inability to create for himself any practicable sense of self—at least, that is, the integrated, sovereign sense of self that institutions like the law presume—his recital of the irredeemable, rather than forgivable, suffering inflicted under apartheid asks us to consider what reconciliatory possibilities might otherwise flow from such a reiterative, even compulsive and, ultimately, melancholy negotiation with the apartheid past.

Duma Kumalo (1958–2006)

Before I return to elaborate upon the melancholy form that arguably structures both Farber's *He Left Quietly* and Gavshon's *Facing Death* alike, it is important to establish the biographical facts from which Kumalo's compulsive confessional performances emerge. For his story is as remarkable as it is also altogether ordinary, a spectacle of gross abuse that also shares in many of the everyday oppressions inflicted under apartheid and in some ways maintained under democracy. Indeed, his experiences are perhaps uncommon only in the sustained public attention they received, both at the time of his arrest for murder in 1984 and since. In addition to the two works under analysis here, Kumalo twice testified before the Truth Commission, once at an HRVC hearing when it convened in Sebokeng in August 1996 and again before a Special Prisons hearing held in Johannesburg in July 1997. He was also a performer in a theatre-for-development

piece *The Story I Am About to Tell* (1997–2001), before the writer Mtutuzeli Matshoba published a detailed account of his experiences, entitled 'Nothing But the Truth: The Ordeal of Duma Kumalo', fashioned from an interview conducted in 2001.[17] From these sources, an unusually detailed account of his life has emerged. Rather than reciting in exhaustive terms the facts of his suffering, however, it is perhaps more valuable here to set out those pertinent details that shape my subsequent interpretation of his confessional acts on stage and screen. For this, I prefer Matshoba's journalistic account as a broad frame, although I also draw from Kumalo's testimony at the Truth Commission.

To begin, it is important to note—as Kumalo regularly insists—that he was no political activist, at least not before his arrest and subsequent conviction. As a resident of the Vaal Triangle, an industrial region south of Johannesburg and notorious under apartheid for its political volatility, Kumalo includes reflections in almost every account of his life on the fatal protests that afflicted the area, from the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 to the Boipatong Massacre in 1992. Nonetheless, he also refuses the suggestion that he was involved with banned national political parties like the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), or even the increasingly popular United Democratic Front (UDF). With ambitions to be a local educator, he was well into his second year of a teaching apprenticeship at the nearby Sebokeng Training College when he took part in a local march against proposed rent increases in September 1984. Residents of the district were already subject to the country's highest average township rents and the proposed sixteen percent hike was to press this largely impoverished community beyond its limit point. Directed by members of the Vaal Civic Association, the boycotts mobilised the majority of local residents and Kumalo remained just one of a great number to converge on Sharpeville's Zwane Street in protest.[18]

Kumalo recalled before the HRVC how the police were deployed to break up the march, launching tear gas and firing rubber bullets in an effort to disperse the large group; a tactic increasingly widespread at protests during the turbulent emergency years of the 1980s. His neighbour, a man named Mango Mketsi, was shot in his lower leg and Kumalo reports how he helped bandage the wound before helping Mketsi back to his home. This, he assured the HRVC, was the sum of his involvement in this typically volatile encounter, even though many other local residents re-assembled outside the home of local town councillor and deputy-mayor of the Vaal Triangle, Jacob Kuzwayo Dlamini. As a non-elected representative of a newly established system of political representation, in which black councillors were used to implement and enforce state policy, Dlamini was

viewed by many of the residents as a complicit actor in the apartheid regime. At the sight of the impassioned crowd, Dlamini is reported to have emerged from his home shooting wildly and killing one of the protesters. The rest of those gathered at the scene responded by setting his house and car alight. Dlamini subsequently died from the burns suffered during the attack.

Kumalo was arrested at his home in Sebokeng's Zone 7 some three months later under the notorious Section 29 of the Internal Security Act, widely used to restrict public protest. No explanation was given for his arrest and in accordance with the insidious terms legislated for in the Security Act he was held without trial until April the following year in Diepkloof Prison, Soweto. Upon his eventual release, Kumalo was immediately re-arrested and charged with murder, subversion, and public violence. He recalls to Matshoba the unlikely optimism this initially encouraged. Along with his co-accused, Kumalo was finally permitted legal counsel for the first time. And in September 1985, along with a further eight other residents, he stood trial for Jacob Dlamini's murder at Pretoria's High Court. With the state prosecutors pressing for capital punishment, a number of witnesses were produced to testify against Kumalo. Two separate deponents placed him at the scene and accused him of blowing up Dlamini's car using a petrol bomb and pouring petrol through a window into the councillor's house before setting it alight. This Kumalo contested, providing an alibi for the time leading up to and including Dlamini's death.

With little regard for this mitigating evidence, however, Acting Justice Wilhelm Human found Kumalo and a further five of his co-accused guilty of murder by 'common purpose'—a particularly draconian item of colonial British legalisation that had become a popular tool among apartheid prosecutors during the 1980s. Prior to this period, common purpose had only ever been cited infrequently in South African case law and even then only to indict co-perpetrators in acts of violent assault and murder when no individual participant could be found solely responsible. In its original form, the rule relied on a proven complicity between all those indicted. However, with the rise of organised, siege revolts in South Africa's townships during the 1980s, common purpose was increasingly repurposed, such that it relied only upon an individual's 'active association' with a criminal act. As legal historians Peter Parker and Joyce Mokhesi-Parker describe, the accused could be found guilty if they were either 'present when the crime occurred', intentionally associated 'with the commission of the crime', or 'gave overt expression to that association'.[19] It was under these demonstrably flexible terms that Kumalo and his co-accused were convicted.[20] They were all sentenced to death by hanging, with their right to appeal refused.

Known by the press as the Sharpeville Six, their conviction inflamed an unparalleled level of public censure, both nationally and internationally. Demands for a retrial were submitted by a number of leading, international legal counsels, while calls for state clemency were registered by the South African Council of Churches, the United Nations Security Council, Amnesty International, the Organisation of African Unity, the Commonwealth, the European Union, and numerous national governments. Ultimately, the case proved a significant blow to the integrity of the South African judiciary who were forced thereafter to reconsider wholesale the legitimacy of its common purpose legislation. For Kumalo and the five others condemned to death, however, this lobbying did little to mitigate their plight.

After more than two years on death row, on 14 March 1988, Kumalo's number, 'V 34-58', was called. Along with the rest of the Sharpeville Six, he was given five rather than the requisite seven days' notice to expedite proceedings. However, news of their imminent execution was leaked to the international media, mobilising a vociferous public outcry in South Africa and abroad. And a mere fifteen hours before they were due to be hanged, the state submitted to the mounting pressure by granting a four-week stay of execution. The group then remained on death row for a further six months until Justice Minister Kobie Coetsee, without permitting a retrial, had their sentences commuted to eighteen years imprisonment. His clemency was contingent on the group all signing an affidavit in which they admitted liability for their part in Dlamini's murder, to which they agreed. Some three years later, in July 1991, all six were eventually released from Pretoria Central Prison as part of the political negotiations ongoing at Kempton Park.

In the years following his imprisonment, Kumalo received counselling from the University of Witwatersrand's Trauma Clinic. With no financial compensation and few long-term job prospects, however, his conviction cast myriad other material shadows that, along with the evident psychological trauma, he petitioned the Truth Commission to assist with. He began by asking them to arrange a formal meeting with Dlamini's family in order that he might 'clarify the record, clear . . . [his] name, so [he] could tell them who actually did those things and what were the reasons'.[21] He also asked them to help him secure his future financial security, whether in the form of a municipal job or a pension, so that he might be able to support his family. Finally, he requested a visit to death row in an effort to bring about a clearer sense of closure. While the HRVC noted his appeals, it made no commitment to assist him. His only recourse was to the Khulumani Support Group, a non-governmental organisation established to

support victims of apartheid-era human rights abuse with whom he volunteered and who eventually launched a series of high-profile lawsuit against corporations in the United States that they accused of profiteering under apartheid.[22] However, Kumalo died before the suits were filed, passing away in 2006 aged forty-eight and in relative poverty. His conviction for murder by common purpose was never overturned.

Glass Confessionals

There is much in this account that we might profitably explore, not least the Truth Commission's manifest failure as a space of individual restitution, let alone ritualised social reintegration and reconciliation. Given Kumalo's enduring sense of injustice, however, I am interested most particularly by the reiterative qualities that also structure these painful confessions, especially since the Commission's formal end. Without presuming to diagnose this repeated urge 'to have his story told and heard', as Farber puts it in her prefatory notes to *He Left Quietly*, it is useful to reflect more widely on the range of motivations that merge with Kumalo's recurrent acts of public telling.[23] To take up the specific requests he made of the Commission, this evidently includes a fundamental desire for redress, legal and otherwise. But, equally, such petitions appear to extend beyond the terrain of individual suffering, reaching out to claims that function in more social than solipsistic terms.

Kumalo puts this well at the outset of *Facing Death*. Illuminated by a single spotlight, his weary, pockmarked face is captured in suspension against the dark vacuity that otherwise dominates Gavshon's opening shot. From the camera's oblique perspective, this striking chiaroscuro depicts him not by what he is but rather, it seems, by what he is not. He appears on screen, much like he does on Farber's stage, as little other than a spectre of himself. 'My name is Duma Kumalo', he reports, his voice languid but clear.[24] 'My dreams shatter and shatter after the long distance marching to my grave', he continues:

> Some say I do good for the people; I am there as a wounded healer. What I know is that I was born to witness evil being done by one human being to another human being.

With this stark, almost messianic disclosure—to pick up the shared etymological root that pairs the martyr with the witness—the screen fades to black.[25]

I have cited already the demotic structure, the 'absent polyphony of other voices', to return to John Beverley, within which such public articulations of

FIGURE 2. Duma Kumalo, pictured in the opening shot of *Facing Death . . . Facing Life* (2001). Directed by Ingrid Gavshon and produced by Angel Films.

the self are regularly implicated. As an act of seemingly collective as much as individual confession—bearing witness to a 'story that extends far beyond himself', as Farber has it—Kumalo here gestures towards the allied political and ethical claims that attend his performances.[26] As such, both *He Left Quietly* and *Facing Death* are likely best understood as 'glass confessionals'—that is, to follow Howard Barker, forms of self-narration committed to the 'the clarification of social problems, the "raising of consciousness", [and] the dissemination of the "truth"'.[27] There is much precedence for this type of intimate as well as insurgent act of self-exposure, not least in playwright Athol Fugard's oft-cited desire to bear witness under apartheid to 'the nameless and destitute (desperate) of this one little corner of the world'.[28] I will return in subsequent chapters to some of the specifics (and complexities) of this tradition as it was mobilised originally under apartheid. Here, it is enough to note the shared political orthodoxies that motivated groups like the Community Video Resource Association (CVRA) at the University of Cape Town and Afroscope, which produced short agitational films in consort with the United Democratic Front during the turbulent 1980s. Much like those famed protest plays like *Woza Albert!* (1981) and *Born in the RSA* (1985) that appeared at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg

around the same time, these works prioritised the experiences of the country's oppressed black majority, while also citing the compromised, surveilled conditions of their own production, offering up a representational challenge to the segregated ways of seeing that apartheid produced.

As the clear moral imperatives of anti-apartheid resistance have given way to the contingencies of democracy, however, these glass confessionals have also receded from the critical horizon, their political function no longer immediately self-evident, it would seem. In part, this chapter attempts to challenge this retreat, especially once we understand the racial injustice of apartheid to be an ongoing condition rather than terminal event. When thought in these expanded terms, it is arguable that audiences in South Africa have been witness to a small host of similarly committed confessional works, especially in the years since the Truth Commission's conclusion.[29] Some are more critical of the Commission than others, but most refuse to make recourse to its salving ends. In their attempts to incorporate the traumatic remains of apartheid, then, these latest examples of the confessional tradition have also found their shifting political ambitions freighted by equally pressing ethical and epistemic concerns. This is not to say merely that trauma 'resists simple comprehension', as Cathy Caruth puts it.[30] More pertinent here is what Maggie Inchley frames, in strictly performative terms, as 'the impossibility of *feeling* another's pain'.[31] For Inchley, the reiterative performance of such acute suffering challenges the possibility for affective reciprocity between traumatised subject and spectator. Even if audiences feel an urgent responsibility towards the pain on show, a sense even of being 'begotten' or 'pursued' by it, as Inchley also has it, we should be wary of presuming that its representation in performance also results in its affective redistribution.[32] In other words, while traumatic suffering may be in some, partial way communicable, it is not entirely shareable.

This impasse is not one that either *He Left Quietly* or *Facing Death* necessarily overcome. Instead, in their marshalling of the traumatic, both works also enter into a decidedly ambivalent, even perilous negotiation with their confessional subject. At their most extreme, these works risk re-traumatizing as much as consoling their primary performer. Indeed, it is far from evident that Kumalo's performances here enabled him to 'reclaim', as Farber would have us believe, the sense of selfhood otherwise lost, as he puts it, to death row. Rather, each reiteration of his trauma upholds the potential to extend rather than end it.[33] To recall again Kumalo's claim at the opening to *He Left Quietly*: 'I have died many times. But here I am again and again'. In this, it is clear that his repeated acts of self-revelation are underpinned not by a sense of shame that might be

sluiced—as the confessional orthodoxy set out by Brooks would have it—but by an internal devastation, by a disintegration, that is, of the speaking subject at the precise point of its own confessional avowal. To this extent, any fundamental desire to speak out and share his suffering also appears paradoxically self-defeating. For he also embarks in these works upon a performative exposure of the very traumas that first triggered his thanatopsistic state—that is to say, his spiralling, traumatic fixation upon his own death.

In attempting to work out the ethical as much as the political imperatives that frame *He Left Quietly* and *Facing Death*, then, notions like reclamation or remedy are also erroneous shorthands for the complex, even contradictory treaty that Kumalo's performances broker with the past. This endless seeming reiteration of his suffering runs counter to the regime of repression—speaking guilt—that ordinarily underwrites confession's self-producing end. But beyond this, there is also something disruptive at the root of his unremitting and irredeemable urgency to speak out, at least as far as the technology of confession is concerned. His insistent-seeming desire to confess even to his own internal devastation, or, to follow Freud's account of shame and self-expression in 'Mourning and Melancholia', his 'insistent communicativeness', exhibits, it seems, a paradoxically insatiable 'satisfaction in self-exposure'.[34] Unable to articulate any decisive claim upon the sovereign subject, the very facts of his repeated confession offer up a challenge to the self-actualizing imperative that we might otherwise assume to motivate his performances. Repetition does not appear to yield any relief, performative or otherwise; rather, it seems to spotlight more intensely the relative failure of his confessional claims upon the self.

Rather than finding ourselves undone by such failures, this insistence on speaking out again and again is vitally instructive, I would like to suggest, and not just because it sets Kumalo's confession at direct odds with the redemptive logic upon which institutions like the law, the Church and, belatedly, the Truth Commission have thrived. Indeed, it is the irredeemable, repetitious structure underwriting his multiple acts of confession—rather than the more prosaic performative repeatability that, say, Cole figures in those submissions made before the Commission—that brings us to the precise challenges posed by *He Left Quietly* and *Facing Death*. For while Kumalo certainly displays as part of his performances a fragmented self in search of repair, the compulsion to communicate this suffering on stage and screen appears to do more than displace the self-actualizing logic of the confessional act. Returning to Freud, this confessional displacement might most productively be understood as symptomatic of a specifically melancholy confessional structure, one that appears to enable

something other than an abortive claim upon the sovereign self, something that approaches, instead, an intersubjective, even reconciliatory impulse that acts beyond the confines of the confessant.

Melancholy Repetition and Radical Unsettlement: *He Left Quietly*

Melancholy is already well established as a theoretical frame through which to approach trauma and its shattering, irredeemable effects upon the individual, and not just in the fields of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. For instance, Dominick LaCapra, who regularly privileges the psychical symptoms of traumatic events like the Holocaust in an effort to understand their historical implications, describes how the melancholic survivor of an extreme experience like death row, 'resist[s] working through [the past] because of what might almost be termed a fidelity to trauma, a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it'.[35] He reflects too upon the melancholic's symptomatic cycles of repetition and re-inscription whereby 'tenses implode as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene'.[36] This type of analysis draws explicitly from Freud's elementary distinction between the 'normal' process of mourning and the attenuated experience of melancholy. The latter, Freud claims, is incapable of integrating and thereby relinquishing the lost object, whether directly or as 'some abstraction which has taken the place of [it]'.[37] Instead, the melancholic's feeling of loss becomes pathological, turning grief's rupture inwards onto the fragile ego. The result, Freud maintains, is a 'lowering of self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment'.[38]

In performative terms, Kumalo's 'powerful will' to enact again and again the traumatising details of his suffering on death row appears to rehearse too the self-reproving symptoms that Freud attributes to the melancholy subject. Indeed, the loss of personal liberty is, in Freud's view, one of melancholy's most prominent beginning points, even if he does not understand its articulation in overt, theatricalised terms. In accounting more fully for the melancholy that determines Kumalo's reiterative acts of confession, however, the performative valence of LaCapra's analysis proves more supple than Freud's own. For instance, LaCapra outlines how the melancholic becomes caught in a cyclical 'acting out' of the past. Unable to mourn and thereby let go of their loss, victims often find themselves destined to re-inscribe their own traumatic experience. Such is the intractability of their suffering, LaCapra concludes, that they remain 'performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes'.[39] In this, his

analysis anticipates the thoroughgoing co-extension between the performative and the psychotherapeutic that has become a mainstay of both trauma theory and the type of performance analysis deployed by critics like Cole to appraise a social drama like the Truth Commission. Indeed, in a consummate account of the therapeutic impulses underpinning contemporary performance practice, Patrick Duggan and Mick Wallis cast trauma's collective and individual catharsis as 'a key responsibility for theatre/performance practitioners'.[40] For them, the theatre provides 'a technical apparatus' through which society might 'aim to live beyond trauma'.[41]

What this type of analysis regularly omits, however, is the fact that this acting out is not always also a working through, at least not in a psychotherapeutic sense. And when extended to prop up the consoling—but also potentially coercive—ambitions of an event like the Truth Commission, this faith in the 'restorative efficacy', as Duggan and Wallis put it, of trauma's theatrical rehearsal proves particularly problematic.[42] In moving, therefore, to look in closer detail in this section at the ways in which *He Left Quietly* might enable us to rethink such traumatic acting out, I choose to prioritise those moments in which Kumalo appears to refuse theatre's redemptive, therapeutic end, those moments of repetition and reiteration that frame most clearly his melancholy urge to confess. In this, I also depart from LaCapra's later conclusions, where he argues that to 'believe in anything like a viable democratic politics' is to believe in the 'ethical solutions' that emerge from a performative working through of trauma and injustice. By contrast, I want to explore how Kumalo's confession alerts us to the democratic solutions that might also begin with a melancholy refusal—that is, with theatre's failure as a site of recovery.[43] This is not to embark upon an anti-theatrical interpretation. Rather, it is to expand upon the possible reconciliatory charge underwriting Kumalo's performative inability to work through suffering and lay claim to some integrated sovereign self, as the confessional act otherwise presumes.

To appreciate theatre's particular primacy within this confessional schema, it is important to recognise that Farber's stage is as much a precipitant or cue as it is some substitutive theatrical site for Kumalo's melancholy acting out. Indeed, Farber frames his confession in such a way as to figure, but also beget, a melancholy fidelity with the performer's own traumatic past. This begins most obviously when Farber moves to provide a reflexive account of her own mediating presence in the production. For while Kumalo's confession begins as a solo performance, the details of his suffering only emerge in dialogue with a white female interlocutor, played originally by the production's assistant director, Yana Sakelaris. Named simply 'Woman' and described as 'non-descript', she appears at first as an empathic

interlocutor, mirroring something of Farber's professed function in the development of the dramatic script. Crucially, however, Farber also describes the role as 'necessary in order to reach out to portray the white community's relationship to injustice, indifference and accountability', signalling something of the collective responsibility, that she, like much of her theatre-going audience, retains towards both Kumalo's original suffering and, now, as he attempts to recite it publicly. As a signal of this shared responsibility, the woman begins the production seated among the audience, only moving onto the stage after Kumalo challenges her to 'help [him] speak for the dead'. You are 'in or you are out', he proclaims, disrupting the possibility for impassive observation.[44] The woman responds thereafter by asking critical questions and filling factual gaps in his story, in an effort to share in, and perhaps also share out, the burden of his confession. However, this is not an act of exculpation. For the woman is also charged with performing the role of his apartheid interrogators: demanding identity documents, tormenting him with racial slurs, and callously passing sentence over him. In this, then, she makes explicit not just the consultative but also the interrogative and even potentially exploitative structure from which Kumalo's confessional performance arguably emerges. She is, in short, an ethical pilot for the audience, unsettling the boundaries that might otherwise distinguish the apartheid past from the democratic present and thereby distract from the complicitous, ongoing structure of racial inequality in which they are broadly implicated.

At risk of repeating, rather than merely representing the violence inflicted in the past, however, Farber also attempts to separate out Kumalo's confessional self from the historical, traumatised self that his performance produces. And following the play's stoical and sedentary opening scenes, *He Left Quietly* proceeds in more dynamic terms by setting the confessant apart from and against an image of the self as other. Neither imagined, nor altogether real, this secondary, surrogate self, named Young Duma and played by the production's only professional performer, Lebohang Elephant, materializes on stage by way of an incantatory ritual. Kumalo, still seated on his chair before the audience but partially veiled by a cloud of cigarette smoke, begins to chant in isiZulu an item of Christian liturgy (Jonah 2: 6–7):

> The waters closed in over me.
> The deep engulfed me.
> Reeds were wrapped around my head.
> I sank to the base of the mountain.
> I went down to the land whose bars closed over me forever.[45]

FIGURE 3. Duma Kumalo and Young Duma, alongside each other in Yaël Farber's *He Left Quietly* (2002). Photo courtesy of John Hogg.

From amid a heap of old green prison uniforms and shoes piled in a dark corner of the stage, Young Duma rises up, stumbling across the otherwise bare stage like the biblical Jonah—himself dragged down towards the realm of the dead before being unceremoniously regurgitated back into the land of the living. This seeming avatar of death row, dressed in prison garb but not yet encumbered by any traumatized torpor, then lights a cigarette in a gesture designed as much to assert his material presence upon the stage as to make clear his ontological link to Kumalo.[46] Any of the nominal truth-claims that might be thought to sustain Kumalo's confessional act are here overtaken by a ritualism that inaugurates and then hardens into a surrogate form of the confessant's remembered self, a self that is also made other.

The simultaneity on stage of the present and the past, of the confessional self and its embodied other, provides the audience with an externalised expression of the internalised melancholy collapse around which Kumalo's performance more generally turns. It articulates the traumatised 'duality (or double inscription)' of time and subjectivity that, to follow LaCapra's logic, so insistently disrupts Kumalo's confessional claim upon the self.[47] More than just a performative exposition of a psychical division, however, Young Duma also helps to give phenomenological form to the otherwise inexpressible suffering that Kumalo reportedly

experienced on death row. For in fashioning this self as other, Farber deploys Young Duma to make legible, if not absolutely knowable, Kumalo's treatment at the hands of the apartheid penal system in a way that the confessant himself, languid and largely immobile for much of the production, cannot. This is, in part, a pragmatic choice on Farber's part. For despite being aged only forty-five at the time of his performance in *He Left Quietly*, Kumalo's experience on death row had left him chronically fatigued. But equally, in spotlighting Kumalo's physical incapacity within the work, Farber also draws the audience's eye to the confessional failure of his body. In this way, Kumalo's inability to give theatrical presence to his experience bears its own witness to the irredeemable loss exacted by death row. His embodied inability is only made starker by Young Duma's comparatively busy presence upon the stage, regularly pacing behind his authoring, older self—imprisoned by the spatial and temporal boundaries of the stage but not yet burdened by the trauma of death row that Kumalo moves presently to describe.

As Kumalo proceeds to relay the facts of his detention and his subsequent conviction for murder, Young Duma is the one charged with acting out, in a theatrical and traumatic sense, Kumalo's experiences in all their disquieting detail. From his arrival at Pretoria C-Max Prison, where he was stripped naked and invasively searched, to his first night in the cell, which contained nothing more than a wooden bench and several soiled blankets left by previous inmates, Young Duma ensures that the audience are made witness to the everyday humiliations of Kumalo's incarceration. Standing within a makeshift metal cage that has been erected on the stage, the performer oscillates, almost manically, from states of depressed quietude, reading passages from his prison-issue Bible, to unbridled hysteria, shouting frantically at imagined prison guards. The restored behaviour that Cole ascribes generally to the traumatised confessions heard at the Truth Commission is here made separate to, and at an embodied distance from, the confessant himself. While Kumalo remains seated throughout, giving stoical voice to the daily abjection that accompanied his time on death row, it is Young Duma who, as his apartheid other, is charged with giving form to its distressing effects. Of course, to recall Richard Schechner's precise description, such restored behaviour is always 'separate from those who are behaving'.[48] This confessional separation or 'secondness', as Schechner terms it, is merely made extreme upon Farber's stage in an effort to give shape to Kumalo's own peculiarly melancholy sense of his self as 'someone else', as a self traumatically 'beside himself' upon the stage.[49]

As far as the fundamental ethics of this dramaturgy extend, Young Duma affords Farber opportunity to give a theatrical account of Kumalo's extreme

suffering on death row without ever making it absolutely concrete. A ritualized figure always in the process of becoming, Young Duma's restored distress remains, in this way, at a distance from the performer's own bodily presence upon the stage. Like Kumalo, he too is consistently lit obliquely from below and behind, helping to trouble any seeming claim to materiality. Indeed, Young Duma fades with regularity into nothing more than a dark silhouette. As such, the figure retains his reconstituted, surrogate status, maintaining too a vital gap between the visceral action that proceeds on stage and its potential to disable in traumatic terms performer and spectator alike. And it is this critical distance, this defamiliarizing breach, I want to suggest, that helps enable the play to work not just as an acting out of injustice but also as an exploration of the ethical, intersubjective possibilities that inhere within trauma's melancholy repetition.

Where Young Duma's ritual form helps maintain a general 'secondness' to the suffering performed on stage, in key moments *He Left Quietly* also makes the divide between theatrical action and its potentially traumatising effect especially acute. For instance, when the woman recounts how Kumalo attempted suicide during his first few days in prison by eating '[broken] glass from a window pane', Young Duma proceeds at this point to smash a glass on the floor, appearing to ingest its small shards. Writhing in pain next to Kumalo, this surrogate self as other then squats on the stage. 'You shit blood in the toilet', reports the woman as a dark pool seeps onto the stage beneath Young Duma: 'They take you to a doctor. But within hours you are back in your cell'.[50] Despite its disturbing, at times even horrifying verisimilitude, such scenes also manage to retain a relative indifference before their own violent action. At least, there seems to be a sense in which this action is designed not necessary to overwhelm the spectator but rather, following Helena Grehan's account of the ethics of traumatic spectatorship, to help precipitate a form of 'radical unsettlement'—that is, 'engaged with the other, with the work and with responsibility'.[51] For in giving embodied but dislocated form to Kumalo's self-excoriating suffering, *He Left Quietly* also helps 'liberate' the type of complex, even competing mix of emotional, visceral and intellectual responses crucial, according Grehan, to a spectator's continued and engagement with a work 'long after they have left the performance space'.[52] This is by no means a secure or even a uniformly understood outcome, but, as one reviewer of the original production corroborates, Farber's play at least upholds the seemingly contradictory potential to deliver a 'lingering after-shock' to its audience.[53] In this way, *He Left Quietly*'s unsettling action is vital if the audience is to serve as a possible 'listening community' for an experience that, in the received terms of trauma theory, appears otherwise to have 'annihilated any possibility of address'.[54]

Even while Farber's dramaturgy may be defended along these relational or intersubjective lines, it is vital to add that the play's reiterative pattern of restored violence threatens to unsettle more than just its audience. For these scenes also appear to condition a traumatic dislocation between Kumalo and his own confessional claims upon the self. In subjecting himself to the drama's successive and at times even relentless display of violence, Kumalo is obliged to bear witness to a type of performative attack upon the integrity of the self, albeit one made other. Traumatically as well as theatrically estranged from his own suffering, Kumalo is in this way made to understand the self through the othering vision of apartheid, finding his personhood reduced to an object of the regime's violent disciplinary procedures, even still.

This loss is by no means confined to Kumalo's embodied claims upon the self, for *He Left Quietly* figures too a punitive errancy at the heart of the performer's confessional voice. For instance, when asked by the young woman, 'Who is Duma?', Kumalo's reply is shared by Young Duma in a synchronous avowal: 'I am'.[55] This verbal co-extension between the confessant and his surrogate self as other only precedes a more profound rupture. As the woman moves to interrogate Kumalo, cross-examining him about the protests that led to his arrest in 1984, it is Young Duma who moves to reply and assert authority over the confessional arena: 'After the police opened fire—I left the scene. I went home'.[56] No longer assured in its distinction between the confessional self and its traumatic other, the drama proceeds by way of a figurative struggle between the two. And with each of Kumalo's attempts to articulate his experience, Young Duma moves to expropriate the verbal as well as somatic claims made by the confessant over his own suffering.

No longer merely 'unsettling' or 'restored', this *repossessive* behaviour appears to undo absolutely the confessant's claims to sovereignty. The confessional self is made impossibly contingent, only ever affirmed against the intractable, othering remains of death row. Estranged from his own experience, even Kumalo's seemingly defiant assertion that 'inside death row—you find your own voice' begins to collapse before Young Duma's appropriative acting out.[57] In this way, Young Duma's 'secondness' is figured as much more than a melancholy reiteration; rather, the traumatic other acquires its own violent authority over the confessant, reiterating and re-inscribing apartheid's disarticulating ends. Indeed, such is the vicarious but powerful hold maintained by death row, that despite the twenty-odd years separating his arrest and his performance in *He Left Quietly*, Kumalo is forced to acknowledge to the audience that 'I have never really come home':

Every night, I am back there.
Every night—I go home to Death Row.[58]

This is a metatheatrical revelation as much as it is a melancholy one. While his nightly confession prompts a theatrical return to the time and space of the original trauma-event, a melancholy fidelity to the self-same trauma is also what partly compels his nightly return to Farber's stage. It is not just that the two spaces have become indistinguishable or substitutable, but that each precedes the other in a pattern of interminable re-inscription.

Perhaps more significantly, under this analysis, it is also important to recognise the way in which the audience appears fashioned not just as witnesses to, but as carceral wardens for, Kumalo's nightly return to death row. For far from sustaining his claim to sovereignty, the presence of the audience necessarily solicits his confessional avowal of the self, at the very same instant as his own melancholy performance threatens to dissolve it. While obviously problematic, this complicity with the play's seeming pattern of disarticulation is by no means uniformly deleterious. To follow literary critic Mark Sanders, apartheid generated 'throughout its life span', including its afterlife, I would add, 'a common ensemble of complicities', deforming and forming as part of this history what he calls a 'responsibility-in-complicity'.[59] By this, Sanders means to reclaim from apartheid a critical response that does not presume to resist its own collusions. As such, the witness to the past is forced to inhabit a compromised, interstitial position, one that in professing 'responsibility—be it in the name of justice, resistance to injustice, or merely in the cause of solidarity—entertains the possibility of *doing* injustice'.[60] For Sanders, however, this complicity is critical to 'the basic folded-together-ness of being, of human being, of self and other' in South Africa, as it refuses the 'apartness' upon which the trauma of apartheid injustice thrived, even as it also marks it out.[61]

In working out this reading in anticipation of my turn to Gavshon's *Facing Death*, I want to propose that rather than merely unsettling the audience, Kumalo's performance in *He Left Quietly* might also be thought to stress the 'foldedness' of self and other in such a way as to potentially 'undo' the spectator. '[I]mplicated in, dependent upon, entangled with and enthralled by' Kumalo's melancholy confession—to follow Donna McCormack's model of traumatic witnessing—the audience are invited to consider their own self-estrangement as key to the reconciliatory ambitions of the play.[62] In other word, by recognising their own 'responsibility-in-complicity', their own potential to perform injustice in the pursuit of justice, Farber's audience are pressed, it seems, to feel beside

themselves, to feel similarly undone by the melancholy structure of Kumalo's confession. It is only in this space of shared undoing, it seems, that reconciliation might equitably proceed. Of course, this estrangement is never guaranteed, but it accounts, in part, for the play's capacity to be, as one reviewer put it, at once both 'overwhelming' and 'potent', both 'harrowing' and 'penetrating'.[63] It is the spectator's reciprocal self-estrangement that, ultimately, performs the ethical labour of a play like *He Left Quietly*. For in 'laying [one's] self open to the other', to return to Sanders, the audience not only enables a process of 'continuous self-examination' but also begins to incorporate, if not altogether comprehend, the discontinuity between self and other that is otherwise central to apartheid's violent and enduring authority.[64]

Of course, in realizing any such ethical and, potentially, reconciliatory end, the audience must be led by the performer's own exemplary, self-sacrificing account. In *He Left Quietly* Kumalo's self-annihilation echoes throughout his confession, the performer repeatedly declaring, 'If not me . . . who?'[65] Even as he exposes publicly the depths of his peculiar trauma, he actively refuses to demark the borders of the sovereign self. 'I speak for the dead', he declares in the play's epilogue, '[f]or we who survived must tell the world'.[66] Kumalo's performance certainly affirms something of the melancholy fidelity that LaCapra finds at stake in a former prisoner's bonds with dead inmates, which often invests shared 'trauma with value', making 'its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration'.[67] But his confessional insistence also extends far beyond such monumentalizing ends. Kumalo moves at the play's conclusion, as he did at its beginning, to reduce the confessional 'I' to that same arbitrary configuration of letters and integers—'Prisoner V 34-58'—imposed upon him by the administrators of death row. In reclaiming this cipher of the self made other, Kumalo's confession closes as it begins with the confessant seated before the audience, a cigarette smouldering in one hand. The light then fades before Kumalo departs from the stage, leaving the audience to contemplate what it has witnessed.

In making a return to its own opening tableau, *He Left Quietly* evidently strives, on the one hand, to stage for the audience the circular, endlessly reiterating quality of Kumalo's confession. On the other hand, it moves to make the audience central to its reconciliatory praxis. In this respect, what the play sustains is not some expedient therapeusis—individual or collective—to be abstracted in order to corroborate a larger national narrative of healing and collective unity. Rather, as part of its melancholy compulsion, Kumalo's confession makes to undo this redemptive, self-actualising structure for performer and spectator alike. Striving endlessly to incorporate the injustice of apartheid without ever

presuming to overcome it, *He Left Quietly* remains potentially constitutive not of some reconciled sovereign self but a community of witnesses, a space of reconciliation built from a folded sense of self and other, responsibility and complicity, justice and injustice.

Melancholy's Critical Agency: *Facing Death . . . Facing Life*

In developing this reading of *He Left Quietly*, I have taken reconciliation to be an object of broadly ethical negotiation, a process of recursive, if also speculative, intersubjective engagement across the traumatic divide that otherwise separates self and other. In moving here to compare Kumalo's theatrical performance with his confession in Gavshon's documentary film *Facing Death*, my aim is to develop a secondary analysis of the material constraints and political demands that similarly condition this process. As such, I want to frame the emergent reconciliatory praxis cited above as also dependent upon an allied unsettlement of the stubborn, regressive political structures that otherwise delimit its collective appeal—something arguably absent in Farber's theatrical account. In this, it is melancholy's potentially insurgent attachment to injustice of the past that counts, over and above its individualised account of traumatic repetition. While critics like LaCapra are instructive in elaborating, after Freud, upon its psychical symptoms and performative pathologies, melancholy also retains an alternative, specifically political valence that psychoanalysis, in its slide into an 'ante-historical and post-historical' semantics, broadly fails to countenance.[68] Max Pensky summarises neatly this broader outlook when he claims melancholy as a 'fundamentally dialectical' way of seeing the world and its suffering.[69] Under melancholy eyes, private pain must be understood in 'dialectical relationship with cognition of the "objective" world', he insists. It is, in other words, a mode of political critique, a way of diagnosing the shared conditions of injustice that otherwise disrupt trauma's narrative of subjective recovery. Or, as Pensky also has it, melancholy 'empowers the subject with a mode of insight into the structure of the real', even as it 'consigns the subject to mournfulness, misery, despair'.[70]

Like the psychoanalytic account offered above, there is an equally long tradition to this 'disruptive' melancholy imagination, to borrow from Jonathan Flatley.[71] Beginning most obviously with a theorist like Walter Benjamin—who epitomises, for many, melancholy's tortured political acuity—but extending equally into the type of pessimistic thought that motivates contemporary critics like Anne Anlin Cheng and Ranjana Khanna, melancholy serves here as a type of 'low theory'—that is, what Jack Halberstam describes as, 'a way out of the

usual traps and impasses of binary formulations'. It is, Halberstam continues, a strategy of the 'in-between', a refusal of the utopian and the optimistic in favour of those alternatives that 'dwell in the murky waters of counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique'.[72] Under these terms, melancholy offers up a less-than-hopeful framework through which to consider precisely the type of anti-institutional, improvised ways of thinking and doing reconciliation advocated by this study at large.

More than mere pessimism, however, this tradition also attempts to uphold the lessons passed on by Freud and others, transforming their psychogenic lessons into demotic ones. Under these terms, this melancholy imagination offers up a collective unconscious of sorts, a 'repository of [the] energies suppressed', as Khanna puts it, by the racial violence of the past. It offers up a symptomatic account of the historical, material and socio-political damage of apartheid. But it is also more than merely descriptive; this shared melancholy proceeds as a form of 'critical agency', Khanna insists, an immanent 'revolutionary politics' aimed at 'the unworking of conformity'.[73] In prioritising this insurgent potential over and above melancholy's potentially pathological ends, this critical agency is vitally instructive in thinking through apartheid's manifold 'melancholy survivals', to return to Sean Field. Under these terms, melancholy works to transform the 'inassimilable and interruptive' remains of apartheid abuse into a 'call for justice'.[74]

To petition for melancholy's 'unworking' of the apartheid past is not to escape the general compromises upheld by reconciliation. Quite the opposite. In citing its critical agency, it is also important to admit to the decidedly ambivalent possibility that any such a melancholy way of looking also delivers. Always structured as a 'half-willing collaboration with the forces it seeks to oppose', any political mobilisation of melancholy must also grapple with the corresponding, even compulsive tendency to immobility that it likely delivers.[75] This ambivalence is in partial evidence in *He Left Quietly*, most particularly in Kumalo's compromised efforts to think outside his own thanatopsis—that is, the intractable sense of internal devastation delivered by death row. And in returning Kumalo to the very scene of this traumatic attachment—his original cell in Pretoria's C-Max Prison—*Facing Death* does little to break this seemingly downward spiral. Much like Farber's theatrical practice, Gavshon's documentary risks aggravating the traumatic repetition that animates Kumalo's confessional performances at large.

This risk notwithstanding, *Facing Death* also differs from *He Left Quietly* in a number of other important ways. For one thing, rather than prioritising the performative separation of self from its traumatised other, as Farber attempts,

Gavshon's film proceeds by making an insurgent appeal to the political solidarities enabled by Kumalo's melancholy attachment to the shared, enduring injustice of the past. This insurgency is as much aesthetic as it is ideological. At least, the latter depends heavily upon the former. Shot over the course of a few months, *Facing Death* was screened originally in 2000 at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFFA).[76] It has since toured a number of international festivals, winning the 2002 Best Film Award at South Africa's Tri-Continental Film Festival and the Frank Capra Award at the Washington, DC Independent Film Festival. As its striking, almost painterly prologue suggests, *Facing Death* is reliant upon its highly evocative cinematography, its political critique bound up with its visual form. In this, Gavshon partnered with Giulio Biccari, a prominent figure in South Africa's budding film industry, whose subsequent work with Ian Gabriel on *Forgiveness* (2004) serves as a subject in my third chapter.

Tethered narratively to certain conventions of documentary practice, deploying talking heads along with found archival footage, *Facing Death* also makes a number of formal, more impressionistic departures that help to frame its melancholy method of critique. For instance, following Kumalo's opening lament from his cell on death row, the film cuts to a series of grainy images of Sharpeville, the township in which he originally gathered to protest against the rent hikes in 1984. Shot in a naïve style that draws immediate parallels with the type of rudimentary, expedient documentaries produced on Super 8mm film by filmmakers during the 1980s, these images purposefully confuse and collapse—not unlike Farber's play, in this instance—the temporality of these scenes. Off screen, Kumalo simultaneously explains the political structure imposed upon the township during the 1980s, which saw complicitous 'black councillors used by the apartheid government' to maintain local order. However, it is altogether uncertain whether the images on screen depict Sharpeville under apartheid or, alternately, in the present day. The scenes are also visually heavy, scans of a place in more than mere temporal stagnancy. A thick smog, for one thing, hangs across the skyline in these scenes as workers return at the end of their day's labour from the district's many industrial plants. Children play amid the rubbish that fills the streets, signal, it seems, of a more general trashing of Sharpeville's future possibility. Gavshon subsequently cross-fades from one scene of relative impoverishment to another as a picture of an elderly man pushing an empty shopping trolley across the dirt road cuts to a group huddled in attempt to keep warm around a small barrel fire on the roadside. It is a landscape of uniform deprivation rather than promise, a place seemingly ossified by its relative lack.

The temporal indeterminacy here is entirely purposeful. For where *He Left Quietly* performs the 'afterwardsness' of apartheid in strictly traumatic terms, *Facing Death* cites it in more broadly everyday ones. In the seeming simultaneity of the apartheid past and the democratic present in these opening shots, the one inextricable from the other, Gavshon asks us not to distinguish between the two but to reflect upon their many continuities. In other words, the 'foldedness' of self and other that Farber stages manifests here less in subjective terms and more as a collapse of apartheid's ordinary violence into the landscape of the present. Under melancholy eyes, Sharpeville gives spatial form to a grammar of injustice. As such, apartheid emerges as much more than the series of singular, if also widespread, human rights violations that the Truth Commission elaborated upon. Rather, it is understood as a highly systematised structure of ongoing oppression and everyday subjugation, something that the Commission was ill-equipped to address. Indeed, even its recommendations for reparations were framed in individual, rather than social and redistributive terms.[77]

This is not to deny the traumatic remains inscribed in Kumalo's confession as it emerges in *Facing Death*. As elsewhere, traces of his wounded self are in obvious evidence. Merely, that his own suffering entails a story, as he puts it, 'that extends far beyond [himself]'. So where Farber sees this story, at its most expansive, as one of white complicity, Gavshon presses us to consider too its deeper, ongoing socio-political resonances. In this, she defers to Kumalo's shared, socially integrated sense of his suffering. For instance, his testimony begins in earnest by recalling how 'on the 3 September 1984, the lives of five people were forced along the same path as mine'. This imbrication of the remaining members of the Sharpeville Six, also imprisoned on death row, into this narrative conception of his own suffering is in obvious contrast to the internalised structure that dominates *He Left Quietly*. Gavshon echoes this relational interpretation by interweaving, in seemingly elegiac terms, black and white photographs of the four men and one woman that made up the Six, each pictured in comparatively happier times before their arrest. She interlaces these headshots between images of Sharpeville, as Kumalo describes the basic biographical details of each of his fellow victims. As an act of self-description on Kumalo's part, this performance of his own suffering by way of the lives of those who endured the self-same legal injustice inflicted upon him here displaces any of the solipsism that might otherwise attend such a confessional act. His story emerges as exemplary and indicative rather than exceptional or singular. In other words, the 'absent polyphony of other voices' that John Beverley finds implicated in the act of confession are invited into his self-narrative and given material presence on screen.

The documentary progresses hereafter as a more conventional act of historical inquiry, its status as an account of the past as told from the present less purposefully ambiguous. This temporal clarity does not necessarily undermine the folded sense of suffering on show. Switching between interviews with members of the Sharpeville Six, the group attempt to account for the local conditions that led to the fateful protest in September 1984. Aerial shots of a Casspir (large, heavy-duty, military defence vehicles deployed by the apartheid state to suppress opposition) as it rolls into the township are clearly from original footage, as are the subsequent sequences of violent clashes between black protestors and police, of large crowds surging through the streets, and of a car set alight as protestors toyi-toyi around it. The Six then recount their subsequent arrest and torture at the hands of security police. Uniquely, however, it is only Kumalo who is pictured inside his prison cell as he describes his interrogation. The heavy cell doors remain open behind him. He recalls how:

> Without touching me, [the security police officer] just said to me, 'Tell me what do you know about the 3 September'. But in his face you could see cruelty, that he could do anything that he wanted to do. I told him, 'I don't know anything'. And I told him that I was just part of the crowd. And he told me, 'You will never see your parents. We are going to lock you up for six months or twelve months in solitary confinement, you will never see even your lawyer'.

The moral impunity of the apartheid state is nothing new, but here Kumalo reveals the racialised malice through which it also proceeded, a legacy that, it seems, cannot be undone by freedom alone. Indeed, as if to underscore its stubborn malignancy, the picture cuts back to the heavy prison door, which slams shut with an evocative, reverberating thud. It provides the sound for a whole history of state abuse, a blunt but expressive sonic metonym for the material as well as emotional resonances of racial injustice as they reverberate in the democratic present. As such, Gavshon has it repeat at key moments throughout her documentary.

In working out the significance of this memory work, it perhaps goes without saying that 'psychical experience is not separate from the realms of society or law' but, to follow Anne Anlin Cheng, 'the very place where the law and society are processed'.[78] Under these terms, it is possible to see how the specific violence of apartheid might be processed in melancholic terms, how its manifold injustices may also be framed as a pathology of grief and loss. But as the double temporality of its early scenes imply, *Facing Death* is not simply an account of abuses past, psychical or otherwise. It is also about the betrayal of the contemporary democratic

ideal—that is, the failure of truth and reconciliation to undo the racial injustice of the past. And it is in precisely this historical, rather strictly traumatic, capitulation that melancholy offers up itself up as a particular valuable explanatory affect. Without drawing explicit comparisons with the history of American racial melancholy that Cheng analyses, it is enough to cite the national denialism at similar seeming work here, something that the Truth Commission arguably institutionalised. For like the myth of progress and American exceptionalism under which racial 'denigration and disgust' were allowed to prosper, the Truth Commission's celebrated reconciliatory agenda has done much to extend the racial domination of the past into the present, rather than end it.[79]

In diagnosing this general impasse, Andrew van der Vlies suggests that we figure it as a temporal disjunction, a grammar of the 'present imperfect' in which the rising disappointments of the democratic age also depress the future horizon, 'beyond which it [is] a struggle to see'.[80] This is also the tendency to torpor and inertia that melancholy risks, its paralysing as much as insurgent attachment to loss.[81] Indeed, such descriptions arguably capture something of Kumalo's secondary punishment, the life sentence, as it were, cited by Gavshon's conjunctive title. As he puts it from his cell, 'facing death was painful, but facing life after facing death, it is more painful'. This is, in part, the immobilising incongruity that Kumalo's melancholy way of seeing the present—that is, as a capitulation to the injustice of the past—threatens to deliver.

To recognise this as a paradox of the melancholy imagination is not to undo its critical potential. As *He Left Quietly* infers, the stings of liberty are by no means illogical, especially in the context of trauma and its melancholy fidelity to the site of its own suffering. In *Facing Death*, Gavshon returns Kumalo to the specific gloom of death row in an effort to provide a less than figural account of this fidelity. Under these terms, 'darkness is', as Daphne Brooks elsewhere has it, 'an interpretive strategy'.[82] At least, in composing his confession, Gavshon relies upon the darkness of his cell to give visual form to its many inexpressible oppressions. Breached by a single shaft of bright sunlight that cuts across Kumalo's face as he speaks to the camera, this seeming allusion to the relief found beyond death row is not, however, a corrective to the general sense of defeat that pervades the scene. Instead, this seam of light competes with the heavy, grievous responsibility that death row continues to impose from the inside out. As Kumalo elaborates:

> For those who have died, there is no more pain. The pain always remains with the living. They leave us with a burden because their faces are with us.

As elsewhere, he refuses the type of individuated interpretation of abuse and recovery that the Commission attempted to institute, insisting upon its relational, shared and, above all, enduring structure. So even as Gavshon cuts to original news footage of the Sharpeville Six's defence lawyer, Prakash Diar, emerging to a jubilant crowd outside Pretoria's High Court following his successful appeal against their execution in 1988, she also switches back almost immediately to Kumalo in his cell, pacing from side to side. His survival is not equal to justice, at least not the expanded version of justice around which his confession here turns. Rather, it confers upon him an interminable, inconsolable responsibility before, and solidarity with, those who are no longer alive to confess to their own suffering.

As an example of melancholy's critical agency, most particularly its 'call for justice', to return to Khanna, this fidelity is also symptomatic of the dialectical and above all relational way of understanding trauma that Kumalo's confession delivers. As he puts it towards the close of the film:

> Being traumatized is a big book, bigger than the Bible itself. And to deal with it we need to turn pages. . . . I keep on turning pages, which is when I become aware that it is not the only issue of mine. There is another part also, which needs to be helped.

In this, *Facing Death* brings us to an account not just of apartheid's melancholy acting out but, more importantly, to the political failures that sustain this reiterative pattern within the present. For instance, cutting from this intimate scene on death row, Gavshon provides a long shot of Kumalo's township home. The door to this small brick dwelling is slightly ajar and, through a lattice of rusted barbed wire that circles the house, Gavshon captures an image of Kumalo and his wife sitting at the kitchen table. Despite the warm glow given off by the internal house lights, the scene replicates the same sense of confinement and repression that also patterns the preceding image of Kumalo in his prison cell. 'My life was going down every minute, every second, my life was going down', Kumalo confesses, recalling the years immediately after his release, during which time he was earning less than R700 (c. US$70) a month and, unable to support his family, was forced to sell many of their meagre possessions.

As Gavshon's documentary attests, the only measurable relief to this material privation came when Kumalo eventually joined the Khulumani Support Group, first as an ordinary member and subsequently as a full-time counsellor. His membership did not equate to any necessary personal psychical relief. Rather, it became a seeming source for the sublimation of his trauma into collective action.

Like the Truth Commission, Khulumani encouraged victims to testify to their suffering under apartheid. Divided into small, local branches, Khulumani went further than the Commission, however, by cultivating a much wider, permanent network of support for its members. With guidance from professional services, like the Trauma Centre at the University of Witwatersrand, members were invited to attend weekly meetings in which one or two individuals would speak publicly about their experiences. Their accounts were not limited—as they were at the Commission—to examples of gross human rights violation, but actively engaged apartheid's wider structural and symbolic abuses, including, for instance, forced removals, poor education and health services, as well as the general poverty endured by the majority of South Africa's black population both under apartheid and since. In other words, their traumatic storytelling returned to the everyday environment of oppression from which it first emerged. As such, Khulumani has sought to frame its psychotherapy as distinct to and separate from the narrative of recovery that Euro-American 'confessional culture' prioritises, searching out ways, as Christopher Colvin elaborates, to encode 'new social categories and moral orders' as a local response to the violence of the past.[83]

It is only very recently that the secondary work of the Khulumani Support Group, and, indeed, similar advocacy groups, has been recognised in scholarly accounts of the democratic transition in South Africa. Colvin's ethnographic account of its development during the late 1990s sets the group at an important conceptual and methodological distance from the 'standardized victim testimony', as he puts it, that otherwise delimited the Truth Commission. Where the Commission celebrated the working through of trauma and its pathological effects, the Khulumani Support Group was both 'shaped by but also exceeded the terms of this discourse', Colvin claims. By this, he means to establish the shift that Khulumani encouraged 'from the clinic to . . . advocacy'.[84] This is not to liberate its model of storytelling from the claims made by 'the global political economy of traumatic narrative'. Rather, it is to centre this model as a potentially resistive, perhaps even adversarial revision of the glass confessional for the democratic age. Colvin's analysis arguably holds too for Gavshon's documentary, which, in prioritising Kumalo's formal engagement with the group, aims similarly at fostering the 'political powers of traumatic storytelling'.[85] Depicting Kumalo in group sessions, the film offers up an account of the solidarities that apartheid trauma has promoted as a condition of its contemporary 'afterwardsness'. Leading group sessions of his own, Kumalo is seen helping to support others from his local Sharpeville branch to testify to their shared, rather than merely individualised, suffering.[86]

As the insurgent tradition of melancholy established above insists, to recognise the shared, relational status of suffering is not merely to diagnose it. It is also to transform this pain into a call for justice. And in speaking out alongside his fellow victims, listening to their stories of suffering and sharing in their own struggles to work through their trauma, Kumalo became animated in a new chapter of struggle. Together with Khulumani, he became involved in a series of local and national protests that aimed to secure for its members the type of substantial financial reparation promised but never delivered by the Commission. At the time of Kumalo's sudden death in 2006, for instance, the Khulumani Support Group were involved in a landmark case against a number of international corporations. The group alleged that multinational corporations such as Barclays, Daimler, Ford, General Motors, and IBM, many of whom had been previously indicted by the Truth Commission's Special Hearing on the Role of the Business Community, both profited from and propagated the oppressive legislation adopted by the apartheid government. Only recently dismissed by the US Court of Appeal, the lawsuit resulted in an undisclosed settlement with General Motors in 2012. To date, however, no other companies have made an offer of reparation.

With 'the rope still around his neck', as his wife puts it towards the end of *Facing Death*, Kumalo's commitment to this legal challenge, as well as Khulumani's many more local lobbying activities, gestures towards the radically redressive impulses born by this melancholy inability to overcome the apartheid past. As Jill Eagle, psychotherapist at the University of Witwatersrand's Trauma Clinic, puts it in an on-camera evaluation of Kumalo:

> While he hasn't been able to get the kind of justice around his court case and the legal conviction, some of the sense of calling public attention to people who don't have a voice, that's also been important to him. So at the level of being a kind of wounded healer, it's been both about understanding people and facilitating other people being able to talk about things.

It is in the context of his wounded confessional that I would frame the claims made by *Facing Death* on behalf of reconciliation, specifically its attempts to establish this national end as an object of material as well as moral restitution, rather than simply one of subjective or even intersubjective reform.

This is not, however, to give up on reconciliation's potential psychical benefits. Indeed, when brought together with the remaining members of the Sharpeville Six at the conclusion to Gavshon's documentary in an old prison yard, their first meeting since their release, Kumalo recalls in his narrative voice over how he

wanted to talk seriously and frankly with his fellow survivors about everything that had happened to them all. The Six begin by reflecting upon their shared experiences on death row, upon the suffering of a life spent facing death and the rituals adopted to help relieve the psychological burdens in their daily lives since. Interrupting the rest of the group's testimony, however, Theresa Ramashamole, the only female member of the Six, questions the motivation of their meeting:

> Why should we talk about our experiences in jail, we should rather talk about our future. We are now free. . . . It doesn't make sense. We should rather help each other make a living and make sure there is food on the table.

Facing Death does not attempt to resolve such seemingly discontinuous attitudes. Rather, Kumalo's account offers up a way of thinking the past alongside the future, of understanding the injustice of apartheid as a motive force in resisting the everyday material inequality of the present. 'I cannot keep quiet about what happened', states Kumalo defiantly as Gavshon's film concludes with one final, evocative shot of his cell door on death row. Less a capitulation to the reiterative, inconsolable compulsions that pattern his traumatic acting out, it is more a melancholy form of speaking truth to power, a necessary refusal of apartheid's 'therapeutic end point', as Colvin has it.[87] Indeed, to borrow from Colvin's more general description of the political advocacy performed by the Khulumani Support Group, Kumalo does not 'deny the emotional suffering that their experiences had produced, or the power of therapy to help individuals relieve some of that suffering'. Rather, in their melancholy form, his performances lobby for 'a more comprehensive and meaningful form of redress—reparations and lasting changes in the social, political and economic conditions' under which he and his fellow victims now survive.[88] For, ultimately, it is only with the achievement of this wide-ranging, structural transformation that anything like a resolution to the psychological suffering of apartheid may ever begin to emerge.

Conclusion

This chapter began by resisting the sovereign claims that confessional act is often thought to affirm. This was not an arbitrary beginning. For under the traumatic diagnostics preferred by the Truth Commission, the indivisible experiences of those victims of gross abuse have too often be seen to rival the collective, specifically relational history of racial injustice that precedes and contains their suffering. I have not sought here to undo this central dilemma, at least not definitively.

Rather, in my analysis of *He Left Quietly* and *Facing Death*, I source a model of individual confession that might, at least, suspend this rivalry, finding in Duma Kumalo's melancholy acting out a socially and structurally embedded sense of his traumatised self. His suffering is rendered indicative rather than exceptional. In many ways, it is the aggregate sum of his performances, across media and through time, that enables this associative, compound sense of selfhood to consolidate itself. For while his confessional acts provide a unique record of his psychological turmoil, this desire to tell his story depends above all on a distributed sense of apartheid injustice. He speaks for those rendered silent by the past, his compulsive performances conditioned by the irreparable suffering of those who can no longer be heard.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, this is not the last word on Kumalo. In fact, his voice echoes across this study, both abstractly and actually. To this extent, there is also an important conceptual 'afterwardsness' contained by his melancholy acting out. And in closing, it is perhaps instructive to return to his self-appointed function as a 'wounded healer', a categorisation that condenses the more general will to renewal, on the one hand, and its implausibility, on the other. Balancing insufficiency with necessity, Kumalo's restrained, stilled sense of what reconciliation makes possible resounds across the chapters that follow, guiding the hesitation that must also condition a more hopeful appeal for racial justice. Put differently, reconciliation emerges here as a problem-space, expressing at once the 'paralysis of will' and the 'horizons of transformative possibility' that have come to define the country's 'idiom of future futures', to borrow from anthropologist David Scott. And while Kumalo cannot resolve this conflict, his melancholy performances succeed, nonetheless, in staging the 'series of paradoxes and reversals' through which reconciliation might yet proceed.[89]

CHAPTER TWO

Risking Reconciliation

On Tragedy, Failure, and Transgression

> It seems that we have jumped from one blindness to another, and with the same visionary confidence.[1]
>
> —Raymond Williams

As a genre, tragedy is always perilous in its progress, always courting disaster. Conventionally, however, this 'attunement to . . . contingency, chance, *peripeteia*' is also its primary asset.[2] Its vulnerability to catastrophe is precisely what accounts for the close proximity between its own tragic development and its less than tragic otherwise. Encoded within tragedy is a rival view of what might have been, a contiguous if also intensely fragile alternative that, in fact, makes its tragedy all the more tragic. This is not quite a theory of improvisation. But it does draw us closer to the potentially tragic constraints upon which improvisation depends, and in this chapter, I am motivated by the lessons that the genre's risky action arguably supplies. More specifically, in the context of South Africa's pursuit of reconciliation, I want to consider the ways in which tragedy offers up a form not only to contain the country's contemporary disappointments but also to venture forth, however hazardously, a sense of hope for the future. Put differently, this chapter is premised on the notion that tragedy risks reconciliation—which is to say, it both jeopardises and makes plausible reconciliation's fragile realisation. For all its discouraging attachment to disaster, tragedy is an essential actor, I want to suggest, in the necessary contemplation of the country's just, reconciled future.

In arguing for this perilous interdependence, I look to stabilise my claims by drawing example not only from the country's contemporary repertoire but also its prodigious anti-apartheid tragic archive. Most obviously, devised works like Athol Fugard's *Orestes* (1971), as well as his workshop drama *The Island*, a

revision of *Antigone* co-produced with John Kani and Winston Ntshona in 1976, point towards the ethical and political ends pursued by tragedy under apartheid. When read comparatively, they also provide a vital scene, I argue, to evaluate the fragile reconciliatory possibilities risked by more recent experiments with the genre, most expressly Yaël Farber's *Molora* (2003). However, in elaborating upon the general accord between tragedy's anti-apartheid tradition and this, its 'post-anti-apartheid' equivalent, to borrow from Loren Kruger, I am not proposing a straightforwardly derivative relationship. Indeed, the 'post' in Kruger's descriptor is designed explicitly to trouble the 'promise of modernity, emancipation, agency and global citizenship' upon which this anti-apartheid tradition first depended.[3] So while a contemporary revision of the *Oresteia* like Faber's *Molora* draws important comparative precedence from those antique adaptations devised under apartheid, it also appears to confound vital aspects of this tradition.

Most obviously, whatever we might make of its tragic billing, *Molora* is not really a tragedy. At least, if we defer to Hegel's evaluative criteria, Farber's drama is no masterpiece.[4] At times, it is an immoderate spectacle, regularly more confusing than obviously edifying. Even trading this shallow estimation of its tragic qualities for more a descriptive mode does little to help to redeem its tragic credentials. For in suspending the cycle of revenge that drives the *Oresteia* towards its catastrophic conclusion, *Molora* arguably fails as a tragedy. Orestes and Elektra do not kill their mother, Klytemnestra, but neither do they end unequivocally her tyrannical rule over them.[5] For George Steiner, 'tragedy is immune to hope'.[6] And yet, as I describe below, Farber's play concludes neither hopelessly, nor exactly hopefully, descending, instead, into ambivalence—what Walter Benjamin names caustically in the *Trauerspiel* as a 'stigma of the demonic' rather than a signal of the tragic.[7]

Nonetheless, in this chapter I want to examine what might yet emerge if we take seriously the sense of failure that *Molora* risks. By this, I mean to explore the ways in which this adaptation of ancient tradition need not maintain the strict laws of tragedy handed down by European aesthetic philosophy in order to offer up its own tragic lesson. To this extent, the longstanding inclination among critics to measure and describe degrees of orthodoxy is certainly useful, but only in so far as it allows us to reflect on why—rather than how—a particular example potentially errs.[8] To discover, as is certainly permissible in *Molora*, a form of tragedy that disrupts its own tragic progress is likely as great a source of critical value as any obedient translation of classical tradition. For tragedy, as Raymond Williams insists, is just as much 'a response to a culture in conscious change and

movement' as it is 'about something else', something 'deeper and closer', more evanescent.[9] In other words, as a genre, tragedy is not precisely equivalent to the tragic as an interpretive concept. And by jeopardising its formal achievements, *Molora* conceivably asks us to consider those other, more abstract tragic reasons that motivate its action, especially in the field of reconciliation.

The Tragedy of the Truth Commission

As elsewhere in this study, it is the Truth Commission that provides the fundamental scene for and against which tragedy's lessons in the contemporary sphere emerge. While its avowed shortcomings might well be styled as tragic, in its everyday action the Commission was also rarely far from the type of risks that condition tragedy in the stricter, more generic sense of the term. For instance, its first-ever public hearing, held at East London's City Hall on 15 April 1996, is remembered by most for the solemn but hopeful address offered by its chairperson, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Lighting a candle of remembrance for apartheid's victims, he proceeded to relate the Commission's solemn objectives: 'To unearth the truth about our dark past, to lay the ghosts of that past [to rest] so that they will not return to haunt us and . . . thereby contribute to the healing of the traumatised and wounded people'.[10] Few recall that less than thirty minutes later, Tutu was obliged to interrupt the Commission's first witness, Nohle Mohapi, to request an immediate evacuation of the building. 'There is a bomb threat', he advised. The many hundreds of spectators, national and international journalists, television and radio crews, not to mention the deponents and their interpreters, all of whom had gathered to witness this remarkable juncture in the nation's history, were forced to file out onto the street. Bomb disposal personnel were called, and a full sweep of the building was carried out. No device was discovered and, after more than an hour's delay, Mohapi was able to resume her evidence. Nonetheless, the threat set into sobering relief for all those present the vengeful impulses that, despite apartheid's end, threatened at any moment to derail the fragile drama of reconciliation in rehearsal at the Commission's hearings.

By no means as crudely elicited or perhaps even as starkly felt, Farber's *Molora* arguably depends upon a similar sense of vulnerability in order to progress its own tragic claims. Conceived in the immediate wake of the Commission's public hearings, the play openly structures itself as a dramatic analogue, an adjacent sphere of public and performative negotiation. In this, it also retrieves from the *Oresteia*—more particularly, *The Eumenides*—a claim over the essential drama of the public trial, affirming those accounts of the Commission offered up by

critics like Catherine Cole who compare it with tragedy's own beginnings as a *theatron*—a 'place of seeing'.[11] And like its ancient source, *Molora* commences from a point of fundamental enmity. Its opening scene is titled simply 'testimony' and in its mise-en-scène it replicates something of the formal arrangement of the Truth Commission's public hearings with two tables set at either extreme of the stage. A microphone of the same variety used by the Commission to record deponents is also set on each of the tables. The rest of the performance space is comparatively bare, emulating, as Farber puts it in her stage directions, 'the drab and simple venues in which most of the testimonies [at the Commission] were heard'.[12] As the main lights go up, a white, middle-aged woman, Klytemnestra, leaves her place among the audience to take a seat behind the table positioned stage right. Her black daughter, Elektra, follows soon after, seating herself stage left, before they are both joined by an exclusively black, largely female Chorus who take up their seats in a line facing the audience at the rear of the stage.

In the context of apartheid's bitter division of white from black, the racial dynamics here are correspondingly stark. It is self-evident who is to play perpetrator and victim. With white mother and black daughter sat on opposing sides of the stage, a familiar red neon recording light at the base of Klytemnestra's microphone then flickers on and she proceeds to launch into a shameless confession of her wrongdoing. 'A great Ox—As they say—Stands on my tongue', she begins with what appears to be sardonic fervour, pausing only to allow a member of the Chorus to translate her testimony into isiXhosa, a vernacular local to audiences at South Africa's National Arts Festival where *Molora* was initially staged.[13] 'Here I stand and here I struck and here my work is done. I did it all. I don't deny it', she continues, before proceeding to describe to the gathered audience her slaying of her husband, Agamemnon:

> I strike him once, twice, and at each stroke he cries in agony. He buckles at the knee and crashes here! And when he's down I add the third—the final blow, to the god who saves the dead beneath the ground. I send that blow home . . . in homage . . . ike a prayer. So he goes down, and the life is bursting out of him—great sprays of blood. And the murderous shower wounds me, dyes me black. And I . . . I revel like the Earth when the spring rains come down.[14]

Without even a hint of remorse, she concludes by defending Agamemnon's murder as a 'Masterpiece of Justice'.[15]

Electra stares Klytemnestra down throughout this uncompromising confession, only to respond with contempt of her own:

> You were my ruin. . . . You poisoned me with your deeds. You are the shadow that fell on my life and made a child of me through fear. I have hated you for so long.[16]

Her testimony here serves as her weaponry, attacking and assailing Klytemnestra in a way that she has otherwise been unable. Further aggravated than consoled by this confrontational confessional arena, Elektra vows to avenge her father's murder:

> For if the dead lie in dust and nothingness, while the guilty pay not with blood for blood—Then we are nothing but history without a future.[17]

Adapted by Farber from a nineteenth-century English translation of Sophocles's *Electra*, this vengeful pledge is also an antagonistic echo to the adage—'no future without forgiveness'—that according to Archbishop Desmond Tutu defined the Commission's ethical outlook. For Tutu, this maxim was as vital to the national recovery as it was to victims' personal healing:

> To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanises you, inexorably dehumanises me. Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them.[18]

For Elektra, however, this sense of integrity is contingent not on forgiveness but justice, and more particularly the retributive model that customarily drives her tragic forebear, rather than the restorative form defended by the Commission. As a condition of her hostile confession, she shatters the grounds for any such a forgiving future; Klytemnestra's callous actions must be met with an equally unforgiving deed, Elektra affirms.

This makes for a highly discordant beginning. But it is not an entirely incongruous one, certainly not in tragic terms, nor historically. Undoubtedly, the Truth Commission only occasionally permitted the type of incendiary public confrontation that *Molora* enables, preferring a victim-led approach to its hearings—with one notable exception, to which I will return. Even so, any sense of reconciliation was far from forthcoming. Despite being evoked at every turn by figures like Tutu, seldom was the concept straightforwardly understood or uniformly adopted by those testifying at the Commission, as outlined in Paul van Zyl's earlier description. But these specific confusion also confirm what many theorists of transitional justice have long considered to be reconciliation's Janus-face.[19] For while the concept aims to deliver, what John Borneman calls,

a 'departure from violence', such concision belies the potentially coercive and immobilizing contradictions looming at its root.[20] This inconsistency is by no means lost on Borneman. To reprise those claims outlined elsewhere in this study, reconciliation rests, as he puts it, 'on the recuperation of losses that are impossible to recuperate'.[21] Under these terms, to make it conditional on the realisation of, say, remorse is also to mistake it for a singularly moral directive, one that risks its own parallel form of social domination. Put positively, reconciliation is likely only ever practicable when taken to guide the pursuit of an equitable future, rather than a decisive end to be administered institutionally.

In the vengeful, destructive turns of fate that traditionally drive Aeschylus's tragic cycle forward, then, reconciliation provides neither the language, nor a moral framework for its action. In his review of *Molora*, Glenn Odom makes schematic this incongruity, drawing out the fundamental incompatibility between tragedy and reconciliation:

> Tragedy requires a universal space, whereas reconciliation tends to emphasize a specific, monumentalized space; tragedy removes individuals from community, whereas reconciliation subsumes the individual story within the communal.[22]

Not only are they organised around such incongruous principles, he continues, but they are also at temporal odds with each other. For while tragedy's fatalistic schema relies upon the repetition, or at least the affective reverberation, of the past in the present, reconciliation depends, according to Odom, on their discontinuity. In broad terms, it is an instructive evaluation, one that also points out how the ethical ends of reconciliation appear to proceed by divesting tragedy of its political aims, how the essential agonism of the latter is undone by the moral exigency of the former. Of course, tragedy is by no means invested exclusively in the political; it maintains its own vital moral principles. But reconciliation, at least as far as Odom has it, is only ever an ethics, even when it is politically led. To this extent, it makes scant space for the deliberative agenda regularly pursued by tragedy—that is, the 'dissensus' arguably also central to any transformation of South Africa's inequitable progress.[23]

Whatever else may be understood of this divide, for Odom *Molora*'s 'mix of Greek tragic form and reconciliation aesthetics prevents either of these forms from reaching closure'.[24] Ultimately, the play is, he claims, 'beyond reconciliation, beyond tragedy', a miscarriage of both in equal measure.[25] But even as I would attest to something of their basic incongruity, there is also opportunity to consider the separate, if less certain interpretation of reconciliation that *Molora*

risks as a condition of this miscarriage. To make this claim is to reflect on the ways in which reconciliation might find itself profitably revised by tragic interpretation, how it might be better understood when thought to align more closely with the fragile, risky progress of tragedy, at least conceptually. This is not to overlook *Molora*'s generic misfires. Rather, in contrast to Odom, it is to prioritise the vital lesson in reconciliation that the tragic also arguably risks—which is to say, the fragile and uncertain, rather than calculable, form through which reconciliation might otherwise be thought to prosper.

Tragedy's Conflicts

A view of reconciliation defined by its tragic dimensions must find a way, in the first instance, to accommodate itself to the ethical potential of conflict as much as conciliation. In the field of tragic justice, it is the genre's essential agonism—its *agon*—over and above its capacity to pacify that more often conditions its progress. But these fateful contests are also what define its fragility, what ensure that ancient tragedy provides a scene of moral dubiety rather than authority. In tragedy, the notion of guilt, like responsibility, is widely distributed rather than concentrated in a single character. So too is the urge to vengeance. To this extent, then, it is arguably profitable to proceed by thinking of tragedy's conflicted-*ness* as more a supple guide for its moral order than mere conflict alone. Taking us beyond the conventionally descriptive or evaluative modes of analysis that critics like Hegel and even Benjamin advocate, this less decided framework accounts for the intense, volatile conditions under which the genre, perhaps paradoxically, thrives. 'Tragic ambiguity', according to Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, 'is to be found in the very language of tragedy'. There is, they insist, 'ambiguity between the human way of proceeding in the drama and the plan decided by the gods, between what the tragic characters say and what the spectators understand'.[26] Its uncertainty is, in other words, precisely what constitutes its glory as much as its fragility.

But this view of tragedy also risks equivocation, with the genre's fundamental ambiguity liable to be mistaken by some for quietism in the sphere of moral judgment. Take by way of troubling example those popular revivals performed by the Afrikaner establishment under apartheid, for whom the classical sphere served to reinforce their high European cultural claims. By 1974, there had been at least three prominent Afrikaans translations of Sophocles's *Antigone* and a number of notable performances, including a national radio broadcast in 1946 and a production at the Stellenbosch Arts Festival in 1961. According to Betine

van Zyl Smit, there was much reward to be found in translating 'great Classics into the youngest language in the world' and in circulating among the Afrikaner establishment the 'treasures of world literature'.[27] Most obviously, they served to bolster the cultural authority of Afrikaner nationalism, enriching and ennobling, it seems, its dramatic heritage. Motivated by dramatic verisimilitude rather than moral deliberation, these productions were designed to proceed outside of history. Any of their fragile interpretive progress was secured by the integrity of their antique costuming or their duteous translation of ancient dialogue. In short, these works were spaces for tragic veneration rather than critical judgment or ethical arbitration.

Where these examples suggest something of ancient tragedy's vulnerability before the imperatives of the ruling classes, this conservative tradition, nonetheless, meets its progressive equivalent in Fugard's contemporaneous experiments with the genre during the 1960s and early 1970s. Chief among this emergent tradition is, of course, *The Island* (1973), but it is useful to note other concurrent engagements with the genre, including, for instance, a staged reading of Euripides's *Alcestis* by Don MacLennan and the Ikhwezi Players in 1974, and Barney Simon's version of *Antigone* at the Market Theatre in 1975. As an alternative national canon of sorts, these revivals were interested less in the abstract authority of classical tradition and more in the conflicted, ambiguous moral terrain that those strict translations into Afrikaans sought to erase. Designed to 'invite . . . reality into them', as one reviewer notes of Fugard's productions, these anti-apartheid examples established a tragic sphere at instructive odds with the abstract aesthetic principles otherwise imagined to underpin the genre.[28]

In recalling this broadly antagonistic tradition, however, it is not my intention to set its ambitions as a direct counterpoint to those conservative impulses that rule elsewhere. Tragedy's ambiguous progress—much like reconciliation—does not permit for any such a resolute sense of opposition. Rather, it is precisely the insecurity of this tradition that corroborates its progressive potential, even as it also risks frustration and perhaps even failure. Indeed, the works under specific analysis in this chapter are from resolute in their political claims. Nor are they necessarily all that persuasive. In those revisions staged under apartheid by Fugard, most striking is the tacit, necessarily uncertain mode of dissent that their tragedy both enables and, indeed, promotes. It is not so much that these tragedies invite reality in, but that the onerous and repressive reality of apartheid imposes upon them a mode of extemporary and fragile resistance to which the tragic is particularly suited as a concept. And it is in this, their improvised

progress that a contemporary work like *Molora* arguably discovers a model of tragic interpretation for its own uncertain pursuit of reconciliation.

This agile, wilfully ambiguous attitude emerges even in Fugard's comparatively rudimentary, early experiment with the genre in his production of Sophocles's *Antigone* from 1965. Petitioned by the Serpent Players, a group of non-professional black actors from the New Brighton township, Port Elizabeth, to direct them in a revival of the play, Fugard attempted initially to draw from the strident qualities targeted by the French playwright Jean Anouilh, who staged a revision of the drama in Paris under Nazi occupation in 1944, and Bertolt Brecht, who followed Anouilh with his own version of the tragedy in 1948. Under the circumscriptive conditions of apartheid, Sophocles's drama offered a comparable opportunity, Fugard imagined, to foment a space of veiled dissent. Prohibited under the Group Areas Act from assembling for rehearsals, however, the cast was regularly harassed by the police, its members frequently arrested and their scripts confiscated. These disruptions reached an almost disastrous peak with the imprisonment of Sipho Mguqulwa, set to play Antigone's lover Haemon, and then Norman Ntshinga, one of the Serpent Players' founding members, for twenty-five and five years respectively on Robben Island for their continued affiliation with the banned African National Congress (ANC).

Far from closing down the production—which was eventually performed to local audiences in New Brighton—their imprisonment transposed *Antigone* into the heart of apartheid's most notorious site of state of discipline. Formulating a rudimentary script from lines memorized during rehearsal, Mguqulwa proceeded to stage his own two-man 'pocket version' of Sophocles's tragedy at Robben Island's annual Christmas concert. This version focussed on Antigone's trial scene in which she is sentenced by Creon to live, like the inmates on Robben Island, 'no more among the living'.[29] As such, Mguqulwa's extemporary adaptation corroborated the repressive authority of apartheid at the same time as it arguably sought to resist it from within. According to Fugard—who was alerted to the production in a letter smuggled out from Robben Island some years later—this performance allowed the prison guards gathered in the first row to enjoy its classical ambitions, while 'the prisoners . . . got the real message' written into Antigone's defiant struggle against the edicts of power.[30]

For Fugard, the fragile dissent drawn out by Mguqulwa's version of *Antigone* was to prove uniquely instructive, inspiring in *The Island* one of 'the most defining theatrical experiences of [his] career'.[31] Produced collaboratively with Kani and Ntshona, two of Mguqulwa's fellow Serpent Players, Fugard sought to retain the extemporary conditions of the inmate's original performance on

Robben Island. As such, the trio eschewed any formal script, preferring instead the improvised methods developed by Fugard for a work like *The Coat* (1966). But in retaining their tragic intertext they also attempted to move beyond the type of strict adherence to the facts of life under apartheid that rendered this earlier work, for Fugard at least, 'flat and lacking in the density and ambiguity of truly dramatic images'.[32] Borrowing, instead, from the workshop techniques ascendant in experimental theatres in Europe and North America, most notably Jerzy Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona set out in *The Island* to formulate a practice that might also appeal by way of its tragic dimensions to the mythopoeic undercurrents of society as much as it testified to its daily brutality.

As a metatheatrical version of *Antigone* designed to reflect on its own risky potential, *The Island* was initially entitled *Die Hodoshe Span* for its run at the Space Theatre in Cape Town, where Fugard still believed it 'impossible to get the specifics' of the play's setting onto the stage.[33] Much like its appeal to classical tradition, the play's gestural title, retained until the production transferred the following year to London's Royal Court Theatre, supposedly served to deflect the glare of the censors from its potentially incendiary references.[34] That said, *The Island*'s opening scene, which pictures John and Winston, played by Kani and Ntshona respectively, dressed in prison garb and toiling under the relentless heat of the Cape sun, leaves little space for misapprehension. Not unlike those prisoners incarcerated on Robben Island, just across the bay from the Space Theatre, the two men are caught in absurd cycle of labour, piling sand into wheelbarrows before they each deposit their separate loads in front of the other and begin the whole process over again. Of course, the sequence provides a provocative echo to the act of excavation that opens *The Island*'s ancient intertext. Crucially, however, where the grave dug by Antigone for her brother Polynices is taken to challenge the authority of Creon's rule, John and Winston's act is sundered from any such principled intent. They are condemned, instead, to a Sisyphean sequence, burying their defiance as quickly as it can be exhumed. And it is under this same veil of seeming futility that the rest of the play arguably proceeds.

Returning to their cell, John and Winston engage in a series of droll exchanges as the former attempts to convince his cellmate to take part in a staging of Sophocles's *Antigone* at the prison's annual concert. Winston's persistent reluctance to wear the makeshift wig required for the role of Antigone, to say nothing of his inability to comprehend anything of her motivation in defying Creon's rule, grants John opportunity to account for the tragic heroine's oppositional, if necessarily ambiguous utility in defying the strictures of their own

present imprisonment. Speaking for the instructive benefit of the audience as much as his cellmate, he notes:

> Winston, when are you going to remember this thing? I told you, man, Antigone buried Polynices. The traitor! The one who I said was on *our* side. Right?[35]

John describes too how in Sophocles's original, Antigone pleads guilty, even though 'we know she's Not Guilty'.[36] But with Winston struggling to comprehend the continuities between Antigone's innocence and his own, his cellmate attempts to explain by recalling the impact of a performance of the play that the pair witnessed in New Brighton before their imprisonment. John reminds Winston how the actor playing Creon was transformed by his role from a 'short and fat' man to one who acted by the play's conclusion as if he was 'as tall as the roof'.[37] Beyond the playfulness of this review, John's description serves to blur the distinction between the fictional performers and their real counterparts. Kani, for instance, was given his debut role by Fugard in the very same 1965 production of *Antigone* to which his namesake in *The Island* alludes, replacing Mguqulwa in the part of Haemon following his arrest. Still imprisoned on Robben Island at the time of *The Island*'s initial staging, Mguqulwa is conjured into dramatic being by the play, with Winston planning to smuggle tobacco to his fellow actor, who, he asserts, has been locked away in solitary confinement.

This circular, metatheatrical design gestures at *The Island*'s origin story, offering up the play as a partial tribute to Mguqulwa's improvised performance. But it also consciously confuses the boundaries between stage and actuality. As Fugard asks rhetorically in his *Notebooks*: 'Two men in a cell on the Island. Two men in New Brighton. What is the difference?'.[38] For Kani and Ntshona, it seems, the distinction is negligible. In each, the two are trapped in a state of non-existence, 'lost between life and death', as Ntshona's character, Winston, puts it in *The Island*. Even at the play's conclusion, in which John and Winston stage their rudimentary adaptation of *Antigone*, the latter concludes by bemoaning the 'everlasting prison' to which both must return, taking the restrictions of the penal colony as co-extensive with the conditions of daily life under apartheid. In contradistinction to Sophocles's Antigone, then, who brings her torment to an end by taking her own life, Winston's performance is denied such a tragic resolution. 'I must now go on my last journey', he proclaims, 'I must leave the light of day forever for the Island'. Condemned 'alive to solitary death', both he and John remove their rudimentary costumes and adopt a position as if enchained to each other as the prison siren wails and the stage fades to black.[39]

Like a number of critics, Kevin J. Wetmore reads this conclusion as a forthright expression of the oppositional potential inherent to tragedy in general and *Antigone* in particular. For him, Winston's final appeal to the audience speaks as much to the actor's own perilous position within society as it does the character's tragic fate. When the performer steps out in the final scene, he speaks not as Antigone or even Winston but as a black citizen contravening the segregationist laws of apartheid that otherwise prohibit his presence on the public stage, Wetmore insists.[40] But as Deborah D. Foster has also noted, *The Island*'s contrived conclusion to its classical source causes the play to stumble as much at the level of form as content.[41] For having pursued a broadly tragic arc, from its opening exposition through to its sense of rising action, in the final analysis, here *The Island* denies its audience that crucial, climactic peripeteia that traditionally draws *Antigone* towards its generic end. Whatever the radical claims that might be retrieved from this final scene, John and Winston's interminable suffering establishes a space of irresolution at telling odds with Sophocles's ancient denouement. Put plainly, their ongoing internment refuses to sustain even the fragile possibility of that less than tragic otherwise which, ultimately, makes Antigone's death all the more tragic. In this, its incisive but also plainly unfaithful climax, *The Island* succeeds, nonetheless, in citing the moral imperatives that underpin tragedy's faulty progress when mobilised in the field of racial injustice. For like Farber's contemporary experiment with the *Oresteia*, Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona's revision arguably also fails in its tragic claims, its generic progress undone by its pressing political ambition.

On Failure

In asserting the failure of outwardly tragic works like *The Island* and, more significantly, *Molora*, it is by no means my intention to denigrate the rationale of these revisions. There are, I aver, more compelling explanations for their seeming miscarriage, explanations that point far beyond the acuity, or otherwise, of their makers. In the first instance, such failures invite us to deliberate upon the situated conditions and constraints that guide their engagement with classical tragedy. More abstractly, these works also reference an established tradition of possibility found in aesthetic failure more generally, from Loginus in the first century to Beckett in the twentieth. Indeed, theatrical practice in particular has long been understood as partially constituted by failure of one sort or another. As Róisín O'Gorman and Margaret Werry elaborate, its methods of 'improvisation, rehearsal and experiment assume an accretion of failure as an integral

part of the creative process'.[42] Most recently, such theatrical failure has been of a fervently representational, rather than generic or formal, variety. In the type of post-dramatic theories that have come to drive contemporary engagements with the theatrical, failure has more often emerged in terms of the explicit disintegration, as Cormac Power describes, of theatre's deictic unities of time, space, and action. Nonetheless, in this, it is a failure that strives to 'emphasize a criticality on the part of the audience'—that is, a typically deconstructive attention to theatre's artifice and associated authority.[43] In other words, as Sara Jane Bailes puts it, '[f]ailure *works*'; it is 'generative, prolific even', and not just theatrically but also heuristically.[44]

It is precisely this heuristic value that motivates my interest in South Africa's otherwise faulty tragic tradition. But tragedy also threatens to defy as much as it sustains such potentially edifying ends. For while the genre's lessons are defined by their ambiguity, in failure, they risk being rendered inscrutable. Something perhaps evidenced by Winston's perpetual confusion in *The Island*, this abstruseness emerges too in the broad scepticism with which critics have more recently approached *Molora*. For the play's value in the field of reconciliation has been found by most reviewers to be generally unconvincing. Unlike Fugard, however, Farber is unable to defend the terms of *Molora*'s tragic miscarriage according to the 'heroic pessimism' invoked by the former under apartheid.[45] In this, Fugard can be seen to draw from French existentialists like Albert Camus in search of philosophical justification for what more radical critics like Robert Kavanagh have dismissed as *The Island*'s liberal capitulation to irresolution and ongoing injustice.[46] For Fugard, however, John and Winston's temporary transcendence reflects the inherent dichotomy of tragedy, which, to follow Camus in *L'Homme Révolté*, 'indefatigably confronts evil' only for injustice to continue undiminished. 'Man can only propose to diminish, arithmetically, the suffering of the world, [for] children will still die unjustly even in a perfect society', Camus explains.[47] In this, Fugard discovers 'a disturbingly lucid statement', as he puts it, for the absolute violence of apartheid, a violence that extinguishes even the most modest of hopes for a non-tragic otherwise.[48]

To claim under these terms that *The Island* fails as a tragedy, then, is also to conceive of its failure as plotted by history—that is, according to the irredeemable sense of injustice that engulfs its action. In other words, its tragic defeat interpolates a situated political one. But once noted this correlation of failure is not necessarily all that instructive. At best, it risks reducing such generic misfires to an elaborate and ultimately unedifying account of those historical conditions that make or break tragedy. To extend this model would be to cast *Molora*'s

confusions in the field of reconciliation as led by the Truth Commission's own generally misguided approach to the concept. This is not necessarily without significance. In an effort to develop a more generative account, however, I want to proceed by charting the negative declaration that this tradition of failure perhaps provides on behalf of tragedy. Without retrieving for the genre some essential talent in navigating South Africa's history of oppression, there is an allied potential, I want to suggest, to source from tragedy and its disrupted progress a separate agency in the field of racial justice. For above all, failure labours to 'index an alternative route or way of doing', Bailes insists. It harnesses by way of its own miscarriage, its 'coming undone', a fragile account of how things might be done otherwise.[49] Ultimately, it is from within this 'failure-driven reimagination', to borrow from O'Gorman and Werry, that reconciliation is potentially and productively undone by tragedy in South Africa.[50]

Situating Failure

In the undoing of tragedy and the doing of racial justice, Fugard's devised approach to the genre under apartheid is instructive. Evidently, the imperatives of this anti-apartheid tradition are at a distance from the specific, reconciliatory agenda that animates Farber's contemporary work. Nonetheless, *The Island* and, perhaps more pertinently, a highly speculative work like *Orestes* (1971) provide important formal nourishment for *Molora*'s tragic failure. Indeed, according Brian Astbury, co-founder of the Space Theatre where *The Island* was first staged, 'it all began with *Orestes*'.[51] In ten weeks of private and intense rehearsal, Fugard refused to furnish his performers—Winston Dunster, Val Donald, and Yvonne Brycleand—with any type of formal script. Instead, the group improvised around a series of mythical, historical, and philosophical 'texts', each layered one upon the other in a form he has described since as a type of dramatic palimpsest, but which might also be understood as a mode of situated ritualism that gestures towards the elemental as much as the factual. The final eighty-minute 'exposure', as Fugard termed it, was staged eventually at Cape Town's intimate, seventy-seat Castlemarine Auditorium in March 1971.

According to Fugard, *Orestes* 'defied translation onto paper in any conventional sense'.[52] The play mystified too the majority of critics who reviewed it over its two-week run. As such, the only effective record of the play remains a deeply personalized impression rendered by Fugard in a letter to the American photographer Bruce Davidson from 1973.[53] These notes are partial but prove especially useful in deciphering the multiple layers that the director attempted to fold into

the production. With fewer than four hundred words of spoken dialogue, *Orestes* granted its audience scant conventional exposition. Instead, spectators were reliant on the play's provocative programme notes to unravel its situated claims from its broadly gestural and symbolic exposition. Here, Fugard cited a specific act of violent resistance folded into the final performance:

> From our history comes the image of a young man with a large brown suitcase on a bench in the Johannesburg station concourse. He was not travelling anywhere.[54]

Although wilfully veiled, this reference would have recalled for most in the audience the figure of John Harris, a teacher and member of the African Resistance Movement (ARM)—a largely white, anti-apartheid collective comprised of university students and members of the South African Liberal Party.

As part of their programme of state sabotage, the ARM had Harris place a bomb next to a whites-only bench in Johannesburg's main railway station in July 1964. Despite him giving notice of the bomb's exact location and telephoning the Johannesburg Railway Police, the device exploded killing one and injuring twenty-two others. In his call to the railway authorities, recorded and produced as evidence at his trial, Harris made plain the motivation for his attack, terming it 'a symbolic protest against the inhumanity and injustices of apartheid'. He maintained too that 'it is not our intention to harm anyone', and advised the station concourse be cleared at once using the public address system.[55] Despite this mitigation, Harris was later found guilty of murder, and was subsequently hanged at Pretoria Central Prison on 1 April 1965. As such, he was the only white South African to be executed by the state for political crimes during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's mandate period, 1960–1994. Accordingly, the Commission lists him in its final report as both a perpetrator of gross human rights violations and a victim of apartheid injustice—an ambiguous tragic figure, if ever there was one.

For Fugard, this tragic but also broadly futile sense of heroism correlated with the cycle of revenge that traditionally drives the *Oresteia*. As he reflects in his *Notebooks*, there was a broad sense that:

> Harris stood in relation to his society as Orestes did to Clytemnestra. An intolerable burden of guilt for the crimes committed—the act of violence an attempt to escape the burden of guilt.[56]

Nonetheless, articulating their supposedly shameful correlation on stage proved problematic. Fugard confesses some years later that 'I still don't properly

understand the relationship between the two ideas that I coupled'.[57] Indeed, *Orestes*'s highly experimental form appears to resist clarity from the start. With the three actors seated separately among the spectators in the auditorium, Dunster signals the play's beginning by placing a matchbox on his thigh and pushing it slowly towards his knee. Describing his actions as 'of the most inconsequential order', Fugard suggests that the audience's attention is directed merely 'by way of a quiet concentration of the other two actors on what the young man was doing'. As the matchbox balances precariously on the actor's leg before one last fractional shove sees it topple to the stage floor, the 'quiet tension' that has accrued within the auditorium supposedly dissipates in an instant. 'We have had our first climax, our first dramatic metaphor', notes Fugard of this nominal 'experience and dilemma of Crisis'.[58]

When lined up against *Molora*'s opening scene, with all its impassioned dispute, *Orestes*'s restrained beginning arguably underestimates the enmity that bristles through their shared source text. Certainly, this cycle of pressure and momentary release mirrors the structure through which Aeschylus's ancient tragedy also progresses. But in his turn to rival 'texts', Fugard's *Orestes* also confounds the agonism that traditionally underpins the *Oresteia*. Harris, according to Fugard, is motivated by guilt, rather than some implacable urge to vengeance. By contrast, *Molora* draws out this violent conflict even to the point of immoderation as its attempts to interpolate the volatility of the Truth Commission's public hearings into its tragic frame. Following its incendiary initial scene, for instance, Farber's play proceeds by taking forthright aim at the Commission's hubristic sloganeering, most particularly its misplaced faith in the redemptive technology of public confession. In a scene entitled 'murder', truth is made an object not of justice but traumatic excess. Here, the violent repression committed in the past is exhumed and re-enacted with disturbing detail for the onlooking audience. Picturing Elektra centre stage singing childishly in a bath as her mother washes her clean, this scene of serene domesticity is almost immediately and inexorably ruptured. Having wrapped her child in a blanket, Klytemnestra moves to the back of the stage to grab a pickaxe. She scrapes its blade noisily and ominously across the floor as she crosses back towards the table stage left, before climbing on top with the axe raised above her head. With no words, only a chilling scream, she proceeds to slam its sharp edge into the wooden table.

As both the site of her preceding confession to Agamemnon's murder and a surrogate object upon which to replay her original crime, the table appears to animate and intensify, rather than appease, the violence of the past. Pointedly, this runs counter to the Truth Commission's own investment in the curative logic of

FIGURE 4. Klytemnestra bathing her daughter, Elektra, in Yaël Farber's *Molora* (2003). Photo courtesy of Ruphin Coudyzer.

confession. And with the axe stuck fast in the table as a symbol of her enduring defiance, Klytemnestra covers her face and hands in her husband's blood before dragging his body, which lies prostrate beneath the table and wrapped in plastic, into the middle of the stage. Revealing it to her daughter, Elektra screams in isiXhosa, 'Mama what have you done?'[59] But Klytemnestra ignores her daughter's protestations as she proceeds to bury the body under a heap of soil.

According to this pattern of forthright confession and graphic re-enactment, her murderous deed is given a hard, visceral form. For not only does Klytemnestra report her actions in the present tense as if, to follow Rush Rehm's analysis of her ancient equivalent, 'she actually relives the crucial moments', but she also makes manifest the violent behaviour that typically remains off-stage or 'ob-scene'.[60] In this, her actions here are also made all the more horrifying and, seemingly, unforgivable. Indeed, in its uncompromising portrayal, the play excises all evidence of Klytemnestra's own suffering at Agamemnon's hand. Here, her cruelty appears to find its precedence not in ancient tradition but in the shocking reports of abuse witnessed by the Truth Commission. And evidently Farber, a white South African who grew up with many of the privileges that her race legally afforded, is in no position to propose any radical empathy with apartheid's guilty agents.[61] Even so, in its preliminary portrayal of Klytemnestra, *Molora* all but disintegrates those conflicted, potentially pitiable feelings that otherwise guide her tragic relationship with Elektra. There is no sense of the shared suffering that ordinarily bind mother and daughter together, and that makes the cycle of vengeance, in very different ways, so anguishing to behold. Instead, it is the chilling collapse of the symbolic into the obscene facts of history that drives the action forward.

In this particular sense, *Molora* is not so very different from Fugard's *Orestes*. Both find their tragic origins distorted by way of recourse to the situated sense of injustice that underwrites their respective progress. In other words, their shared ancient source is denatured by too much or too little of the essential conflicted-ness that ordinarily structures its fragile progress. But equally, as the action in Fugard's play also begins to escalate, *Molora*'s violent excess appears less and less exceptional. With Donald and Dunster engaged in a series of ritualized games, the innocence of their initial exchange slowly gives way to a violent encounter with their tragic inheritance. First, Bryceland, who has been watching passively from the margins, enters onto the stage, before Donald asks her, 'How do you spell "Orestes"?'[62] Joining hands, Donald and Dunster together inscribe alternate letters in a heap of sand on the stage. In this, their ritual performance is washed over by ancient myth, with the pair transformed into the roles of Electra and Orestes, respectively. Bryceland, as Clytemnestra, first beckons to the pair before she is struck down by a series of elemental 'grunts, snarls, groans' as she painfully stitches together the name 'Iphigenia'. This symbolic nativity is hastily reversed, however, with the name 'broken down again into its elementary syllables' as she bewails her child's subsequent sacrifice to the gods.[63] Searching out a 'vocabulary for grief', verbal as much as physical, she ruptures

the rising pressure in the auditorium with an act of violent reprisal, staged 'every night, every performance', Fugard affirms. Clytemnestra destroys 'one unique, irreplaceable chair called Agamemnon', its upholstery torn up and its wooden frame shattered before the audience. It is 'an awesome and chilling spectacle', according to the director.[64]

There is much to compare in this violation of the representational order by the sphere of violence. Most obviously, where *Molora* conceives of Agamemnon's murder reproachfully, as testament to the brutality of apartheid, *Orestes* imagines it as altogether cautionary. Fugard reproved the violence deployed by the resistance movement, calling it 'the most stupid, the most pointless, the most tragic, the most misguided' of 'all the things men and women resort to', principally because 'it only perpetuates itself'.[65] As Fugard has it, 'you cannot witness destruction without being damaged'.[66] Sundered from their innocent beginnings after their mother's violent action, Orestes and Electra 'experience themselves individually as alone in the most terrible sense of the word'. Both siblings now stumble across the stage, blinded, it seems, by their proximity to this scene of murderous revenge. When Electra and Orestes eventually locate each other, the former imprisons her sibling in a 'savage little gaol fashioned out of chairs'. As Fugard explains, the 'ugliest of all transformations [has taken] place . . . they [have] become a threat to each other'.[67]

As a withdrawal from the *Oresteia*'s driving agonism, Fugard's capitulation here to a non-violent political philosophy threatens to wreck the drama's fragile tragic order. At its worst, *Orestes* sustains a blunt retreat into solipsism. Addressing the audience as the drama reaches its climax, Dunster's character appears situated not by myth but history: 'Me. Male. White. South African. Here'.[68] With this, he emerges from his temporary gaol alert for the first time to the world around him and, it seems, his own disturbing isolation within it. And it is this terrible realisation, over and above any tragic compulsion to revenge, it seems, that motivates the play's fatal conclusion. Fashioning two bombs out of newspaper, Dunster, now in the role of Harris, calmly hands them to Bryceland, who performs their detonation in slow motion. As Fugard recounts:

> Her head goes back slowly . . . her feet come up, the toes crimped in. The feet rise still higher, the head goes back still further and the hands drop their paper bombs. We barely hear her say: 'How am I going to walk?' She pushes herself to the edge of the bench and drops to the floor. She experiences herself as being utterly alone. The petrol has burnt away the soles of her feet. She wants to walk but cannot. She wants to cry but all that comes

> out are small sounds of disgust as she grabs her ankles and, using her heels and her arse, drags herself away across the floor of the station concourse so vast and empty it looks like the floor of a palace. There is torn paper everywhere.[69]

This scene of devastation provides no relief to the cycle of pressure and violent release proffered more generally by the play. Instead, it seems to signal the latest, most climactic turn in the tragedy's futile progress.

As polemic as this denouement appears, the extent to which *Orestes* actively abandons its tragic origins in pursuit of its political principles is perhaps also open to debate. In other words, it is not simply that the work fails as a tragedy. Rather, it seems that apartheid also imposes on the drama's generic ambitions its own moral and philosophical constraints. Certainly, Fugard is resolute in his opposition to violence. And, ultimately, *Orestes* concludes by reciting a segment of Harris' original trial testimony in order to corroborate this message:

> I felt, terrifically, ecstatically happy while sitting on the bench. . . . I knew what I was doing was right. Later I heard that people had been hurt, but this did not make sense because I had known that people were not going to be hurt.[70]

But under Fugard's 'triadic' structure, a term that Mervyn McMurtry deploys to describes it coincident use of ritual archetype, mythical character, and historical action, it is arguably the latter—historical action—that precedes Harris's imprudence.[71] To understand *Orestes* as a failure, then, is to centre the state-led cycle of violence that renders its tragic action otiose. But it is also to begin to conceive of a non-violent otherwise. Incipient and inchoate, this less-than-tragic alternative must also be compelled into being from amid the space of general futility that rules this historical account. To this extent, it anticipates something of the uncertainty, perhaps even the implausibility that also stalks reconciliation's progress. It is in this precise sense that we might take *Orestes* as an instructive guide for *Molora*'s more contemporary tragic failing.

Tragedy's Undoing

In its conceptual impulses, *Molora* sets itself at some distance from the sense of futility that drives *Orestes*. But formally Farber's revision retrieves much of the layered, triadic structure through which this earlier experiment proceeds. Indeed, in the adaptation of its ancient beginnings according to the scenic and

procedural logic of the Truth Commission, *Molora* finds important precedence in Fugard's own efforts to amend a familial structure into a situated, political one. Unlike Fugard, however, Farber also moves to intensify, rather than flatten out, the sense of inner torment that rages through the *Oresteia*. This she achieves by inserting a series of supplementary challenges to her audience, particularly as the drama shifts from the represented or reported pain that typifies *Orestes* to what is best described, by way of Han-Thies Lehmann, as 'pain experienced in representation'.[72] Following the pattern of confession and re-enactment that guided *Molora*'s first two scenes, Electra subsequently describes how she sent her brother Orestes away from the house, fearing for his life. Entitled 'exile', the scene works to abstract this extreme family drama, making it representative of the apartheid struggle more generally. Like those members of the ANC forced into exile in Tanzania and elsewhere, Orestes is cast as an exiled political activist, with Elektra, like a good number of their female relatives, forced to stay behind and suffer the constant harassment and maltreatment of her apartheid tormentor. Elektra was, as she testifies, 'the wall [Klytemnestra] beat against every day'.[73]

Prompted by this claim, the ensuing episode—entitled, 'interrogation'—restages Elektra's abuse at her mother's hand. Forcing her daughter down onto her knees, Klytemnestra begins by thrusting Elektra's head into a pot of water. Holding it under the surface for a few anguishing moments, Klytemnestra then demands of her spluttering and distraught daughter, 'Where is my baby? What have you done with my boy?'[74] With Elektra refusing to respond, Klytemnestra presses her head once more beneath the water, before, frustrated, she adopts a new method; coolly lighting and inhaling on a cigarette, she extinguishes its burning embers first on Elektra's hand and then upon her neck, before screaming with rage, 'Where is my son?'[75]

In the face of these extreme acts of torture, there is little space for an audience to separate out the represented pain from the pain experienced in representation. The assaults appear all too literal and somatic, not nearly abstract or theatrical enough for any type of measured evaluation. For a theorist of the post-dramatic like Lehman, it is precisely this 'indecidability' that leads an audience into an 'ethically provocative play with . . . cruelty'.[76] For him, such unsettling, contested displays directly implicate the spectator, supposedly raising their 'awareness of the problematic of spectating itself'.[77] In other words, to return to the notions raised above, they potentially stage the failure of theatre as a space of representation, inducing critical reflection on the boundaries that separate the theatrical from the actual. Given the escalating extremity of the violence on display in

Molora, however, it is also the affective, rather than the strictly ethical, that likely comes to rule in these moments.

Reviewers have been uniform in spotlighting precisely this point, describing *Molora*'s scenes of torture as 'overwhelm[ing] on a purely sensory level' and 'harrowing almost beyond endurance'.[78] Such responses may well include a sense of ethical discomfort, but this plausibly remains, for the most part, an adjunct to the more intense emotional disquiet and distress that otherwise prevails. For the horror that *Molora* induces is not simply, say, the *erschrecken* that Brecht suggests as 'necessary for cognition'.[79] It is also, and more likely, the anguish of being compelled to endure the graphic re-enactment of a truth that is already known and condemned. Put differently, even as *Molora* defers to something of the Commission's confessional praxis, it assumes few of its corresponding truth-claims. Klytemnestra and Elektra are made representative in their acrimony, not particular. To this extent, the play's acts of torture tend towards the excessive more than they do the edifying or ethically provocative. This stands in important contrast to the highly ritualised scenes of violence that pattern Fugard's *Orestes*, which are designed to estrange its audience more than shock them.

Of course, *Molora*'s excesses are firmly relative, led above all by the intense ill-feeling that circulated daily at the Commission's hearings. But they are also, and perhaps more significantly, allied to the 'transgressive energy' that, to return to Lehman, is partly constitutive of tragedy itself. As elaborated in his more recent treatise on the genre, tragedy is nothing if it is not also aimed towards the possible 'deconstruction of (moral, reasonable) judgment'. By this, Lehman means to alert us to the way in which tragedy's staging of emotional excess necessarily shakes 'the groundwork that makes it possible for human beings to live together in a civilized fashion—indeed, to survive at all'. This is why, he continues:

> [W]e react emotionally when art portrays gruesome crimes, untenable desires, boundless hatreds, awful torments and events that are morally unacceptable: it unsettles us, because these phenomena positively demand judgment—which, however, is at the same time rendered impossible by the tragic spectacle.[80]

Of course, conventionally, tragedy does not wreck absolutely the means for judgment, or the grounds for survival. Instead, it draws out with sharp, even cruel distinction their vulnerability, establishing what Lehman describes as a state of imminent but 'suspended transgression'.[81]

Doubtless, a sense of transgressive possibility also stalked the Truth Commission, where the traumatic truths revealed at its public hearings regularly

threatened to devastate the possibility for any reasoned response, save revenge. Not that the Commission ever seriously admitted to this fragility. Its uncompromising pursuit of reconciliation and 'redemptive closure' left little room to contemplate, let alone incorporate, the extreme and intransigent affects that it stirred.[82] Refusing such notions, *Molora* is candid in reanimating the looming and potentially catastrophic transgressions that arguably also mark out the Commission as a tragic enterprise. Indeed, the play appears to actively nurture this transgressive potential, consistently pressing its simmering sense of violence to the point of febrility. This sense of transgressive excess is no more apparent than in *Molora*'s eighth scene, entitled 'wet bag method', which takes as its source one of the Commission's most shocking hearings. Having recalled and replayed for the audience the exploitation she suffered at her mother's hand, Elektra proceeds to demand that Klytemnestra 'please, demonstrate for this commission how you tried to get information out of me as to my brother's whereabouts'.[83]

The request recalls directly the unique demand made of Jeffrey Benzien, a disreputable former detective warrant officer in the South African Police's Terrorist Unit, by one of his victims, Tony Yengeni, at an Amnesty Committee hearing in Cape Town in 1997. Remarkably, Yengeni, by then a prominent ANC Member of Parliament and invited along with other victims of abuse to the hearing, was permitted to take the stand and cross-question Benzien. In a highly manipulative move, Benzien began by bragging to the Committee of his expertise in torture, which, he claimed, allowed him to capture information from ANC cadres such as Yengeni in less than thirty minutes. In an effort to cede back some form of control, Yengeni responded by requesting that he 'be given the opportunity by the Commission to see what [Benzien] did to me, with my own eyes'.[84] Granted leave by the hearing's chair, Benzien proceeded to crouch over a (surprisingly willing) volunteer from the assembled audience, placing a pillowcase over their head before twisting it to show how he would block off the victim's airway. With the bag soaked in water, this technique reputedly induced in its victims the added sensation of drowning, he advises.

Engaging a figure like Benzien in this way was, as Mark Sanders attests in his review of the hearing, a hazardous ploy.[85] Upon witnessing this shocking re-enactment of his own torture, Yengeni reportedly began to stumble uncharacteristically through his subsequent questions. Others also present at the hearing, particularly reporters, displayed their own signs of distress, 'breaking down, packing up, freaking out', as Antjie Krog recalls.[86] In an effort to blunt his own shame, Benzien responded perniciously by attempting to defame Yengeni. Asked

by the former cadre how he personally responded to being tortured in this way, Benzien claimed:

> I know that after the method was applied, you did take us to the house of [prominent anti-apartheid activist] Jennifer Schreiner where we took out a lot of limpet mines, hand grenades and firearms.[87]

In this, Benzien finds renewed opportunity to manipulate and terrorise his victim, all but destroying Yengeni's political reputation, which relied in large part on his status as a hero of the struggle. Altogether, it was a remarkably shocking incident in the history of the Commission, not least in terms of the re-traumatizing effects it appeared to have on Yengeni, who was not only compelled to share in the 'visual culture' of his own victimhood, but also subjected once again to the coercive authority of his torturer.[88]

Speaking in the wake of Benzien's ultimately successful appeal for amnesty, Shirley Gunn, a former ANC cadre like Yengeni, summed up the sense of sustained injustice shared by his many victims:

> It didn't feel like there was closure at all. We know this character and I think he haunts many people up to this day. The fact that he has been vindicated like this is quite horrifying.[89]

But where Benzien's original confession arguably put the concept of reconciliation under extreme pressure, in reanimating and making all the more direct his abusive actions, *Molora* so intensifies the basic incongruity between truth and reconciliation as to make the latter appear almost cruelly absurd in its ambition. For Klytemnestra's demonstration of the wet-bag method goes one step further than Benzien's own, performing it not on a volunteer but on Elektra herself. In this, torturer and tortured slip directly back into their former hierarchy as Klytemnestra stands menacingly over her daughter, whose face lies down in the ground. With a plastic bag, she covers Elektra's head and twists it tight until the girl begins to convulse in active-seeming pain. After what feels to be an interminable length of time, Klytemnestra releases her, allowing Elektra to gasp desperately for air.

Again, the logic of the post-dramatic here suggests ample opportunity to reflect upon the thin boundary that separates actual pain from its artificial equivalent. As Lehman puts it, in threatening to 'transgress . . . the pain threshold', such post-dramatic praxis 'moves away from a mental or intelligible structure towards the exposition of intense physicality, the body is *absolutized*'.[90] Certainly, this investment in the body as the preeminent site of significance provides a vital key for the suffering staged by the Commission's original hearings—something,

FIGURE 5. Klytemnestra performing the 'wet-bag method' of torture on her daughter, Elektra, in Yaël Farber's *Molora* (2003). Photo courtesy of Ruphin Coudyzer.

again, taken up by Cole in her analysis of the Commission's generally performative dimensions. As a tool for interpreting *Molora*'s violent acts of torture, however, this singular focus on the body risks appearing agnostic before the political agenda also driving their re-enactment—which is to say, Farber's decision to give torture an embodied form in her tragic schema. It is perhaps better, then, to approach the bodily pain reproduced in this scene as part of *Molora*'s transgressive capitulation, rather than suspension. Under these terms, Elektra's

tortured body not only rehearses Yengeni's original trauma, but also threatens to wreck altogether the play's tragic status, undoing its general conflicted-ness in favour of actual and irredeemable conflict. Our judgment of Klytemnestra and her abusive actions can no longer be suspended, it seems. For like Elektra's pain, Klytemnestra's violence is here made absolute rather than ambiguous or somehow justifiable. And in this moment, *Molora* appears to rupture altogether the terms of its own fragile tragic tension.

Reconciliation's Fragility

If we are to accept this scene as indicative of *Molora*'s general failure as a tragedy, then we must also accept its corollary success as a moment of moral decisiveness. There is no plausible arbitration here of Klytemnestra's violent behaviour. Rather, it is made deplorable, indefensible. In wrecking its state of transgressive suspension—its 'indecidability', to return to Lehman's earlier term—Farber also appears to render reconciliation implausible. Mother and daughter seem absolutely estranged. It is more and more reasonable for us to expect that *Molora* will reach its conclusion not just by satisfying its vengeful compulsions but by collapsing too all possible future accord. Not even the gods have authority to arbitrate here, it seems. In this, Farber arguably finds instruction in Fugard's endless and, above all, pessimistic capitulation to violence. Indeed, with Orestes returned from exile, he and Elektra plot precisely such a climax, planning to murder first Ayesthus and then Klytemnestra with the same axe used to slay Agamemnon. And following Orestes's shocking, if also more broadly symbolic, attack on Ayesthus, ripping his heart from his chest, the cycle seems set to fulfil its ancient climax and in the most violent of terms.

Suddenly and inexplicably, however, Orestes begins to vacillate. 'Elektra—we are lost', he declares after a member of the Chorus, Ma Nosomething, rebukes him for this latest act of murderous revenge.[91] Elektra presses him on, trying desperately to renew his conviction. As he raises the axe, however, the rest of the Chorus sing out plaintively. Again, Orestes pauses, unable, it seems, to take vengeance against his mother. 'I cannot shed more blood', he declares, before falling to his knees and grabbing Elektra, entreating her to help him 'rewrite this ancient end'.[92] But, unlike Orestes, Elektra cannot so readily 'forget [her] hatred'. For her, 'there can be no forgiveness!' This merciless tragedy, like the 'night's end', Elektra proclaims, 'is already written'. And with an impassioned cry, she leaps forward, grabbing the axe to take 'VENGEANCE! An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!'[93]

FIGURE 6. The Chorus, performed by members of the Ngqoko Cultural Group, cradle Elektra in Yaël Farber's *Molora* (2003). Photo courtesy of Ruphin Coudyzer.

With no ancient deus ex machina to intercede and prevent Elektra from making herself another victim of the *Oresteia*'s schema, the task of undoing this fatal tradition falls once more to the Chorus. Representatives, according to Farber, of the 'common everyman and everywoman who, in the years following democracy, gathered in modest halls across the country to face their perpetrators', the group rise up from their seats at the rear of the stage before rushing forward to envelop Elektra, wrestling the axe from her grip.[94] As she rages and struggles, the Chorus pull her to the ground, cradling her as her frenetic screams eventually give way to a flood of pitiable tears. When Elektra finally emerges from their protective embrace, she and Orestes begin to crawl tentatively towards Klytemnestra, who cowers before them in terror. Rather than strike out, however, the siblings offer her their hands and together the group rise to their feet. Klytemnestra backs away, made humble by their show of mercy, before the group's diviner, Nofenishala Mvotyo, steps out before the audience to pray for a new 'unity between black and white'.[95]

In the context of the play's relentless seeming drive towards disaster, Mvotyo's hopeful appeal comes as a broadly welcome one. It intercedes where the other characters have been unable. Given the violent transgressions that precede this moment, however, it is also entirely unexpected, if not also unconvincing. At

least, when understood as part of *Molora*'s capitulation to absolute conflict, such a comparatively peaceable climax may well strike many as manifestly incongruent. But this is not the only context for rationalising its turn to unity and racial reconciliation. For Farber's play is motivated not by preserving tragic tradition, but by failing it, conceptually as well as dramatically. In failing to uphold the state of suspended transgression that otherwise defines the *Oresteia*'s tragic progress, *Molora* also disables the tragedy inherent to its cycle of revenge. As soon as Klytemnestra's violent action wrecks the delicate moral order governing the tragedy, Elektra's violent reprisal proves impossible to dignify or defend in such tragic terms. Like *Molora*'s generic frame, the urge to vengeance has itself been undone, divested of its conflicted and, therefore, tragic ethical status. In other words, it falls beyond the scope of tragedy's fragile deliberations, adhering instead to a more stable variety of retributive justice.

When thought in these terms—as a failure of tragedy's fragile action—the play's climactic appeal to reconciliation appears to serve as little more than a blunt 'departure from violence', to return to Borneman. It is, in short, an affirmation of reconciliation in the weakest sense of the term. Crucially, however, this is not quite where *Molora* ends. For as swiftly as this scene of seeming unity emerges, it is made vulnerable before the threat of reconciliation's own plausible failure. With Orestes and Elektra huddled alongside the Chorus in the centre of the stage, Klytemnestra returns in the play's epilogue to her seat behind the table stage-left. 'It falls softly the residue of revenge', she begins portentously, as a thick cloud of ash begins to drift down onto the stage.[96] 'We who made the sons and daughters of this land, servants in the halls of their forefathers', she continues, '[w]e are still only here by grace alone'.[97] The delicate, ethereal beauty of this finale belies its malefic quality. As Odom elaborates, in Xhosa tradition ash upholds its own contradictory connotations as a symbol of mutual destruction as much as an object of ancestral reverence.[98] Against this backdrop, a looming sense of peril necessarily persists, the ash now swathing the characters also threatening to overwhelm and asphyxiate *Molora*'s climactic appeal for unity.

Of course, the *Oresteia* is traditionally venerated for the delicate equilibrium thought to prevail at its end.[99] In its own, similarly ambivalent final scene, *Molora* not only upholds this frailty but also affords its audience a view of reconciliation's correspondingly risky progress. Here, reconciliation's vulnerability to failure is intensified by precise virtue of its close proximity to a violent otherwise. This fragile end might even be declared *Molora*'s success, a ratification of reconciliation's defining 'attunement to . . . contingency, chance, *peripeteia*'. Borrowing from the prescripts of tragic interpretation, reconciliation emerges as

an entirely provisional end, something subject to the capriciousness of human agency. To this extent, *Molora*'s generic failure is also indicative of its heuristic success in the field of reconciliation, the play's climax providing an instructive view of reconciliation that accounts for its risky and, in strictly conceptual terms, tragic progress.

Conclusion

In settling upon this fragile reading of reconciliation, my analysis may not appear to differ all that very much from those critics who find *Molora* to be marred by equivocation. Odom's complaint is entirely typical in this: 'beyond reconciliation' and 'beyond tragedy', for him, the play appears to be a failure of both in equal measure, conforming 'neither to the processes of reconciliation nor to the requirements of tragedy'.[100] The significant difference, as I understand it, however, is that this seeming inability to settle upon either broad end is precisely the point, not the problem, of Farber's adaptation. Indeed, far from undoing its value, this refusal finally to resolve its own conflicted-ness, whether through continued violence or some artificial sense of unity, establishes a conceptually tragic frame through which to approach 'this thing called reconciliation'. For whatever we might claim of its transgressive, occasionally even also anguishing theatrical form, ultimately, *Molora* offers up an important lesson in reconciliation's fragile progress. To pursue its achievement is also, Farber's play insists, to risk its failure.

This is, of course, principally a challenge to the monumental claims of the Truth Commission and its desire for a measure of conceptual and historical certainty. But it is also a point that underpins some of the fundamental claims driving this study at large. Emerging from a long tradition of devised theatre-making and tragic adaptation in South Africa, *Molora* extracts from this range of anti-apartheid examples a more abstract sense of what the improvisatory might enable, even by way of its own failure. Above all, it attempts to discover in the tragic a sense of fragile historical possibility that is equal to the unpredictability and contingency of reconciliation—that is to say, a sense of what reconciliation's proximity to catastrophe also makes thinkable. But this is not its only achievement. For in making the black, largely female Chorus the principal agents of reconciliation, it also anticipates the more substantial focus that follows in the subsequent two chapters on apartheid's ordinary, often maligned female victims. Indeed, this chapter may well have chosen to pursue this gendered argument more insistently. Given the achievements of other critics, as well as the arguments that follow elsewhere in this study, however, I have preferred to retain a more

conceptual approach to the play.[101] For above all it is *Molora*'s generic failure as a tragedy that enables its account of reconciliation's risky, uncertain progress to thrive, a suggestion that does much to inoculate the concept against the seductive claims of the forgiving nation-state that emerge in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

The Melodrama of Forgiveness

Propriety and Popular Film

> The truths produced by truth commissions . . . cannot be merely cerebral and disembodied. The subject of history must be as emotional as she is thinking.
>
> —Deborah Posel

In many of the most prominent accounts of the Truth Commission, reconciliation has often been correlated alongside individual accounts of forgiveness. Profiling the contrition of some of apartheid's most notorious perpetrators and, by return, their victims' capacity to give up on revenge in favour of clemency, critics like Antjie Krog and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela laud these forgiving turns as a reassuring signal of the Commission's success in the field of reconciliation.[2] But these acts of forgiveness are not quite of the same political order as reconciliation, even if they circulate contiguously. Certainly, both depend upon forms of confessional disclosure and the arbitration of guilt. In this, each establishes a method to decide over the past, offering up a sense of resolution as alluring as it is perhaps capricious. But forgiveness is also tethered to the emotional realm in ways that a remote, institutionalised iteration of reconciliation often finds difficult to interpolate. It is less a computation of, say, healing and closure, to return to Johan Galtung's account of reconciliation, and more an intimate, interpersonal enterprise. There is, in short, a mutual and potentially remedial vulnerability to the act of forgiveness for victim and perpetrator alike that reconciliation finds hard to disclose.

Beginning with an act of self-exposure, much depends upon the perpetrator's apology and demonstration of remorse. But this is no guarantee of success. In the end, it is the victim's own willingness to accept this remorse that allows forgiveness to prosper. In granting victims with a degree of agency denied them in the past, then, forgiveness organises itself around unstable affective economy, one

that is liable to elicit a range of extreme responses, censorious as well as compassionate. In other words, forgiveness necessarily proceeds with no assurances, save its own inherent riskiness. Nonetheless, it is precisely these emotional risks that provide it with the type of compelling, climactic frame that reconciliation, in its more austere negotiation of justice, largely fails to replicate. This is not the principal fault of reconciliation; it merely attests to the comparative appeal of forgiveness when it comes to staging the intense drama of injustice and its seeming relief. Indeed, where the defeat of a peaceable otherwise intensifies, it is forgiveness, not reconciliation, that more often flourishes as the most captivating corrective. As Martha Minow insists in entirely indicative terms, the gift of forgiveness 'can heal grief; forge new constructive alliances; and break cycles of violence'.[3] Put bluntly, it is thought to retain the uncommon potential to move people, emotionally and otherwise. And in a study animated by those alternate ends that improvisation risks, forgiveness may well seem to offer up its own allied potential.

I am not proposing, however, to give up on the language of reconciliation. For one thing, the accounts that critics like Gobodo-Madikizela provide of forgiveness and its achievements in the sphere of racial justice are highly selective and highly individualised. For another, its sacramental credentials threaten to revive something of the Christian doctrine that was regularly deployed to sustain apartheid's own corrupt moral authority. As such, its seductive power should not be underestimated, especially when it comes to South Africa's democratic transition, in which the 'power and the glory' of forgiveness has been deployed to animate and authorise a whole host of broadly popular interpretations of the Truth Commission and its confessional praxis.[4] Take, for example, Archbishop Desmond Tutu's review of *Red Dust* (2004), adapted from Gillian Slovo's original novel by Tom Hooper. Invited to an exclusive preview just a few days before its general release at the 2004 Cape Town World Cinema Festival (CTWCF), he remarked upon the uncanny emotional response the film elicited from its audience. In re-enacting the terms of a confession heard originally by the Commission's Amnesty Committee, *Red Dust* recalled, he argued, 'so very much, so poignantly of all that we, and so many people of our country had gone through during the process of the TRC'. Indeed, so deeply moved was Tutu that, by the film's final scene in which a white, former police officer is granted the forgiveness of one of his black victims, the chairperson, along with many of the other former commissioner's present at the screening, was brought to tears. 'We forgot that this was just a film', he professed.[5]

Doubtless, in Tutu, *Red Dust* found an unusually fulsome sponsor. Under his stewardship, the Commission had made many similar such appeals to the

sacramental logic of forgiveness. But Hooper's film is by no means alone in deferring to the affective intensity of the Commission's public hearings in order to frame its poignant progress. Adapted from Krog's *Country of My Skull*, John Boorman's *In My Country* (2004) makes many similarly emotional appeals, taking up a whole host of hearings as example of South Africa's fundamentally forgiving spirit. By comparison, Ian Gabriel's *Forgiveness* (2004) broadens this sense of personal and, by implication, national redemption, tracking its everyday, rather than national, drama. Set in the years after the Commission concluded, Gabriel's film invokes, nonetheless, the self-same sacramental metaphors that motivated Tutu's original appeal to light over darkness and goodness over evil. Gabriel even concludes his film's burdensome narrative of recrimination and thwarted revenge by citing on screen a dictum first tendered by Tutu in a foreword to the Commission's final report:

> Having looked the beast in the eye, having asked and received forgiveness and having made amends, let us shut the door on the past—not to forget it but in order not to allow it to imprison us.[6]

This poignant appeal—a trademark of Tutu's chairmanship—is designed to certify the film's sense of moral deliverance. But it is also an attempt to make imperceptible the gap between its own moving, melodramatic climax and the supposedly remarkable achievements of the Commission in the field of racial justice.

Distinguishing the intense, often also overwhelming emotion of the cinema screen from its original, institutional source is no straightforward task. Indeed, such is the strength of the affective bond supposedly secured with the Commission and its confessional praxis, that this trio of films have been catalogued since by film scholars under a simple but exclusive index as 'TRC films'. This is not, however, a necessarily creditable label. For their close correspondence with the Commission has proven less a foundation from which to explore the recuperative capacity of their shared confessional praxis and more a source of critical aggravation. For the most part, this criticism circulates around broadly defined questions of legitimacy and authenticity. Lesley Marx, for instance, foregrounds the artificial links that secure these 'TRC films' to the Commission, querying more generally 'the relation between the filmic text and the reality with which it engages'. She challenges, in particular, the capacity of this popular cinematic genre to provide its audience with the 'complex truth' that emerged originally at the Truth Commission's hearings.[7] For Patrick Flanery, the challenges levied by Marx against this brand of popular cinema are as much a problem of ethical propriety as they are of truth. And in rather more trenchant terms, he sets about

cataloguing the consistent and 'outrageous appropriation' made by these films of the individual testimonies elicited by the Commission.[8] His shock is by no means abstract but is led by a sense of fidelity before the appreciable suffering of those many victims whose stories now sustain these popular tales of national redemption.

In part, this chapter attempts to incorporate rather than excise the acute, often polarising feelings that the Commission has stirred up, both on the cinema screen and among reviewers. Rather than simply disclaim the litany of abstractions, appropriations, and elisions that pattern these so-called 'TRC films', then, I want to reflect on the melodramatic appeal that arguably conditions their seeming corruptions. To be clear, this is not to mitigate their acts of appropriation. Nor is to assent automatically to the forgiving ethos that these films so fastidiously promote. But accepting the extreme affective atmosphere that has come to rule the Commission, my principal aim here is to ratify the full range of truths, felt as well as factual, collective as well as individual, that this confessional sphere delivers. For these are also the 'complex' truths that any recital of reconciliation—forgiving and otherwise—must find ways to integrate. As Deborah Posel asserts in the epigraph that begins this chapter, 'the subject of history must be as emotional as she is thinking'.[9] It is the adjacent priorities of popular film, I want to suggest, that provides us with a foundation for their mutual articulation.

In working out a cinematic mode that is responsive, as well as responsible, before the emotional intensities of this confessional arena, however, this chapter must also adjudicate upon the moral outrage that so consistently stalks the treatment of these 'TRC films'. Put bluntly, is verisimilitude the sole criteria against which they must be judged, or are there other, more generic motivations to be found in their moving appeal to the language of forgiveness? Merely reciting the many egregious diffractions made of the Commission by these films is unlikely to yield a satisfying resolution. But this should not necessarily lead us to discount their contribution to our understanding of the Commission and, most expressly, the intensely emotional terrain within which it acted. In fact, they arguably reveal much as a condition of their impropriety, not least the slim divide that separates their melodramatic drive towards forgiveness from the Commission's own declared achievements in this sphere.

More significantly, these popular 'TRC films' also serve to set into comparative relief the neighbouring achievements of Mark Kaplan's contemporaneous documentary film *Between Joyce and Remembrance* (2003). Largely neglected amid the controversy that has enveloped these more popular, fictional

equivalents, Kaplan's documentary approach potentially offers up a separate mode of democratic rather than strictly popular filmmaking through which to integrate the emotional excesses conjured up by the Commission. Certainly, *Between Joyce and Remembrance* is not without its own potential controversy. But in securing a mode of filmic representation where the affective intensities often essential to the act of confession might play a pivotal but not redemptive function in its process, Kaplan's film also prioritises the type of unpredictable, improvisational impulses that are central to this study at large. For *Between Joyce and Remembrance* defers not to the institutional authority of the Truth Commission but the interpersonal claims of those victims who appeared at its hearings, offering up a more general theory of the confessional act and the intense emotional sphere through which it must navigate.

The Melodramatic Imagination

To secure a sense of emotional integrity from the intensities that stalk the confessional sphere means first and foremost deciding over the integrity of the melodramatic imagination upon which those 'TRC films' screened at the 2004 CTWCF arguably all depend. A suggestion made most prominently by Anton van der Hoven and Jill Arnott in their unusually approbatory review of these popular films, melodrama's generic claims are not especially distant from the Truth Commission's own affective excesses or, indeed, its supposedly forgiving ethos. Though the genre's sensationalist tendencies appear incongruous with the urgent ambitions of the Commission, there is much in the genre's appeal to the emotional, the sensorial as well as the moral that inform our understanding of its everyday praxis. In principle, then, Van der Hoven and Arnott defend melodrama as a 'cultural mode and aesthetic practice . . . entirely appropriate to understanding the South African context and the painful stories of its recent past'.[10] Drawing audiences into a primarily '*ethical* apprehension' of the intense human suffering begotten by apartheid, they claim it as an unusually adept mode through which to rediscover South Africa's '"lost" humanity', a task 'central to the TRC itself', they insist.[11] But, of course, melodrama's more stubborn, pejorative adjectival associations also motivate many of those staunch attacks on this informal coterie of 'TRC films', with Flanery, for one, decrying the misappropriations that animate Boorman's 'melodramatic story'.[12]

Unlike tragedy, consistently venerated for its moral accomplishments, such contrary appeals are, in fact, entirely typical of the uncertain value that melodrama maintains. Since it was first granted a measure of aesthetic as well as social

credibility by Peter Brooks in the 1970s, the melodramatic imagination has been claimed as both radically democratic and ideologically conservative. At its most celebrated, melodrama is said to maintain a talent to 'communicate to a mass audience in the most immediate and accessible ways'.[13] At its most maligned, however, it seems liable to return 'deceptive non-solutions' for society's many problems.[14] In short, melodrama consistently splits opinion. It is for this reason that critics like Jane Shattuc insist that we only ever assess melodrama with careful regard for 'its double hermeneutic'.[15] By this, she means to suggest a mode of analysis that might allow for the contradictions animating the genre, one that takes these conflicts as instructive rather than reductive.

Following critics like Shattuc and, indeed, Brooks, then, I prefer to approach the specific melodrama of these 'TRC films' as a 'not quite respectable yet . . . animating and somehow necessary' mode of representation, especially when it comes to giving form to the Truth Commission and the excess of feeling that its public hearings delivered.[16] Withholding a degree of judgment, my aim is to adduce from their melodramatic interpretation of the Commission a sense of the generic protocols and palatable denouements that have since been deployed to ratify its public praxis. In this way, melodrama might yet tell us something about the Truth Commission and its vulnerability before the 'quasi-theological drama of forgiveness', even if the genre also challenges our sense of aesthetic propriety. I prefer to proceed, therefore, not by dismissing melodrama out of hand, but by approaching these 'TRC films' according to the genre's double hermeneutic. To read in this way is to secure important insight into the type of ideological conflicts and coercions upon which absolution's exaltation arguably also depends. But it is also to reckon with the countervailing value that melodrama upholds in the much wider, 'post-sacred' arena of reconciliation—to pick up on one of Brooks's key descriptors for the melodramatic imagination.[17]

There is much precedence for the type of political scaffolding under which melodrama's individuated trials and triumphs appear to play out. Indeed, as both a cinematic genre and as a broader cultural mode, its broadly demotic appeal has been the subject of a wide, globally distributed proliferation that long precedes South Africa's transition to democracy. From Mexico in the 1910s to South Korea in the 1950s, the genre has come to serve in the wake of various political crises as a vital arena for the mobilisation of new collective solidarities. Noble, for one, describes how in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, 'the kind of narrative structures and identifications promoted by and through melodrama became important audio-visual vehicles through which to tell stories of cohesive nationhood'.[18] Similarly, for McHugh and Abelmann, the melodramatic screen

maintains a rare ability to circulate the democratic reassurances necessary to counteract the ideological instability that followed the end of the Korean War in the 1950s.[19] In each of these critical paradigms, melodrama is seen to prosper as the arbitrator of a fractured, authoritarian past, assisting in the composition of a new, democratic present and contributing to what has been dubbed since as a 'golden age' in their respective national cinemas.

No attempt has been made to distinguish quite such an apotheosis in South Africa's still budding national cinema. But arguably these 'TRC films' are part of melodrama's more general proliferation in the earliest years of democracy.[20] As elsewhere, the genre's flourishing is thought to depend upon its contemporary resonance with something of the radical, revolutionary spirit of France in the 1790s under which melodrama, according to Brooks, was first ushered into formal existence. For just as the French Revolution's utter 'dissolution of an organic and hierarchically cohesive society' is hailed as the original harbinger of melodrama, it is the parallel desire 'to legislate the regime of virtue' that often underpins accounts of its subsequent renewal.[21] Indeed, wherever the genre has been found to thrive, something of the anxious and 'traumatized condition of melodrama's first audiences' is also thought to rule.[22] Set into this paradigm, melodrama's typically Manichean conflicts between good and evil combine to call forward much more than mere sensation. Arguably, they also serve to locate and make operative for their audience an 'essential moral universe'.[23] Where 'the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been thrown violently into question', melodrama 'strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, to "prove" the existence of a moral universe', Brooks insists.[24] It is, in other words, a genre that soothes as much as it moves its audience.

But for all Brooks's efforts to discover in the melodramatic imagination the terms for a reconstituted moral contract, there are many others who pay contrasting attention to the pattern of 'naïve ethical antithesis' into which it all too often descends.[25] Suspicious of those 'pure and polar concepts of darkness and light, salvation and damnation' that, for Brooks, constitute the 'emotional [and] spiritual force' of the genre, critics lament this strictly diametric view of the world as liable to exploitation, abstraction, and elision.[26] To this extent, then, it is important to remain alert to the contradictions, as Christine Gledhill affirms, 'hidden in the formal and ideological operations of melodrama'—which is to say the distinction between its democratic appeal and its potentially populist manipulation.[27] This is, undoubtedly, an awkward separation to maintain. In its broadly utopian desire to reform and remake society from below, melodrama also maintains a wide appeal that many of the other performative modes

countenanced in this present study, for all their democratic ambitions, would find hard to sustain. Whatever else may be said of its formal credentials, melodrama is nothing if not a genre performed 'in the name of "ordinary citizens"'.[28]

When critics like Flanery deploy melodrama in order to discredit these 'TRC films', then, they also risk denigrating the egalitarian ambitions to which the genre more generally subscribes, making simplistic the historical, demotic roots of melodrama. To this extent, the problem posed by the genre is perhaps better framed in terms of the collective, rather than merely individual and specific, manipulations it arguably performs. In short, how do you maintain the ordinary, democratic impulses of melodrama without also sustaining a popular compulsion towards triumphalism, especially in a field as seductive, politically as well as personally, as forgiveness?

The Melodrama of Forgiveness: *In My Country* and *Red Dust*

For the likes of Van der Hoven and Arnott, who draw extensively from the recuperative labour performed by Brooks, the melodramatic vernacular of both *In My Country* and *Red Dust* presents itself as an entirely apposite one through which to address the legacies of the apartheid past. From its essential 'egalitarian impulse[s]' to its consistent focus on the somatic and the non-verbal, melodrama gives form, in particular, to the acute and often also incommunicable suffering of apartheid's many victims.[29] To bolster their general argument, the pair make particular example of the individual confessions delivered before a fictionalised version of the Truth Commission during the course of *In My Country*. They target, for instance, the pitiable cry let out by a character named Albertina Sobandla as she hears how her husband, Hubert, was stabbed thirty-seven times by police. Read by Van der Hoven and Arnott as an 'expression of [a] pain' that exceeds description, the scene undoubtedly depends upon a similarly moving moment in Nomonde Calata's original deposition, heard during the first week of the Truth Commission's public hearings.[30]

Presiding over her appearance before the HRVC in East London in April 1996, the Commission's deputy chair, Alex Boraine, has described Calata's 'primeval and spontaneous wail' as an utterly transformative moment. It was 'as if she enshrined in the throwing back of her body and letting out the cry the collective horror of the thousands of people who had been trapped in racism and oppression for so long', Boraine affirms.[31] And so, just as Calata is understood to have 'caught up in a single howl all the darkness and horror of the apartheid years', Sobandla's extreme distress as she falls back into the arms of a professional

comforter is taken by Van der Hoven and Arnott as 'a more, not less, eloquent' portrayal of the suffering endured by the ordinary victims of apartheid.[32] As they understand it, her intense performance operates beyond the limits of language—that is, in the otherwise ineffable spheres of grief and trauma. And it is here, in the somatic and the paralinguistic, that melodrama stakes its efficacy, presenting its audience with, what Van der Hoven and Arnott describe as, those 'personally felt moral truths' that a more discursive confessional account of the past can rarely hope to replicate.[33]

In principle, at least, their claim is a compelling one and might well serve to account for the intense emotional encounters that animate the rest of Boorman's film, of which there are many. Upon closer inspection, however, these outwardly derivative scenes do more to destabilize than substantiate Van der Hoven and Arnott's support for those moral truths unveiled by this melodramatic interpretation of the Commission. For one thing, the cry let out by Sobandla largely fails to convey with any comparable affective force the anguish that motivated Calata's original distress. Similarly, the basic configuration of her hearing finds little correspondence with those staged originally by the Truth Commission. The makers of *In My Country* blithely confuse the distinct procedures of the HRVC, a supposedly compassionate space dedicated to eliciting uncritically victims' confessional accounts of past abuse, with those of the Amnesty Committee, a quasi-legal body designed to adjudicate on perpetrators' criminal liability and underwritten by the burden of proof. In Sobandla's case, the plausibility of her extreme anguish is made to depend absolutely on the tormenting appearance of her husband's killer, Sergeant Dreyer, as she attempts to relay her story—precisely the type of encounter proscribed by the HRVC.

Marched into the hearing under police escort as reproachful shouts issue from the assembled crowd, Dreyer takes his seat just a few feet away from Sobandla on the makeshift stage. He is shown snarling in defiance as she recalls how the police laughed at her when she attempted to obtain information about her husband's disappearance. His actions are purposefully provocative, entrenching the divide between victim and perpetrator, between good and evil, it seems. Turning to confront Dreyer directly, Sobandla concludes her evidence with a desperate petition for him to acknowledge his part in her husband's death: 'To this day, I do not know what happened to him. You must tell me'.[34] But Dreyer sits unmoved before her, playing the role of merciless perpetrator with aplomb. It is only after he is directed by Reverend Mzondo, the fictional equivalent to Tutu, to make a 'full confession' that he begins to offer up any information. With scant care for Sobandla's fragile condition, Dreyer describes

how her husband was viewed as 'a thorn in the side' of the apartheid regime and was nominated for 'elimination'. He recalls how Hubert Sobandla 'fought like a tiger' when beaten by police officers. 'He was fighting for his life', Dreyer continues, with a slight smirk appearing across his face. It is only with this distressing revelation that his widow, Albertina Sobandla, collapses, screaming in anguish as she is helped from the hall. 'I'm sorry to Mrs Sobandla', Dreyer calls out in between her cries, before he turns to Mzondo and the rest of the commissioners with an obvious sense of self-satisfaction: 'I'm asking for amnesty. I have made a full disclosure'.

Such instances of 'false invention', as David Philips terms them, might perhaps be overlooked as necessary to melodrama's negotiation of the many affective excesses circulating at the Commission were it not for the sense of triumphant resolution at which these scenes ultimately aim.[35] Boorman's 'barely fictionalized' but, ultimately, also fallacious rendering of another case, Seditso Motasi, who in 1987 witnessed his mother's murder at the hands of three security police officers, provides for an especially instructive example.[36] In Boorman's account, the boy is re-named Peter Makeba but the details of the case are reprised almost verbatim from the transcripts of Paul van Vuuren, one of the offending officer's original Amnesty Committee hearing. His fictional equivalent, a police officer named Van Deventer, first reports the clinical method with which he and his colleagues in the security police first smothered and then shot Makeba's father. He recalls too how they proceeded thereafter to turn their guns on the boy's mother, who stood defiantly before them in protection of her young son. With the boy placed for some inexplicable reason alone on a chair facing the assembled audience, Boorman adds to this confession a wholly specious scene in which the police officer turns to petition Makeba for absolution.

Leaving his position behind the microphone, Van Deventer steps out in front of his young victim. 'I'll look after him', Van Deventer announces in a desperate effort to make recompense, 'I'll pay his school fees'. With little regard for this misplaced paternalism, the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of the boy's face, tracking his eyes as they move up to meet those of the amnesty applicant in seeming astonishment. Under the rubric of melodrama, this small gesture is understood to signal Makeba's assent and Van Deventer falls to his knees in front of the boy in relief. Supposedly brought into symbolic parity, the pair embrace each other, the police officer somehow forgiven and redeemed. Commenting on the scene as part of his director's commentary, Boorman describes it as a 'moving moment' in which the audience is 'seeing exactly what happened' at the original hearing. Except, as Flanery also points out, an examination of the transcripts

FIGURE 7. A police officer named Van Deventer pleads with his victim's young child for forgiveness. From *In My Country* (2004), directed by John Boorman and produced by Sony Pictures Classic.

from Van Vuuren's original hearing reveals no such moving encounter. Financial concerns were raised at the conclusion of another officer's Amnesty Committee hearing by Motasi's elderly grandmother, who feared for the future security of her orphaned grandchild, but no personal offer of reparation was ever made.

The 'outrageous appropriation' of Motasi's suffering, as Flanery describes it, does much to betray the genre's declared concern for those 'ordinary citizens', to return to Gledhill, that suffered most under apartheid.[37] When examined against the ongoing trauma cited by the film, it is hard to conceive of its sensationalist reinterpretation as motivated by anything other than melodrama's 'one overriding aesthetic goal: the calling forth of "pure," "vivid" emotions'—to invoke Daniel Gerould's description.[38] This is not to dismiss the genre out of hand, but to probe the appeal made by these 'TRC films' to the more specific melodrama of forgiveness. In scenes like this, any of the complex moral and affective truths that Van der Hoven and Arnott sanctify appear to have been overtaken the genre's more precipitous preference for narrative as much as moral redemption. Of course, there is a necessary case to be made for the interpersonal and intrapsychical relief that forgiveness may secure. As Minow attests, 'through forgiveness, victims can reassert their own power and reestablish their own dignity while also teaching wrongdoers the effects of their harmful actions'.[39] In the wider pursuit of reconciliation, forgiveness offers itself up as an important

mechanism through which to reintegrate those individual perpetrators who otherwise appear beyond the sphere of moral concern.

This rationale is severely undermined, however, when these plausible benefits are cut free from their situated, personal mooring in an effort, as Bhekizizwe Peterson describes, to deify forgiveness 'as the *sine qua non* of nationhood and progress'.[40] Not only do expedient injunctions like Tutu's 'no future without forgiveness' threaten to deny victims their 'acute, pervasive and transgenerational experiences of suffering', but this forgiving drive also appears to act as a 'disempowering burden', Peterson insists, disabling the criminal case against apartheid's chief architects.[41] Moreover, as a number of analysts all affirm, the actual prospect of forgiveness brought about by the Commission found little correspondence with the vision propagated publicly by Tutu and others.[42] Examination of the Commission's HRVC hearings reveals that forgiveness seldom ever featured as a topic for discussion, and when it did, it was not without express encouragement from the commissioner leading the particular hearings. For the limited number of deponents who spoke of forgiveness, it was usually to deny its promise and to underline, instead, their abiding sense of distress and anger.

Even if we accept *In My Country* as giving sweeping but legible shape to the Truth Commission in its intricate, peripatetic journeying across the country, the way in which specific hearings are selectively rehearsed and revised ultimately discredits the film's democratic credentials. By comparison, *Red Dust* can claim no such partial mitigation. But neither does it maintain quite the same litany of abuses. Favouring the comparative intensity of a single hearing set in the fictional frontier town of Smitsriver, Hooper's film still confuses the conditions that distinguish the HRVC hearings from those of the Amnesty Committee. Here, however, there is some important precedence at least. On a large proscenium stage, we are presented with the Commission's fictional chair, Justice Neville Mashaba, a victim of gross human rights abuse named Alex Mpondo, the police officer, Dirk Hendricks, accused of torturing Mpondo under apartheid, and the deponents' respective lawyers. Despite the obvious procedural confusions, the hearing's historical source is almost immediately identifiable once the details of the case emerge. Drawing from one of the Commission's most notorious Amnesty Committee hearings, Hendriks appears to approximate the notorious apartheid-era police officer, Jeffrey Benzien. Much like Benzien's most notable victim, Tony Yengeni, a former MK cadre turned ANC MP, who came before the Amnesty Committee to oppose his application, Mpondo was subjected to a similarly brutal interrogation by Hendriks while under arrest for alleged acts of terrorism under apartheid.

It is an acutely provocative case to reprise. Yengeni had been provided a unique opportunity by the Amnesty Committee to cross-question Benzien, directing him to describe and then, unnervingly, re-enact before the Committee the particular methods used in his torture, most notoriously his preferred wet-bag method—as witnessed in Yaël Farber's *Molora*. Taking a pillow and a curiously willing volunteer from the audience, Benzien squatted over his victim, pulling tight the makeshift bag over a volunteer's head to supply a moment of damaging disclosure. As a venomous rejoinder to this request, however, Benzien proceeded subsequently to prey upon Yengeni's own vulnerability, remarking upon the MP's faint resistance. According to Benzien, he quickly gave up the names of fellow anti-apartheid activists like Jennifer Schreiner.[43] It was an unnerving display of the sadistic authority still held by the perpetrator over his victim, with Benzien actively taunting Yengeni as the two slipped back into their former roles.

In *Red Dust*'s earliest scenes, Mpondo, much like Yengeni, prompts Hendricks to confess before the Committee to some of his abusive acts. Hendriks's account, presented in the same stoic, chilling tone of Benzien's own deposition, affects a collective gasp of horror from the black audience assembled for the hearing. But rather than inviting Hendriks to restage his method, Mpondo is, instead, overtaken by traumatic flashbacks to the scene of his original torture. Incorporating something of the scene that emerged at Benzien's Amnesty Committee hearing, Mpondo is pictured as part of this induced analepsis with his head covered as he thrashes on the floor in pain. We hear his skull crash against the floor, before the wet-bag is eventually removed and a close-up captures the look of terror that flashes across his face. Returning to the public hearing, Hendricks describes how he would repeat the procedure in an effort to break his victim, and with each new detail, the film cuts back to the scene of Mpondo's original torture. In a somewhat crude effort, it seems, to raise the tension of this already distressing scene, a small clock ticks volubly in the background, counting down each excruciating second, as Hendricks's lawyer queries whether the technique produced its desired effect. The clock then stops, the silence swelling, before Hendricks declares with a measure of climactic satisfaction: 'He told me what I wanted to know'.[44]

With this shocking revelation, cries of outrage and disgust explode from the audience, while Hendriks continues to describe how Mpondo gave him the details to an arms and ammunitions dump. Mpondo, meanwhile, begins to shake with a seeming admixture of anger and self-reproach. The firm, defiant gaze he had hitherto targeted at Hendricks breaks as he hangs his head in shame. The audience, meanwhile, continues to grow increasingly clamorous, with many shout-

ing the amnesty applicant down, while others can be seen looking at one another open-mouthed in disbelief. 'Do you think he really sold out?', remarks one elderly woman to her husband, before the Committee's chair is forced to stand up and request calm. Thereafter, the hearing adopts a procedural style more appropriate to a courtroom drama than any Amnesty Committee hearing. Mpondo's lawyer stands up to oppose Hendricks's remarks, assuring the commissioner that her 'client will refute the allegations in his testimony' before the hall clears out and Mpondo's narrative search for personal and reputational redemption begins.

Red Dust is not a straightforward tale of forgiveness. At least, it is Mpondo, rather than Hendriks, who is most eager to secure the forgiveness of those he has wronged in the past. In so doing, he also finds a way to absolve Hendriks and agree to his appeal for amnesty, but this is made secondary to Mpondo's own route to absolution. It is from this comparatively incongruous perspective, therefore, that *Red Dust* provides its sensitive account of the tumultuous, fragile emotional terrain from which the pursuit of forgiveness always also emerges. In scenes that suspend their narrative intelligibility, Mpondo focalises the ongoing trauma as well as the rising sense of shame that also stalks his sense of personhood. We are made privy to his internal suffering—something wholly absent from *In My Country*. But *Red Dust* cannot shake off the urge to redeem the past and give expression to the country's forgiving future. In this, Mpondo is made metonymical, his status as a public representative evidently designed to stand in for the country as a whole. As such, his trauma is also the trauma endured nationally, while his capacity to overcome the injustice of apartheid also reflects the supposed willingness of ordinary citizens to do the same. He is, it seems, both for the people and of the people, guiding them spiritually and morally towards the film's final, climactic scene of liberation from the past. Cheered and ululated by the crowd at the film's conclusion, he offers up to the nation a vision of its collective deliverance.

Melodrama's Populism

Where melodrama may claim a prodigious role in the democratic life of the nation, in its general appeal to the popular it also appears to stand vulnerable before the monumental tale of redemption that has come increasingly to animate the country's transition. To this extent, the genre's plausibly laudable efforts work through apartheid's most recalcitrant antipathies seem to do less to reconstitute the country's moral sphere than they do to legitimate the injustice ongoing in the present. At its worst, the melodramatic scenes of forgiveness that

emerge from these 'TRC films' appear as a national asset, affirming the supposed exceptionalism of South Africa's 'ordinary citizens' in the long history of mass violence. Under these terms, they risk conscripting the affective in service of other less ethical, more coercive, even commercial ends. But such risks are not necessarily unique to melodrama; they arguably parallel the priorities driving the country's incipient film industry more generally in the wake of apartheid. For where certain critics, most notably Jacqueline Maingard, celebrate the transformative objectives driving the national cinema in the first decade of democracy, others remain far less convinced. The industry's foundational 1996 White Paper, for instance, has been subject to particular censure with many commentators unable to reconcile its cultural ambitions with its globalised commercial underpinnings. Even as Lucia Saks underlines 'the crucial role of cinema in envisioning the new nation through a progressive/continuous state of vision and critique', she derides the White Paper for its unnerving reliance upon 'phrases that could have emerged from a reader on neoliberal economic policy'.[45] In a particularly trenchant attack upon the distortive influences presiding over the industry, Flanery too questions how others can even begin to speak of a truly national cinema 'when the financing, personnel, and circulation, to varying degrees, have so often been and remain emphatically multi-and transnational'.[46]

The pair of 'TRC films' reviewed above fair especially poorly under this critical light. Both *Red Dust* and *In My Country* were adapted from their South African source texts by American screenwriters. With British directors at the helm, they were each realised with major Hollywood actors in leading roles, namely Hilary Swank, Jamie Bartlett, Juliette Binoche, Samuel L. Jackson, and Brendan Gleeson. National funding for *In My Country* totalled just US$ 20,000 (c. R 200,000), invested by the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC), a public finance institution interested, as Saks describes, only by 'productions that will attract international players'.[47] For the IDC, a project is considered feasible only 'if it can be shot in South Africa *and* find an international market'.[48] Only seven prints of *In My Country* were distributed nationally after the CTWCF, grossing a mere R 155, 840 at the South African box office.[49] Hooper's film, by contrast, did secure funding from Videovision Entertainment, a large South African production company led by Anant Singh, in official collaboration with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Its distributor, the British company United International Pictures—which maintains a marginal share in a market dominated by Ster-Kinekor, the same distribution company that monopolised the industry under apartheid—released only fifteen prints in South Africa.[50] Earning just R 309,738 in South Africa, the film's gross per print

was largely equal to that of *In My Country* at just over R 20,000—barely enough to cover the cost of each printing.[51]

The failure of *Red Dust* and *In My Country* to secure a verifiably popular appeal in South Africa not only tests the claims made by Van der Hoven and Arnott over the 'significant social impact' of melodrama, but such poor box-office receipts also seriously derogate the films' purchase within the South African cinematic economy at large.[52] To this extent, it appears increasingly impracticable to defend their melodramatic composition as a response to the concerns of a South African audience in pursuit of a new moral, democratic order. Of more immediate seeming concern are the demands of an international, chiefly American audience for whom 'the master narrative of South Africa's democratic struggle' is required to function more as an allegorical frame through which to navigate their own suffering, to borrow from Rita Barnard's argument over Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948). With similarly scant concern for the historical frameworks that condition the films' narratives, under these terms, the long struggle for democracy finds itself flattened out and made serviceable as a type of 'therapeutic travelogue'.[53]

The casting of Samuel L. Jackson as Langston Whitfield, a cynical American journalist reporting on the Commission's hearings for the *Washington Post*, in Boorman's *In My Country* and Hilary Swank as an expatriate South African lawyer recently returned from New York in Hooper's *Red Dust* certainly expedite this process. Not simply a boost for the commercial appeal of the films within the American marketplace, their characters act from their removed perspective as filters through which to mediate and make accessible the redemptive, therapeutic potential of the Commission for a removed, comparatively inexpert audience. Swank's character, for instance, offers obligingly ill-informed estimations of the Commission's function that are then contested and recomposed as the film progresses, the audience effectively sharing in her enlightenment. Similarly, Jackson's role in *In My Country* helpfully (which is to say hazardously) extrapolates many of the film's specific contextual details, rendering apartheid, as he writes in one of his filed newspaper reports, as the 'South African Holocaust'. Eschewing concern for what Achille Mbembe describes plainly as the circumstantial as well as historical 'distance that prevents the traumas, the absence, and the loss from ever being the same', both *In My Country* and *Red Dust* attempt to render South Africa as a proxy for a more generic collective suffering.[54] Ultimately, the impressions that prevail in both films are essentially 'touristic', to borrow again from Barnard, propagating a type of 'soul branding' that situates the Truth Commission at the heart of South Africa's national redemption.[55]

This is no more evident than in the sumptuous aerial shots of Cape Point, the Northern Drakensburg's sweeping Amphitheatre, and the verdant Blyde River Canyon that open *In My Country* and the equally striking panorama of the Eastern Cape's Valley of Desolation with which *Red Dust* begins. Just as in *Cry, the Beloved Country*'s lofty, opening vision of the Natal midlands, in fact, these title sequences offer an inviting pictorial of South Africa, 'lovely beyond any singing of it', to borrow from Paton's novel.[56] This affinity with Paton's 'almost cinematic' rendering of the hills outside Ixopo, as Herman Wittenberg puts it, extends even to the sublime vision through which both films counterpose the country's profound beauty with a sense of the potent terror brimming beneath its surface.[57] Directly preceding *Red Dust*'s evocative, high-angle tracking shots, for instance, is a brief but disquieting close-up of a gravely beaten black man stricken on a dusty floor. Staring directly into the camera, his limp hand points towards the audience both in accusation and in supplication as he is dragged out of shot. The large pool of cranial blood left behind captures only an indistinct reflection of his assailant who struggles to manoeuvre the body. By comparison, *In My Country*'s wide opening vistas cross fade into raw documentary footage of a violent assault against a number of black protesters by South African security police, likely shot by news crews during the 1980s. In each, the transcendent beauty of the landscape, to recall again Wittenberg's account of Paton's novel, is made to feel 'threatened by the facts of racial injustice'.[58]

Unlike *Cry, the Beloved Country*, however, which at the very least allows this sublime vision to structure a narrative tension, *Red Dust* and *In My Country* presently displace such facts of racial injustice with the triumphant intercession of democracy. As the picture shifts in *Red Dust* from its remote prospect on top of the hills, it tracks the flight of a number of children racing through an informal settlement to greet a long line of trucks traversing the valley floor. With the vehicles branded with the insignia of 'Truth and Reconciliation' and adorned with the nation's new flag, this stylised entrance invites a comforting but crude kinship between the Truth Commission and the all-too familiar images of international aid agencies as they arrive in post-conflict territories to provide relief from famine and disease. Like Boorman, who inserts into his title sequence footage of Nelson Mandela's jubilant parade at Soweto's Soccer City Stadium in 1990, Hooper forecloses any sense of those ongoing and unjust legacies that might threaten to undermine his film's therapeutic narrative. The final resolution written into *Red Dust*, in which Mpondo is granted forgiveness by his comrade's family, is never seriously put in doubt. Barcant returns to her job in New York armed with fresh affection for her native South Africa, while Mpondo

is able to continue with his work in parliament supposedly liberated from the burdens of his past.

For the limited audience that ever saw this pair of popular films in South Africa's cinemas, evidently the aim was to leave them contented with the work of the Commission in resolving the difficult traumas of apartheid and satisfied by the prospect of a healed democratic future for the country more generally. Perhaps it is this troubling departure from the bounds of any verifiable collective experience that accounts for their general unpopularity, locally at least. But this has not prevented their broader circulation elsewhere, and it is this wider appeal to a distorted and increasingly corruptive image of South African exceptionalism that irks so many of their critics. Further corroborating images of the Rainbow Nation, the forgiving spirit of the apartheid's many victims endorsed by these 'TRC films' entails similarly derealizing consequences, not least for the black majority whose lives have been little improved by the transition to democracy. Even maintaining a sense of the 'double hermeneutic' through which the melodramatic imagination proceeds does little to help rescue them from their intensely emotive negotiation of the past a strictly democratic, rather than merely popular, agenda.

Melodrama's Unreal: *Forgiveness*

As intimated already, Ian Gabriel's *Forgiveness* maintains a certain distinction within this band of 'TRC films', and not just by virtue of its comparatively narrow focus on a time and place beyond the Commission's public hearings. Produced by Dv8, a modest initiative launched by Jeremy Nathan and Joel Phiri in 2001 to 'develop, produce and market twelve genuine South African digital feature films', it maintains a degree of separation too from the financial, aesthetic and, indeed, ideological influences that so clearly dominate *Red Dust* and *In My Country*.[59] Greg Latter, the lead writer for the long-running South African 'edutainment' television series *Soul City*, provided the original script and, much like his television work, *Forgiveness* maintains a pedagogical impulse with its published screenplay prefaced by support material for use in South African schools. There is, it seems, a broadly creditable commitment to social justice at the heart of the film, something that helps to distinguish it from the comparatively touristic ambitions of these other 'TRC films'.

That said, the international leverage that afflicts *In My Country* and *Red Dust* should not be discounted altogether from an assessment of *Forgiveness*. In the face of consistently low patronage at South African cinema screens, for instance,

Gabriel has spoken of the serious obligations placed upon him 'to make films that speak to and appeal to an international as well as a local audience'.[60] Similarly, his wife and co-producer on the film, Cindy Gabriel, has argued in her concluding remarks for its press notes that *Forgiveness* should be viewed as a 'drama that deals with the issue of truth and reconciliation in a universal, cinematic way'.[61] But when set against the gross abstractions made by Boorman and Hooper, Gabriel's narrative retreat in *Forgiveness* to the small Western Cape town of Paternoster, together with his intimate depiction of a Coloured family burdened by the racial injustice of the past, helps to salvage some of its credentials from the transnational concerns that corrupt these 'TRC films' more generally.

Moreover, where *In My Country* and *Red Dust* are arguably constrained by their attachment to the Commission's proceedings, *Forgiveness* pursues its melodramatic ambitions in terms that also exceed such a broadly realist framework. This is a vital feature of the genre, which as Gledhill explains, necessarily makes 'a demand for significances unavailable within the constraints of socially legitimate discourse'.[62] Realism may be where melodrama often begins, but in its deferral to those 'pure and polar concepts of darkness and light, salvation and damnation', to return to Brooks, it is the spiritual realm towards which it more often tends. As Gledhill conceives it, then, the genre must be taken as a transition from, and within, the realist mode, sharing rather than eschewing its fundamental regard for verisimilitude, even as it also extrapolates its causal logic to make intelligible elements of the hyperbolic and the gestural, the emotive and the fantastic, the subjective and the surreal that animate the former. In other words, the melodramatic imagination satisfies the demand made by realism to depict 'how things are in a given historical conjuncture' not by attempting to reproduce them but by giving form to the atavistic desires stirring beneath the surface.[63]

It is this wider appeal to the 'spiritual force' of melodrama, then, that above all distinguishes Gabriel's 'TRC film' from this more general index. Refusing many of the conventions of narrative reason, *Forgiveness* makes no attempt to pursue the 'literal and rational weighing up of a particular claim to forgiveness on the grounds of measurable and representable degrees of sincerity on the part of an individual', as Van der Hoven and Arnott put it.[64] Instead, *Forgiveness* hinges on the potential of the melodramatic imagination to make legible the 'spiritual meaning' latent, according to Brooks, 'within the sphere of human ethical relationships'.[65] Making recourse to a highly expressive visual grammar, Gabriel begins by obviating many of the film's historical and contextual markers in favour of this more symbolic register. The opening sequence, for instance,

pictures the central character, Tertius Coetzee, speeding along a dusty coastal road, leaving no indication of the route by which he has arrived, figuratively or literally. With the camera preferring instead to give expression to the man's distressed psychical state, these early frames display a fractured vision of his journey. The principal point of focus is not the road but a medal of Saint Christopher that swings from Coetzee's rear-view mirror. Searching, it seems, for some form of salvation, he garners temporary relief from a heavy dose of anti-depressants. But his self-medicating also frustrates our attempt to diagnose the underlying source of his anguish.

When eventually the car stops at a windswept cemetery and Coetzee pauses to add drops to his sleep-deprived eyes, the camera also blurs, inviting the viewer to share directly in his distorted visual prospect. It is the first in a series of moves designed, it seems, to encourage our identification with the character. But it is also part of the film's early narrative disorientation, heightening the audience's sense of anticipation. As Coetzee walks slowly around the cemetery, with the wind whipping the sandy topsoil across the graves and further obscuring the names marked on their rudimentary wooden crosses, the feeling of diegetic confusion only rises. Eventually, he alights upon a grave marked 'Daniel Jacobus Grootboom'. He stares at the name, wiping away the dirt and residue that conceals the dates: '03-10-1971–26-08-1991'. The significance is unclear, even if we might, in the context of the turbulent early years of South Africa's transition, begin to guess at their meaning. But as the man turns to stare wistfully out towards an increasingly tempestuous skyline, the audience is left in a state of increasingly muddled anticipation.

This inexplicable opening is only compounded as the camera cuts from the cemetery to Coetzee's subsequent arrival at a local B&B. Rather than offering up his name to the genial proprietor, as may be anticipated, he remarks in oblique terms on a caged Java rice finch, placed at the forefront of the shot: 'They're not from here, but they survive in the wild'.[66] Aimed, we might surmise, to reflect upon the character's own alien status, this circuitous reference speaks to the film's general refusal to grant its audience with any simple narrative exposition, intensifying the generic pleasure thought to inhere in the act of speculation. It is only with the arrival of the local priest, Father Dalton, that the film finally provides the viewer with any firm contextual foundation. From Dalton it emerges that Coetzee is a former apartheid police officer responsible for Daniel Grootboom's death. Having obtained amnesty from the Truth Commission, he has travelled to the small town, we discover, in order to meet with his victim's family and seek their forgiveness.

But Dalton serves to provide more than narrative exposition. In lieu of any formal representation of the Truth Commission, the priest also animates something of the same spiritual framework that, under Tutu, structured its original public hearings. Indeed, Tutu's sacred influence over the film manifests in other, comparatively crude terms, most obviously in its literal rendering of the symbolism used to describe the act of forgiveness in his memoir, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. 'Imagine you are in dank, stuffy, and dark room', Tutu writes:

> This is because the curtains are drawn and the windows have been shut. Outside the light is shining and a fresh breeze is blowing. If you want the light to stream into that room and the fresh air to flow in, you will have to open the window and draw the curtain apart. . . . So it is with forgiveness.[67]

By direct comparison, the Grootboom family are pictured initially emerging from the dark interior of their home as Coetzee arrives with Dalton to speak with them. A neighbour briefly interrupts the scene to remark in pointed terms to Daniel's mother, Magda, that it is 'nice to see you outside again'.[68] Her appearance, even on the partial shade of the stoep, is evidently an anomaly. And when her daughter, Sannie, seeks to remind them all of the way Coetzee 'put a bullet in Daniel's head', Magda turns to her husband, pleading him to 'take [her] inside', unable, in Tutu's figurative terms, to tolerate the light.[69]

This is all part of the excessive styling within which Gabriel frames his film's melodramatic drive towards forgiveness. At its worst, *Forgiveness* has been derided as a 'willed choice in the direction . . . of justifying the amnesty clause'.[70] But to maintain a more sympathetic view is also to discover in its sacramental structure a potentially moving and numinous transformation in its characters, if not also in its audience. In this, much depends, however, on the affective power of Coetzee's subsequent confession. Invited by Sannie to return to the Grootboom's home, he is greeted by the rest of the family with a mix of hostility and incredulity. Nonetheless, Dalton encourages them to listen to the former police officer describe the details of Daniel's death. With the camera focused tightly on his face as he sits facing the family, Coetzee begins to recount how Daniel's initial capture was made to look like a bungled hijacking, with the young activist's car burnt out and left on the side of the road. He is visibly distressed as he continues to describe how Daniel was then taken to a police facility known euphemistically as 'the farm' outside Cape Town and tortured for information. We see the family gasp and recoil with collective horror at this disclosure. Despite being suffocated, electrocuted, and forced to stand for many hours without relief, Coetzee insists that Daniel refused to confess to his role in any anti-apartheid

activism. In fact, he spoke only once: 'He asked me, please rather . . . just kill me', Coetzee confesses.[71]

With this distressing revelation, the camera cuts suddenly to Daniel's brother, Ernest, as he instinctively grabs at a teapot on the windowsill before bringing it crashing down on Coetzee's head. Playing out in slow motion, the scene momentarily blurs, leaving the audience confused as the family too jump to their feet in shock. But as Ernest subsequently slips away, the camera returns to Magda and Sannie who rush to stem the blood streaming down Coetzee's temple. There is, undoubtedly, much melodramatic force written into this reprisal. For one thing, it gives expression to the intense, even vengeful affective arena within which the act of confession is compelled to operate. But it also gives symbolic form to the sacramental structure of the film. For the family discover in Coetzee's bodily suffering—his performed penitence, as it were—an unexpected catharsis. While Magda initially remains locked up within the gloom of the indoors, declaring despondently, 'There's nothing out there for me', her husband Hendrik returns to work on his small fishing boat.[72] Where previously he complained of the crippling low yields, he suddenly finds himself hooking in an unexpectedly abundant return of snoek fish.[73] This miraculous haul, 'the biggest catch we've had in years', according to Hendrik, is imagined within this apostolic atmosphere as a mark of the revivifying process brought about by Coetzee's confession.[74]

Their collective salvation reaches its acme when the former police officer invites the family out to celebrate Hendrik's remarkable catch. The dinner serves as something of a Last Supper for Coetzee, who has learned of Ernest and Sannie's longstanding plot to have him killed. But it functions too as the moment of miraculous liberation for Magda, who finally frees herself from the darkness of her grief. Accordingly, she raises a glass to toast the former policeman, offering him her forgiveness. Her ability to 'look the beast in the eye', to make literal Tutu's phraseology, and grant him clemency is, ultimately, what validates the moral authority of the film, her forgiveness safeguarding Coetzee, in the final analysis, from Ernest's vengeful conspiracy. Unlike those other 'TRC films', Gabriel does not make this conclusion inevitable. Indeed, even while *Forgiveness* aims to leave its audience satisfied in the final scene by its rehabilitated moral order, it also makes use of its melodramatic intensity and inexplicable plot twists to ensure that the audience remains suitably doubtful over the power of forgiveness right to the end.

In this, however, it is arguably the melodramatic pleasure of anticipation that motivates the film's formal progress, over and above the pursuit of justice. Certainly, under Gledhill's reasoning, such elements might be defended as part of its generic transition from the sphere of the real to a more suggestive sense of the

FIGURE 8. Tertius Coetzee is attacked by his victim's brother, Ernest, while petitioning the family for forgiveness. From *Forgiveness* (2004), directed by Ian Gabriel and produced by Dv8 Film.

unreal. But this transition also stands vulnerable before the triumphant, populist agenda that reigns over these 'TRC films' more generally. For much like *In My Country* and *Red Dust*, the redemptive arc pursued by *Forgiveness* contradicts many of the ordinary stories of grief upon which it also depends. This is nowhere more evident than in its misappropriation of a key scene from Mark Kaplan's documentary film *Between Joyce and Remembrance* (2003).[75] Captured by Kaplan while filming the family of Siphiwo Mtimkulu, a black student activist first tortured and later shot dead by security police in 1982, it depicts his alleged killer, Lieutenant Colonel Gideon Nieuwoudt's abortive confession and subsequent petition for forgiveness. Just as in Gabriel's revision, it ends with the former police officer being attacked by one of his victim's relatives. But the conditions of Nieuwoudt's confession, to say nothing of its subsequent impact on the Mtimkulu family, bear little by way of comparison with those that animate *Forgiveness*.

Melodrama's Real: *Between Joyce and Remembrance*

Before his death in 2005, Nieuwoudt was liable to stir especially embittered outbursts from South Africa's black citizenry. Responsible, among a host of other crimes, for the death of Steve Biko, feted leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, while in police custody in 1977, the former security policeman

embodied precisely the type of 'exquisite cruelty' that Coetzee too reflects in *Forgiveness*.[76] Like many prominent agents of the state, Nieuwoudt defended himself against such opprobrium, deferring to executives of apartheid like Adriaan Vlok, sometime minister for law and order, and to the implicit presidential authority under which he acted. His conduct may have been disgraceful, but it was also dutiful—at least, this was the justification generally levied by the regime's rank and file. Nonetheless, when investigations uncovered Nieuwoudt's prominent role in a bomb blast that unlawfully killed three black policemen and a police informer in Motherwell in 1989, he was tried and successfully convicted in June 1996 to some twenty years in prison.[77] He lodged an immediate appeal against his conviction, however, securing release from prison on conditional bail. He also signalled his intention to make an application to the Amnesty Committee, eventually submitting four separate requests, covering his role in ten apartheid-era assassinations, the so-called Motherwell Four, Steve Biko, and Siphiwo Mtimkulu all included.

Kaplan's documentary begins as Nieuwoudt was preparing evidence for the Truth Commission in September 1997. However, it is not principally a film about his appeal for amnesty. Rather, it takes as its general focus the struggle of the Mtimkulu family, amid their aggravated grief, to secure the truth about Siphiwo's disappearance. Nieuwoudt is unavoidably integral to their search, but Kaplan is careful to frame his account with details of the police officer's torture and, later, murder of both Siphiwo and his friend Topsy Mdaka. He even includes a series of disturbing re-enactments of the violence inflicted by Nieuwoudt and his colleagues.[78] Even so, Nieuwoudt evidently also saw in Kaplan's documentary a unique opportunity to enhance his otherwise corrupted reputation, petitioning the filmmaker to arrange a meeting with the Mtimkulu family 'in the spirit', as he puts it, 'of reconciliation and forgiveness'.[79] This, despite the fact that he had only recently conspired to prevent Siphiwo's mother, Joyce, from testifying before the HRVC when it first visited East London in 1996. Along with a number of former colleagues from the security police, Nieuwoudt had acquired a court injunction that prevented him from being named in any public submission to the Commission without timeous notice of the evidence against him. When other deponents were deemed to have violated the order by referring to him as 'Mr. X' and 'that person that cannot be named', he even charged the Truth Commission with contempt of court.

Despite this injunction, Joyce was not deterred from indicting Nieuwoudt for the abuses he inflicted on her son in police custody in 1981. At a later convening of the HRVC in Port Elizabeth, Dumisa Ntsebeza, the commissioner leading

the hearing, asked Joyce to clarify precisely who she meant when she referred to Nieuwoudt as the 'forerunner' in Siphiwo's torture. She responded forcefully:

> He is one of the people who tried to prohibit [Siphiwo] and sent an interdict that we shouldn't mention his name. I don't know any other Nieuwoudt except that one, he is the same person who used to pretend to be a Minister of religion. He would put on the collar and he would come and collect Siphiwo. He would say he is a member of the Methodist church in town. He is the same Nieuwoudt that I am talking about. He is Gideon Nieuwoudt.[80]

She subsequently relayed for the court how Nieuwoudt and his colleague, Cornelius Roelofse, 'would take pipes and electric wire and . . . hit him, flog on the back severely' before suffocating him with a wet towel until he lost consciousness and even electrocuting him on occasion. Joyce recalled how her son was starved for days, the meagre food they offered him often contaminated with cigarette ash.

Unable to walk or even eat when eventually he returned home, Siphiwo was soon admitted to hospital, first in Port Elizabeth before being transferred to the Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town. Here it was confirmed that he had been poisoned, with Joyce even producing for the HRVC clumps of the hair that fell from Siphiwo's head as a consequence.[81] Like many of the victims that testified before the Commission, Joyce was desperate to secure official corroboration for her story:

> I want you today to see Commission, that we have his hair together with his scalp attached to the hair . . . to witness what I've brought here today so that they should know the effect of the poison which was used on my son.

Equally pressing, however, are the basic details of Siphiwo's subsequent disappearance. She concludes, therefore, by asking of the Commission: 'Where did they leave the bones of my child? Where did they take him from Port Elizabeth, who handed him over to them? Where did they take him to? What did they do to him?'

Nieuwoudt's request to meet with the Mtimkulu family under what he claimed to be 'the auspices of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee [*sic*]' presented a unique opportunity for the family to interrogate the former police officer and, potentially, have such vital questions answered. Capturing Nieuwoudt's journey to the Mtimkulu family's home in August 1997, the camera trained closely upon his face as he looks out of the window, idly smoking a

cigarette, Kaplan is still to be convinced, however, by the former police officer's particular motives for the visit. He reflects in his narrative voiceover on Nieuwoudt's astonishing stoicism:

> Looking at him, I saw no sign of remorse. What strikes me most is how remote he seems. But perhaps this is merely the outward sign of someone suddenly powerless, now trying to hold things together while living a nightmare.

With this forewarning, Nieuwoudt is pictured knocking on the front door to the Mtimkulu family's typically small, government house. Greeted nervously by Siphiwo's father, Sipho, Nieuwoudt is led to a seat in front of the family. He begins with what sounds like a rehearsed plea, spoken more for the sake of the camera:

> Why I'm here is to seek forgiveness from the family for what hardship I have caused in the past as a result of the apartheid regime.

Joyce cuts through his detached explication. With a telling aside to Kaplan, she notes, 'Gideon [Nieuwoudt] knows very well who I am'. And like the filmmaker, she is evidently wary of his intentions, using the recorded event, by return, to discredit his affected sense of contrition. Continuing undeterred with his sermon-like address, however, Nieuwoudt loses no time in making an appeal to the family's Christian convictions, declaiming:

> With truth and sincerity, I came here today. This is where reconciliation start[s]. Where the Lord is being honoured and His name be glorified. And we seek knowledge and wisdom from Him.

Kaplan promptly undermines this liturgical solemnity, cutting to a recording of Joe Mamasela testifying before the Amnesty Committee. Here, the former black askari describes Nieuwoudt as 'the man who quoted the Bible with his head, A up to Z'. This performance of faith is, Kaplan implies, learnt by rote and all part of his deluded self-narrative.

Nieuwoudt's efforts at conciliation are equally troublesome. Whether the consequence of his faulty English or a more telling legacy of apartheid-era officialese, the former police officer repeatedly addresses Joyce and Sipho, as 'you people', removing in the process any sense of their individuation or, indeed, the intimate responsibility he holds in their suffering. Similarly, his repeated deferral to the language of bureaucracy in describing Siphiwo as 'the late Mr Mtimkulu' feels, as Lesley Marx attests, 'both nauseating and chilling'.[82] Most

troubling, however, is his repeated dissimulation. At one stage, he claims 'with clear conscience' no knowledge of Siphiwo's poisoning, even assuring the family that 'I never used no physical method [of torture] on Siphiwo, that I can tell you with the truth'. Once more, Kaplan undermines Nieuwoudt's credibility, cutting to a re-enactment of the abuse described originally by Siphiwo in a legal affidavit. In this brief, impressionistic scene, we see a young black man being forced headfirst down into a bath of water, while Siphiwo's original testimony is narrated simultaneously. Nieuwoudt is named as one of the officers who held his head beneath the cold water until he had swallowed enough to make his stomach protrude. Cutting back to the Mtimkulu's home, he assures them that as 'a matter of fact, I never eliminated Siphiwo, but here . . . I'm here asking you people for forgiveness'.

Against these obvious incongruities, Nieuwoudt's confession presents itself as an entirely calculated enterprise. But this does not in any way prepare the viewer for what happens next. Having heard his circuitous, dissembling confession, as well as his meagre efforts to apologise and make amends, Siphiwo's teenage son, Sikhumbuzo, suddenly emerges from the background of the shot. Grabbing a ceramic ornament, he smashes it over the policeman's head, fracturing his skull. It is a shocking intervention, one that entirely unsettles Kaplan as he struggles to frame the scene. His camera momentarily loses focus and falls from Nieuwoudt's face towards the floor before the filmmaker composes himself, capturing the blood as it pours from Nieuwoudt's skull. As the rest of the family rush to assist him, Sikhumbuzo can be seen rushing out the front door.

There is very little to separate this entirely spontaneous scene from the violence later scripted in *Forgiveness*. Gabriel even echoes the tight visual grammar employed by Kaplan as the attack unfolds, although he also slows the action down to add to its intensity. In some ways, it is not surprising that it found such a swift re-articulation under the rubric of melodrama, given the intense emotional sphere from which the scene emerges. Indeed, not altogether unlike those highly affective scenes harvested from the Commission's hearings and replayed in *Red Dust* and *In My Country*, Sikhumbuzo's shocking attack gives expression to something of his profound and enduring suffering in a way that language alone is arguably unable. But where *Forgiveness*, like these other 'TRC films', integrates this emotional intensity into a redemptive forgiving moral arc, critical commentators have struggled in their analysis of Kaplan's documentary to contain its contradictory affective force.

Philips, for instance, admits to a 'sense of vicarious pleasure that . . . Siphiwo's son could exact some form of physical retaliation for what [Nieuwoudt] had

FIGURE 9. Gideon Nieuwoudt sits with blood pouring from his skull following a sudden attack by his victim's teenage son, Sikhumbuzo. From *Between Joyce and Remembrance* (2003), directed by Mark Kaplan and produced by Grey Matter Media.

done to Siphiwo'.[83] Whatever the initial shock, in the context of the family's ongoing suffering, Sikhumhuzo's violent reprisal is not altogether beyond the realm of moral propriety. Saks too comments on her curious feeling of satisfaction, while Marx describes it as a 'cathartic release'.[84] Only Mark Sanders, in a remote Freudian reading of the attack, seems capable of extricating his own emotional response from his critical reading. According to Sanders, Sikhumbuzo, whose name means remembrance in isiXhosa, has been assigned a responsibility to deny Nieuwoudt 'the right to mourn' alongside and in the same 'social formation' as Siphiwo's family.[85] Under these terms, Sanders presses us to consider the attack not under the tumultuous rubric of revenge and, by possible extension, forgiveness, but collective memory and the traditional sphere of mourning.[86]

Without resolving the contradictory feelings elicited by Sikhumbuzo's attack, Kaplan has criticised what he saw as Gabriel's flagrant appropriation of this entirely impulsive act. With both directors brought together in 2004 on a panel at the CTWCF to discuss the topic of 'Truth, Reconciliation and Forgiveness: Fiction or Reality?', Kaplan pointed to the 'insouciance' shown by Gabriel in his attitude to the burdensome legacies of apartheid. By contracting Sikhumbuzo's

ongoing suffering to reinforce an alternately redemptive moral agenda, Gabriel stood accused by Kaplan of eschewing historicity in favour of a fallacious and broadly hopeful understanding of the scene, one that conveniently recomposed 'former security police men' as 'sensitive souls . . . plagued by the demons of their past', while also re-conceiving 'their victims' families [as] dysfunctional, manipulative and vindictive', as he has since put it elsewhere.[87]

In the broadest sense, Kaplan's criticism is characteristic of the entrenched hostility between the makers of documentary and narrative film. From its earliest origins, as Bill Nichols recalls, proponents of the former have sought to censure the 'distracting shadow-play of fiction' that patterns the latter.[88] And according to Daniel Lehman, who audited the fractious panel talk, Gabriel sought to defend his construal of the scene in analogous terms, insisting upon the permissible fiction that motivates *Forgiveness*. He disclaimed, for instance, any similitude between the police officer portrayed in his own film and the one documented by Kaplan. 'Tertius Coetzee is not Gideon Nieuwoudt', he reportedly insisted, but a 'a mélange of seven or eight apartheid cops' that includes Nieuwoudt but also draws upon the likes of Eugene de Kock, head of Vlakplaas, and Jeffrey Benzien, as modelled by Hendricks in *Red Dust*.[89] Indeed, as Gabriel has since described in his foreword to the published filmscript, the film was designed 'to distil the thousands of different stories that [came] out of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings', rather than detail any one particular experience.[90]

Having spent more than five years documenting the Mtimkulu family in their frustrated struggle to discover the truth about Siphiwo's death, by contrast, Kaplan did not hide his contempt for Gabriel or the ease with which *Forgiveness* appropriated elements of his original documentary. He charged the director, along with the film's screenwriter, Greg Latter, with eliding the Mtimkulu family's anguish in order to provide a 'comfortable image to white South Africans' in which 'even the most evil . . . possess the moral integrity needed for forgiveness to take place'.[91] In Kaplan's opinion, the utopianism pursued by *Forgiveness* failed to 'do justice to the pain and suffering of real victims'. It is here, in the variance between the monumental claims of the popular sphere and the troublesome, often more complex aims of its democratic alternative, that melodrama risks a form of representational injustice. In pursuit of popular appeal, melodrama potentially violates the historical and emotional truth of South Africa's transition, prioritising those scenes of forgiveness afforded to apartheid perpetrators over and above the collective grief of their victims. To this extent, the genre threatens to extend rather than end the suffering wrought by the past.

Documenting Excess and Insufficiency

The objections levied by Kaplan against Gabriel's melodramatic adaptation echo many of the more trenchant critiques levied against 'TRC films' at large. But to share in Kaplan's contempt for *Forgiveness* is also to reflect on the very specific affective claims that emerge from his original account. For while *Between Joyce and Remembrance* navigates the same tumultuous emotional terrain later occupied by Gabriel's narrative film, it manifestly avoids any melodramatic conclusion. This is not to say that Kaplan also dismisses altogether the plausible pursuit of forgiveness; Nieuwoudt's visit to the Mtimkulu family was, in principle, conditional on his status as a forgivable agent of abuse. In this, however, much depends on the sincerity of his confession. And Nieuwoudt's appeal for forgiveness did not only fail because of its barely disguised self-interest. Rather, as Siphiwo's elderly father, Sipho, put it to Nieuwoudt before he his attacked: 'My wife is saying to you . . . you're too late. And me . . . I say, you're too late'. Having survived for well over a decade with no information about their son's fate, Nieuwoudt's sudden candour was always likely to feel overdue, to say the very least. Even so, for the Mtimkulus there was also, it seems, a more malicious belatedness at work in his appeal for forgiveness. Coming at a point convenient for Nieuwoudt, the cynical timing of his confession rendered it not only insincere but also antagonistic.

As Sikhumbuzo's violent reprisal bears out, the family are evidently in no mood for this sudden bout of truth-telling. In this, *Between Joyce and Remembrance* returns us to the fragile, even perilous conditions under which all acts of confession are arguably proffered and received. Refusing Nieuwoudt's supplications, the Mtimkulu family reveal the grammar tacit to this confessional scene, making manifest the intricate temporal as well as emotional preconditions that must otherwise be met in order to validate the delivery and enable the reception of his appeal. But they also expose the incendiary consequences of its violation—that is, when victims feel compelled under the auspices of a national imperative to broker an imperfect treaty with the past. In more general terms, then, *Between Joyce and Remembrance* might be taken as an entirely indicative lesson in the pattern of excess and insufficiency that typifies the act of confession more generally—the simultaneous potential for too much truth and not enough.

This is, in part, what Sanders also implies when he draws attention to the necessary 'ambiguities of witnessing'. For him, the confessional act is always liable to prove partial, always prone to dissatisfy those clinging to its legal truth value. But this statutory inadequacy must also be made to account for those forms of

confession performed *in extremis*, at a time, that is, of uncommon emotional insecurity. Arguably, for Nieuwoudt to enter into a meaningful, which is to say remedial exchange with the Mtimkulu family, he must also share in this unstable confessional economy. Put simply, he must be prepared to make himself vulnerable before their reprehension, over and above their absolution. It is precisely this act of self-exposure that provides forgiveness with its measure of authenticity as well as its potency. By contrast, an act of confession in anticipation of forgiveness, as melodrama scripts it, runs counter to the very logic of uncertainty that must otherwise underwrite such a confessional appeal.

Understood in these terms, it seems that Nieuwoudt is attacked as much for his violation of the confessional pact as he is for his part in Siphiwo's original abuse. In an interview conducted a few days after the incident, Sikhumbuzo elaborates on this cyclical sense of abuse, noting to Kaplan:

> I don't think that I will forgive him. He is sitting there by his house and showing himself with his kids. What about us here?

For Sikhumbuzo, amnesty and the pressure applied to victims to forgive an abuser like Nieuwoudt threatens to maintain the original injustice of apartheid. For Kaplan, however, it also raises 'the possibility that Sikhumbuzo's anger could consume him'. His fears are only sharpened when he learns of the teenage boy's subsequent expulsion from school following the attack. The filmmaker cuts to a scene of Sikhumbuzo in tears as Joyce describes her grandson's increasing sense of withdrawal. Kaplan subsequently shifts to a picture of the teenager on the streets with a *majita* (gang) as they smoke and play music. Here, amid allusion to the group's criminal behaviour, Sikhumbuzo admits to Kaplan his sense of confusion and rising emotional turmoil. 'I hold things back', he admits, 'but this thing is too bad'. Denied the opportunity to forgive and plausibly grieve by Nieuwoudt's cynical actions, Sikhumbuzo, like many other victims, seems bound instead to the repeat the injustice of the past, capitulating before its seemingly irresolvable and ongoing inequity.

As Kaplan understands it, Sikhumbuzo's enduring torment is entirely indicative of the emotional naïveté both of the Truth Commission and those 'TRC films' that sought to ratify its achievements. To make forgiveness the principal measure of success is to dismiss the intricate, less than satisfying affective negotiations that this process not only enables but arguably also advocates. Just as *Between Joyce and Remembrance* begins by postponing judgement on Nieuwoudt's motives, it proceeds by troubling any singularly sympathetic engagement with Sikhumbuzo and his actions. His violent behaviour, much like his

petty criminality, renders him the subject of situational rather than singularly sentimental reflection. This is not to frame his attack on Nieuwoudt as a wanton act of revenge. But neither is it to perceive it, as Gabriel prefers, as a moment of cathartic and obligatory release. Instead, Kaplan encourages a vitally empathic response from his audience. Emerging, as theorist Murray Smith puts it, from an 'imagining from the inside', empathy here differs from sympathy and its instinctive feelings *for* the victim. Instead, it insists upon a feeling *with* them, refusing any 'total absorption', maintaining, instead, 'knowledge of the total situation' from which this affective appeal emerges.[92] In Sikhumbuzo's particular case, this empathic structure is designed to ensure that the audience does not slip into any straightforwardly uncritical emotional response to the sudden violence witnessed on screen. Instead, Kaplan encourages a more reasoned and rounded engagement with the implications of Nieuwoudt's confession, giving filmic representation to its swirling emotional intensities and seemingly irredeemable costs.

The empathic perspective pursued by *Between Joyce and Remembrance* might be further clarified according to the type of witnessing, rather than melodramatic, imagination that, in a separate context, Karen Malpede finds crucial to any recuperative representation of violence. Such a 'witnessing imagination' refuses to elide the complex historical as well as interpersonal terms under which such scenes play out. Nor does it dilute the intense, potentially contradictory affects it generates. Instead, as Malpede elaborates, it 'seeks to give form to the multiple dynamics which occur between the victim of violence and the person who provides the holding empathic environment'.[93] By this, she means to elaborate upon the formally reflexive representational conditions that allow for the suffering wrought by an intense history of violence to be recognised as much more than a political event, and, conversely, in terms more complex than the sum of its interpersonal abuses. It is a process designed to make reciprocal and collective the emotional excesses of this violence, even as it upholds the integrity of its victims' suffering. By contrast to its melodramatic equivalent, then, this witnessing imagination does not attempt to ratify the past; it has no abstract moral order according to which this hostile history must be made to yield. As Malpede has it, it 'sees into violence', attempting to bear witness to its complex, often contradictory affective intensity.[94]

In an effort, it seems, to enable this witnessing imagination to thrive, Kaplan also unravels for his audience a parallel record of his own experiences as a filmmaker under apartheid. Set amid an early report on the uncertain details of Siphiwo's original disappearance, which at the time took Joyce to Lesotho in a futile search, Kaplan adds evidence of his own mother's anguish during his broadly

contemporaneous internment for fifty-one days without trial under Section 22 of the General Laws Amendment Act in 1982. Newspaper cuttings from the period detailing the filmmaker's detention at the Caledon Square Police Station in Cape Town are displayed as a backdrop to an original audio recording of his mother, Madelaine Lewis, speaking before a protest meeting at the University of Cape Town. Made just a day after Kaplan had been deported to Zimbabwe, Lewis discloses her sense of her cruel relief, grateful at the very least that 'there can be no more cells, no more detentions for my son, no rat poison in his food'. She concludes, however, by countenancing the suffering endured by countless other women in South Africa, supposing that 'I am so much luckier than so many other mothers' whose sons have not been returned to them.

Kaplan's unusual choice to include his mother's testimony as an experiential analogue to Joyce's much more intense maternal suffering actively extends the film's empathetic environment, inviting viewers to imagine the violence of apartheid from inside these partially parallel stories. This is not to draw an inapt correlation between the director's ill-treatment and the abuses inflicted upon the Mtimkulu family. It is, however, to modulate the divide that habitually separates white filmmakers from their black subjects, an ambition that owes much to Kaplan's founding experience as the executive director of the Community Video Resource Association (CVRA) at the University of Cape Town during the early 1980s.[95] Influenced by 'Challenge for Change', a Canadian participatory film project inaugurated in 1967 in an effort to respond to a diverse set of contemporary social issues from across the country, his filmmaking with CVRA attempted, as Harriet Gavshon suggests, to usher in a fundamental change 'to the traditional relations between filmmaker and subject community, observer and observed'.[96] In *Between Joyce and Remembrance*, it is evident that these principles continue to drive Kaplan's work, his camera deployed to provide an intimate and empathetic, rather than remote, account of the family's continued suffering.

Moreover, just as his film expands its audience's empathy, it also attempts to distribute the emotional burden of the past, establishing a representational arena in which to share out those intense feelings of anger and hostility that necessarily remain despite apartheid's formal end. For in setting his account of the Mtimkulu family in dialogue with his family's own relative anguish, Kaplan arguably disaggregates the disproportionate pressure placed on those individual black victims to serve as the arbiters of forgiveness and with it the fate of the nation. His adjacent experience of apartheid sees into both the Mtimkulu family's original experience and the secondary violence bound up in the Truth Commission's implicit demand on them to give up on justice in favour of some

unifying national ethos. As Joyce readily admits in one of the documentary's earliest scenes, 'I have no idea what reconciliation is'. In staging her circumspection, Kaplan offers a powerful counter to the seductive moralism that appears to motivate both the Commission and the melodramatic imagination through which it has since been marshalled by the popular cinema screen. This is not to give up altogether on forgiveness or, indeed, reconciliation. Instead, it is to frame their plausible benefits within a much wider, collective project, one that is able to admit to their individuated, emotional, even overheated beginnings without also circumscribing their endings.

Unlike the universal therapy favoured by more popular 'TRC films', *Between Joyce and Remembrance* attempts to make itself a responsible participant in this reciprocal project. At risk of overemphasising Kaplan's adjacent experience of imprisonment and abuse, which recedes as the film progresses, his own relative struggle with and against the emotional volatility of the past implicates the Mtimkulu family's particular story within a wider constituency of suffering. There is a sense in which their anger and disdain, to say nothing of their disinclination to forgive, is rendered at once exceptional and exemplary. As such, their astonishing encounter with Nieuwoudt offers a more general rejoinder to the melodrama of forgiveness that elsewhere threatens to reinscribe the original injustice of apartheid. To take Kaplan's documentary in this way as an indicative account is to calibrate forgiveness too as an insistently social rather than individualised act, one that must be legislated collectively and distributed equitably. In this, *Between Joyce and Remembrance* offers up a vital challenge to those 'TRC films' that have otherwise taken priority in cinematic reviews of the Commission, insisting upon the democratic principles, over and above the popular sentiments, around which any appeal to forgiveness must collect, melodramatic or otherwise.

Conclusion

'The camera', Kaplan remarks in the opening shot to *Between Joyce and Remembrance*, 'is a way of preventing things from disappearing'. If not precisely equal to the melancholic repetition that drives those examples included in the first chapter, this commitment to film as a mode of representational fidelity with the past and its emotional remainders draws his documentary into a similarly intimate, if also volatile ethical sphere. Indeed, like each the works of theatre and film favoured so far in this study, Kaplan's account occupies a sphere of irresolution, whether historical, moral, or emotional, for which the Truth

Commission generally refused to accept responsibility. But this encounter with the irresolvable is not meant to breed apathy or anger. Instead, it discovers in the intense confessional encounter between the Mtimkulu family and Nieuwoudt a 'soft weapon', to borrow an epithet used by Gillian Whitlock, deploying its feeling of implacable discord to defend against any expedient redemption of the apartheid past.[97] In other words, the family's emotional struggle and, in particular, Sikhumbuzo's inability to reckon with his own vengeful, even seemingly self-destructive impulses are also the inherited struggles of the past, of apartheid's ongoing inequality and injustice. These complex legacies can never hope to be corrected by a single, individualised act of forgiveness. Their expiation depends, instead, as Kaplan's film suggests, on a democratic, which is to say collective and broadly distributed reckoning with the past.

Of course, this is not the sole responsibility of his film. Nor is it entirely capable of fulfilling this demand. Indeed, the intense, excessive and overwrought variety of feelings that emerge from *Between Joyce and Remembrance* were always liable to exceed the representational limits of the documentary genre, and perhaps even film in general. But this is no mitigation for the generic insufficiencies of melodrama. For any sense of the darkness and light, or good and evil that emerges from the confessional encounter between victim and perpetrator necessarily escapes the diametric interpretation that melodrama prefers. Even Kaplan's parallel experience under apartheid, his partial view from the inside of its violent history, is inadequate before the contradictions and complexities contained by Nieuwoudt's confessional appeal. To this extent, *Between Joyce and Remembrance* disrupts the straightforward moral authority that forgiveness elsewhere assumes, gesturing instead at the situated empathy that must condition its pursuit. This is arguably the principal achievement of Kaplan's film; not some monumental scene of clemency between black and white, but a cumulative sense of reciprocity across and between those committed to justice and on both sides of the racial divide.

There is a restraint, then, to *Between Joyce and Remembrance* that contrasts with the hyperbole of those 'TRC films' that patterned the first half of this chapter. In the face of the Mtimkulu family's implacable sense of loss, Kaplan's documentary is judicious, delimiting his audience's sense of the possible in the field of reconciliation. Without giving up on its achievement, it is the incremental and ordinary efforts made by the family to accommodate themselves to their intense grief that appears here to guide reconciliation's more general pursuit. As signal of this imperfect but also indispensable end, the film concludes with the ritual burial of Siphiwo's last remaining clump of hair—an act of symbolic

mourning for his family. It is little more than a faint glimmer of light in the general gloom of their suffering. But vitally, it is also a collective ceremony that unites the family with the wider township community, one that even dignifies Kaplan's camera as an active participant in this intimate public rite. And it is to this ritualised sphere that I turn in my final chapter, uncertain but hopeful of its efficacy in the field of reconciliation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Telling Stories the Way We Like

Zulu Love Letter and Reconciliation's Rites

> We have set out on a quest for a true humanity, and somewhere on the distant horizon we can see the glittering prize. . . . In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible—a more human face.[1]
>
> —Steve Biko

Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998) is perhaps the most widely cited and, by return, one of the most widely censured accounts of the Truth Commission. In its critique of the Commission's deeply gendered praxis, however, it alights upon a controversy more serious than those broad generic concerns that stalk its professed nonfictional status.[2] 'Truth has become woman', remarks Krog's narrator as she reflects upon the endless succession of female witnesses who appeared before the Commission to testify during its first six months of public hearings. 'Dressed in beret or *kopdoek* [headscarf] and her Sunday best', the truth as woman has become so insistent that it has come to penetrate 'even the most frigid earhole of stone', she affirms.[3] But while the truth of the apartheid past was, indeed, given an embodiment *by* women at the Truth Commission, it was not *of* women. Amid its litany of female voices, the abuses recorded by the Human Rights Violation Committee (HRVC) were most frequently those endured not by these women themselves but by their sons, their husbands, their fathers, and their brothers. 'Everybody recognises her', Krog's speaker continues, everybody recognises that she 'has undermined Man as the source of truth'. And yet, '[n]obody knows her', she concludes, nobody knows the specific truth of her experience of the past, nor, indeed, the specific role she might also play in the negotiation of the future.[4]

Krog's instinctual misgivings have since been substantiated by quantitative analysis. For instance, in a comparatively forensic account of the Commission's

many individual hearings, Fiona Ross provides striking evidence of this gender imbalance. For even while half or more of the deponents who appeared before the HRVC were female, seventy-nine percent of these women provided evidence of violations committed against men, Ross reveals. As a result, women were consistently described by the Commission and in the media as 'secondary witnesses', with little concern shown for their own status as primary victims of abuse.[5] But even before this imbalance became institutionalised, Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes had delivered to the Commission in the first month of its public hearings a combative position paper on the long-standing subordination and oppression of women under apartheid. Drawing from the evidence of eight prominent female anti-apartheid activists, Goldblatt and Meintjes made clear the specific structural and symbolic violence committed by the apartheid state against women. Of an internal, more often psychological order, however, it was always less likely to be captured fully by the Commission's mandate to investigate gross abuses, they argued. For Goldblatt and Meintjes, it was imperative, therefore, that the Commission recognise the gendered aspects of apartheid oppression and attempt, finally, to 'lift the veil of silence hanging over the suffering of women' in South Africa.[6]

Despite the subsequent institution of three Special Women's Hearings, held in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban in 1997, and the adoption of new gender-sensitive statement-taking protocols, the Commission largely failed to overturn this essential and early misalignment between women's historical status as primary victims and, at the same time, their public function as secondary witnesses.[7] As Nomonde Calata's appearance before the HRVC in 1996 bears out, more significant to the Committee than any of the suffering she endured as a result of the assassination of her husband was an understanding of the role he played in the highly politicised Cradock Residents' Association, the increasingly violent struggle in the Eastern Cape, and, ultimately, the events that led up to his death. Nomonde Calata was introduced to the Committee not as a victim of apartheid but as a 'political widow', a term deployed originally by the anti-apartheid activist Mamphela Ramphele to reflect the relational status imposed upon her following the death in detention of her partner, Steve Biko, in 1977.[8] Indeed, her traumatic cries, as recalled by the Committee's chair, Alex Boraine, and reimagined by John Boorman's *In My Country*, have continued to function above all as a summary of the country's agglomerated pain, rather than as testament to her unique suffering. All this, despite the fact that Calata, like Ramphele in fact, served as an active agent in and notable victim of the struggle.

Unable, ultimately, to overturn this essential myopia, the Commission was forced to concede in its final report to the 'gender bias' that stemmed from its

'relative neglect of the "ordinary" workings of apartheid'.[9] Undoubtedly, this is by no means the Truth Commission's only shortcoming. But it is perhaps the one that reveals most plainly the failures that attended its highly individualised, rights-based approach to victimhood. The adjacent confessional scenes prioritised in this study so far have sought to challenge this strict taxonomy of bodily rather than structural or symbolic suffering, even if the critique has not so far been elaborated in strictly gendered terms. Whether in Farber's account of the melancholy psychical as well as social remains that animate this confessional sphere or in Kaplan's attention to their long, intergenerational shadow, there has been much in these works to challenge the Commission's attachment to the visible and verifiable aspects of apartheid abuse. That some of the most prominent voices in this repertoire of injustice are female is also no necessary coincidence. Take, for instance, *Molora*'s Elektra, or Siphiwo Mtimkulu's mother Joyce, both of whom give witness to the much wider range of intense emotional and familial suffering that many black women have been forced to endure under apartheid and since.

This final chapter continues to prioritise a sphere of confessional praxis constituted not by its fractious contiguity with the Commission but its expressive and conceptual autonomy. In turning here to Ramadan Suleman's *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), a highly evocative and formally innovative narrative film that was scripted and shot by its director in collaboration with the scholar Bhekizizwe Peterson over the course of some six years, however, I also attempt locate a pointed counterpoint to its specifically masculinist limitations. A fictionalised account of the apartheid past and its lasting injustice within the democratic present, *Zulu Love Letter* does not defer to the Commission to sustain its truth claims. There are no appeals, for instance, to specific hearings or historical events that might be verified by way of the archival record. Signal, it seems, of a more general frustration with the Commission and its confessed biases, this divestment distinguishes in *Zulu Love Letter* a vernacular separation as much from the Commission as from the aesthetic repertoire privileged so far in this study.

In this, Suleman and Peterson intend their film, I want to suggest, less as a strict corrective to the Commission and more as a parallel if also experimental and above all ritual scene of confessional negotiation. Indeed, by giving cinematic form to apartheid's manifold unjust remains, *Zulu Love Letter* does not disclaim altogether the principles of truth and reconciliation. For instance, in Peterson's own recent scholarly analysis, he underscores, apace with the objectives written into *Zulu Love Letter*, the exigent need to first recognize and then integrate apartheid's residual 'social pathologies'. But equally, he continues:

> The ills of the nation are not likely to be overcome if citizens are not granted space and time to address their personal and localised anxieties in ways that are not necessarily consistent with or parallel to the initiatives and needs of the larger society.[10]

In other words—to secure an echo for the general aims of this study—reconciliation must only ever proceed as a situated enterprise. So while *Zulu Love Letter* may retreat from the strictly national 'strategies of containment' that conditioned the Commission's public hearings, it nonetheless sustains something of reconciliation's collective imperative. By way of distinction, however, it begins with the situated demands of its cast of black female characters, retrieving from their lived, everyday experience of injustice an expanded sense of what reconciliation might otherwise constitute.[11] This is, I want to suggest, as much an epistemic intervention as it is a more broadly feminist one. For in demarking a confessional arena at vital odds with the Commission's gendered tendencies, *Zulu Love Letter* also attempts to liberate reconciliation from the conceptual and interpretive constraints that have elsewhere assailed and arguably derailed it.

As a condition of its imaginative and intellectual autonomy, then, Suleman and Peterson's film also makes some exceptional demands of this concluding chapter. Methodologically, I do not defer to any of the comparative frameworks deployed previously. Nor do I suggest a specific generic or modal tradition against which to measure the film's fidelities, or not. Rather, *Zulu Love Letter*'s comparative freedom is entirely the point. This does not mean it is entirely without precedence—at least, not in the global field of trauma and experimental cinema. But in the more discrete spheres under review in this study, *Zulu Love Letter* establishes a vital aesthetic and ideological distinction that I also attempt to uphold critically. To this extent, this chapter is perhaps the most speculative. Nonetheless, it is also intended to serve as a summative one. For as much as *Zulu Love Letter* distinguishes itself from the repertoire appraised above, it proceeds by drawing some of the incipient, extemporary praxis on display in earlier chapters into a more socially embedded, plausibly enduring representational schema, one that renders reconciliation's future renewal in terms more assured than previously seemed viable.

Humble Storytelling, Experimental Style

Much of *Zulu Love Letter*'s distinction as a cinematic object is achieved by way of its rare combination between an outwardly modest narrative and a highly experimental cinematic form. Set in the weeks before and after the Commission

launched its first public hearings in 1996, it is, according to Peterson, at its most fundamental an unassuming 'story of two mothers in search of their daughters'.[12] Despite this professed humility, however, *Zulu Love Letter* does not retreat from the challenging legacies of apartheid. Nor does it uphold a singularly realist method of narration. Rather, Suleman and Peterson deploy this ordinary lens of motherhood to discover a vernacular mode of storytelling that might represent with greater acuity the intractable, oftentimes imperceptible, even spiritual consequences of loss and specifically female suffering that derive from the extraordinary events of the apartheid past.

On one half of this twin narrative focus is Me'Tau, a black, elderly, and impoverished woman from Soweto whose daughter, Dineo, an anti-apartheid activist, was murdered by security police in the 1980s. Without ever having had her daughter's remains returned to her, Me'Tau is left in a state of interrupted grief, unable to fulfil the burial rites that, according to Zulu ontology, 'purify and restore the sacredness of the corpse'.[13] Only by way of the ritual process of mourning, termed the *ukuzila*, can the deceased pass eventually into the realm of the ancestors. 'In the context of the abductions, assassinations and secret disposal of the remains of anti-apartheid activists', however, as Peterson explains:

> [t]he absence of the body, the lack of knowledge of the place and cause of death, throws the processes of *ukuzila* into disarray and with it the attendant prerequisites for individual and group mourning and healing.[14]

Denied the process of mourning, Me'Tau still holds a monthly vigil for her daughter with a host of other grieving mothers at her small, township home.

To this tragically common story of maternal loss, as witnessed elsewhere in, say, *Between Joyce and Remembrance*, Suleman and Peterson add the experience of Thandeka Kumalo, a middle-class black journalist at the *Mail & Guardian*. Having observed Dineo's original murder by state police, Thandeka still experiences regular flashbacks to the scene as well as to her own subsequent detention and torture on a remote farm in the Transvaal, as it was then termed. Pregnant at the time, this abuse appears to have also impacted her daughter, Simangaliso (meaning miracle in isiZulu), who was born deaf. Now aged thirteen, the girl has no seeming knowledge of mother's previous suffering even as she appears to serve as a constant reminder of it. As a result, the two have become largely estranged from each other: Thandeka lives alone in her apartment in downtown Johannesburg, while her daughter has been all but abandoned to her grandparents' home in Soweto.

At the most fundamental level of plot, *Zulu Love Letter* tills a comparatively conventional path. With both mothers beginning the film isolated and

comparatively bereft, their twinned experiences are brought into closer and closer alignment, each helping the other to reckon with their own sense of inner torment, until they are seen at the film's conclusion in a moment of shared unity. Their alliance begins when Me'Tau arrives one evening at the *Mail & Guardian*'s offices, petitioning Thandeka to help her find Dineo's remains. While the elderly woman is driven by a ritual urge to cleanse the past and lay Dineo's spirit to rest, Me'Tau also encourages in Thandeka a broadly comparable, specifically ritualised reconciliation with Simangaliso. As such, the premise of their respective search may remain dissimilar, but the process unfolds in broadly mutual terms, one that suggests among other things the power of black female solidarity in the more general struggle against the past. In other words, these women establish a vital collective arena in which to share and resolve between them the traumas of apartheid, rather than dwell upon them in melancholy isolation.

To this extent, the broad imperatives of the Truth Commission may appear somewhere near at hand. But in the telling of this story *Zulu Love Letter* is also sustained, I want to suggest, by a series of frictions, epistemological as much as procedural, that serve to contest the monumental terms around which reconciliation has more often been composed. For one thing, the film resists the overtly Christianised elaboration of reconciliation and forgiveness witnessed in those 'TRC films' above, centring by contrast the separate contribution made by a more traditional account of healing and spiritual recovery. In this, African ontology's alternative understandings of 'personhood, sociality and ancestral veneration', arguably prompts, what Peterson describes as, 'a more life-affirming and enriching alternative to the . . . projects of the state'.[15] This is not to endorse uncritically the principle of ubuntu, so often deployed by the Truth Commission to dignify reconciliation's traditional merits. Rather, it is to centre those non-sensory, pluri-dimensional as well as deeply ritualised ways of indigenous being that are entirely immanent to the black majority's understanding of grief and mourning.

This ritual spiritualism serves as a vital key, I aver, to *Zulu Love Letter*'s expanded account of reconciliation. But it is by no means the film's only epistemological friction with the Commission, especially in its insistent appeal to the 'medicolonial' logic, as Guiliana Lund has it, of healing.[16] As becomes increasingly evident, in Simangaliso's character Suleman and Peterson also move to introduce the question of disability and, more specifically, the implications of her deafness to the Commission's attachment to a discourse of pathogen and cure. There is very little precedence in South African cinema for the critical negotiation of disability, and certainly not in such abrasive proximity with the medicalised metaphors that predominated at the Commission. 'Healing the wounds of the

nation' was, after all, one if its principal self-descriptions. However, Simangaliso's central role in the film necessarily brings with it a host of intricate interpretive tensions that seek to challenge this normative attitude to impairment.

For one thing, her deafness wrestles with and against the type of symbolic framework often deployed to make manifest the lasting 'ills' of apartheid, wherein the individual is made surrogate for the suffering of the national body.[17] The congenital status of her deafness arguably challenges this tired aesthetic manoeuvre, for it also cites the very specific violence inflicted upon her mother during her pregnancy, disclaiming, as such, the curative credentials of forgiveness. In ways more somatic than even Duma Kumalo's melancholy compulsions can perhaps attest, Simangaliso insists, instead, upon the enduring, necessarily irredeemable impact of this wider political trauma. This is not to say that she is embittered by her disability. Rather, it is to allude the ways in which her deafness further confounds the Commission's deferral to a normative 'treatment'—in all senses—of the past.

Evidently, then, to describe the film in such humble terms as a story of two mothers in search of their daughters is also to submerge something of the provocative, even radical epistemic agenda at work in its narrative structure. This is not, however, how most critics have sought to elaborate upon Suleman and Peterson's film. Undoubtedly, the comparative dearth of critical interest in contemporary cinema in South Africa has checked some of the more serious analysis it arguably deserves. Other than the passing remarks afforded by likes of Lesley Marx and Lindiwe Dovey in their wider reflections on recent African cinema, or Heidi Grunebaum and Annalisa Oboe as part their assessments of the Truth Commission, critical reflection has been largely reduced to the odd citation in national film surveys.[18] Only Jacqueline Maingard and Marie Kruger have begun to grapple seriously with *Zulu Love Letter*'s formal and narrative distinction within South Africa's contemporary cinematic economy.[19] Bearing down on the film's traumatic visual grammar, for instance, Kruger finds that its 'incoherent visual landscape' pushes the film towards the 'limits of cinematic representation'.[20] This Maingard broadly corroborates. Affording the film an especially prominent space in her study of South Africa's national cinema, she describes it in admiring terms as a film 'where meanings are never complete', where 'the viewer is constantly invited to create narrative coherence'.[21] For her, its formal fracture typifies South Africa's traumatised condition in the wake of apartheid.

Certainly, those elements of inarticulacy and semantic rupture are worthy of sustained attention, especially as they challenge the narrative coherence pursued by the more popular 'TRC films' surveyed above. But to understand these

formal features as indicative of 'the contested terrain of nation and identity in South Africa', as Maingard supposes, is also to risk reducing *Zulu Love Letter*'s distinction to a broadly postmodern interpretation of the aesthetic sphere.[22] Nor does the retreat made by Kruger into the theories of trauma reflect adequately the wider epistemological ambition that comes with this formal innovation, especially as it animates a set of 'African spiritual and cultural rites' at odds with those 'neatly self-contained categories and linearity underpinning metaphors of . . . the national imaginary'.[23] Indeed, as Peterson elaborates:

> We were clear during the writing, production and editing of the film, that cinema can present a more complex and experimental take on the issues under exploration. We settled on an aesthetic that would not be narrated or resolved according to the classical three-act structure but one that would try to approximate a loose and open-ended structure. Similarly we favoured strategies of visual composition that, like the film's thematic concerns, allows for a plurality of temporalities, presences and generic styles (from realism to fantasy) to co-exist within the same frame or sequence.[24]

In other words, the humility of *Zulu Love Letter*'s outward story of two mothers in search of their daughters is betrayed by its insistent appeal to a sphere of aesthetic experiment, one that both includes and exceeds the generic concerns predominant elsewhere. In formulating an interpretive framework through which to approach Suleman and Peterson's film, then, this chapter pursues its own equally experimental method, exploring the film's potential resonance within a remarkably wide discursive terrain, ranging from traditional culture to Black Consciousness and epistemic justice.

Frank Talk

In beginning to situate *Zulu Love Letter*'s outwardly modest if also inwardly radical tale of motherhood, there are undoubtedly certain precedents to be found in feminist aesthetics and vital correspondences to be secured with black female filmmaking more generally in South Africa.[25] To understand the personal as political, for example, is still an instructive beginning point. But I also want to suggest a powerful resonance in *Zulu Love Letter*'s humble ambitions with the strikingly simple adage, 'I write what I like', that was first deployed by Steve Biko as part of his contributions to the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) newsletter in 1970. Writing under the wry pseudonym Frank Talk, Biko's conscious simplicity here belies the complex aesthetic philosophy from

which his thinking first emerged.[26] Of course, Biko's political desire for black emancipation is well established. Even still, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which has found a renewed vitality in recent decades, defers to his original elaboration of the 'shackles that bind [black South Africans] to perpetual servitude'.[27] As Biko puts it in one of the many essays that make up his posthumous collection of selected writing, *I Write What I Like* (1978):

> In an effort to destroy completely the structures that had been built up in the African Society and to impose their imperialism with an unnerving totality the colonialists were not satisfied merely with holding a people in their grip and emptying the Native's brain of all form and content, they turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it. No longer was reference made to African culture, it became barbarism. Africa was the 'dark continent'. Religious practices and customs were referred to as superstition. The history of African society was reduced to tribal battles and internecine wars.[28]

Black Consciousness, by positive reply, has come to be defined by the black community's 'new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook in life', to cite Biko again.[29]

Amid evaluation of these socio-cultural criteria, however, the imaginative autonomy that Biko also here deploys to encourage and effect this sense of total liberation—bodily, cognitive, and spiritual—has more often fallen from critical view. Nonetheless, his axiom provides an indicative summary of the belligerent as well as independent vernacular imagination upon which Black Consciousness in large part depends. 'I write what I like' is the autonomous aesthetic impulse behind the movement's political effort to 'make the black man come to himself; to pump life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity', Biko affirms. But it is also to ennoble a tradition of black self-expression, that 'love for song and rhythm', as Biko has it, which has historically defined much of Africa's traditional cultural sphere. 'Music and rhythm were not luxuries', he elsewhere insists, 'but part and parcel of our way of communication'.[30] In this way, the compulsion to 'write what I like' depended upon a much longer tradition of expressive sovereignty, a way of giving imaginative representation to black life beyond the imperatives otherwise imposed by colonial and apartheid rule.

It is under similarly radical but also culturally embedded terms that *Zulu Love Letter* might also be found to encode in its professedly modest story of motherhood an aesthetic and cognitive emancipation of its own. In a plausible echo of Biko's simple adage, Suleman and Peterson's comparatively experimental

cinema arguably tells the history of apartheid trauma, injustice, and reconciliation *the way they like*. Eschewing the various generic impulses—whether tragic, melodramatic, or more broadly realist—governing those other examples privileged in this study, my aim is to explore their preferred aesthetic autonomy, as much as the allied political and cultural claims this approach potentially precipitates, not least in the field of reconciliation. For at its most expansive, Suleman and Peterson's professed desire to secure from *Zulu Love Letter*'s simple story a 'ceremony and tribute to [the] victims and survivors' of apartheid establishes an instructive parallel with the 'quest for a true humanity' at the fundamental root of Biko's political writing. Just as Biko acclaims the 'great gift still . . . to come from Africa—giving the world a more human face', Suleman and Peterson celebrate their film's capacity 'to foster love and healing'.[31]

In accounting for this mutualism, it should be noted that any ostensive return here to Biko and his humanistic agenda comes amid a much wider renewal of Black Consciousness in recent decades. Indeed, in some ways it seems that critical interest in Biko's radically humanistic philosophy has been accurately indexed by democracy's rising disappointments. The thirtieth anniversary of Biko's murder, for instance, was marked in 2007 by a significant return to the tenets of Biko's original quest, with critics deploying the principles of Black Consciousness to attack those structures of racial inequality operative still within the emergent democratic imaginary.[32] For instance, outlining the 'classic inferiority complexes [visible] in our day-to-day existence', the former deputy minister for education and president of the Azanian People's Organisation, Mosibudi Mangena, used the occasion to draw out evidence of the stubborn continuities between life under apartheid and life under democracy for South Africa's black majority. Even while 'physical liberation has been attained', he insisted, 'black people have regressed terribly with regard to psychological freedom'.[33]

Following the tone set by Mangena's intervention, much of the critical reflection prompted by the anniversary of Biko's death proved recuperative, even hagiographic in its outlook, revivifying the supposedly fading tenets of his political philosophy. Nonetheless, there are some who remain less than convinced by its contemporary revival. Njabulo Ndebele, to take one prominent example, has highlighted the problem that Biko's focus on the oppressed black body has arguably bequeathed the present political sphere in South Africa. Even as he acknowledged an aesthetic debt to Biko's impulse to 'write what I like', Ndebele also cast doubt during the inaugural Steve Biko Memorial Lecture in 2000 over the logic of victimhood that Black Consciousness has since been made to sustain. To reduce the black body to nothing more than an object of racist

oppression is for Ndebele, at least, to make black suffering into an issue of historical injustice, something for which the current democratic executive can claim little responsibility. Of course, Ndebele makes this observation not to deny the deep historical roots from which black suffering emerges, but to challenge the contemporary political order under which it continues to spread. As he puts it, 'white racism no longer exists as a formalised structure' and it must be 'the black majority [that] carries the historic responsibility to provide, in this situation, decisive and visionary leadership':

> Either it embraces this responsibility with conviction, or it gives up its leadership through a throwback psychological dependence on racism which has the potential to severely compromise the authority conferred on it by history.[34]

For Ndebele, the stubborn sense of victimhood speaks to 'the black majority's perception that perhaps they are not yet agents of their own history'.[35] If Biko and Black Consciousness are to provide an instructive alternative, then, for Ndebele, it must help return black subjecthood to the sovereign, humanistic ambitions that guided its revolutionary agenda under apartheid. Indeed, as he describes in his most widely cited essay collection, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, it is the 'insatiable desire to create: to create comparable structures on the basis of a new human sensibility' that must be found to rule in any contemporary revival of Black Consciousness, Ndebele affirms.[36]

Through the Eyes of Ordinary Women

For all the broad, creative appeal of this radical humanism, Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement have long been charged with a serious, and perhaps even fatal, contradiction when it comes to the associated claims of gender. 'Black Consciousness', as Masego Panyane writes in unequivocal terms, 'has been drawn through the eyes of men'. She follows up this opening lunge by further castigating the movement's inevitable misogyny, which is 'so rife', she insists, 'that, even if pressed, few students of South African [Black Consciousness] will be able to list many names of women who were its protagonists and heroes'.[37] Historically, critical commentaries have tended to pass over this seeming failure either by underlining its more abstract political claims or by quickly excusing the masculine pronoun used to denote black life as a product of its time. And while Panyane provides important evidence of the women activists, like Vuyelwa Mashalaba, Fatima Meer and, indeed, Mamphela Ramphele, who dedicated themselves to

the cognitive as well as material emancipation of South Africa's black majority, she also insists upon the enduring and regrettable misalignment between the movement's masculinist beginnings and its otherwise egalitarian ambitions.

Zulu Love Letter's latent appeal to Biko's famous adage and, with it, the tenets of Black Consciousness is arguably as much a rejoinder to this fundamental bias as it is a contribution to the movement's contemporary rejuvenation. Its outwardly simple, everyday story of motherhood serves both to rearticulate Biko's autonomous imagination and to challenge its founding misogyny. This Suleman and Peterson arguably pursue according to a 'feminist reworking' of the politics of the everyday. As Anthony O'Brien notes, the two are rarely all that distant from each other, despite the 'symptomatic silence on women's struggles' that accompanied Ndebele's well-rehearsed shift in narrative focus 'from state and mine and battlefield to "ordinary daily lives" that . . . are the "*very content*" of political struggle'.[38] Though vital in theorising the everyday as an 'arena of cultural autonomy' and 'universally meaningful democratic civilisation', Ndebele's arguments have not always made explicit their 'emergent' feminist praxis. In O'Brien's reading, however, Ndebele's turn to the ordinary necessarily makes 'feminism . . . indispensable' to his politics.[39] Accepting the writer's tendency to occlude the specific struggles of his female characters, for O'Brien, Ndebele depends upon feminist praxis to make visible and theorise the political claims embedded in the everyday.

Most convincing is the narrative form adopted by Ndebele's novel *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003), which centres the ordinary experience under apartheid of six black women left waiting for their absent husbands to return home from, for instance, exile, forced labour, or prison. Their stories are both indicative and highly personal. By comparison, in the considered focus that Suleman and Peterson provide in their outwardly ordinary story of motherhood over and above the spectacular history of apartheid abuse, *Zulu Love Letter* might well be thought to join this 'progressive male repositioning in response to black feminism in South Africa', as O'Brien has it. Indeed, O'Brien describes Suleman and Peterson's first feature film, *Fools* (1997), based on Ndebele's original 1983 novella, as taking its 'lesson explicitly' from *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, 'emphatically continu[ing] it into the new period'.[40]

But their latest film together is arguably also more ambitious in its 'male repositioning'. For the ordinary focus it deploys is intimately as well as experimentally tied to its female protagonists over and above the generic everyday of democracy. In its opening scene, for instance, its audience is thrust into the brooding underbelly of Thandeka's modernist apartment block in downtown

Johannesburg. Lit by a series of irregular and austere fluorescent bulbs, a loud cacophony of free jazz can be heard playing out from a car stereo. Sharp, syncopated notes reverberate against the cold brick walls, pervading the space and disrupting the composure of the opening titles. The camera then tracks an attendant as he scurries over to investigate the source of this disturbance. Panning across the underground garage, a series of concrete pillars insistently fracture the scene's stability. Citing both the everyday sphere and its feverish disruption, this splintered sequence fixes eventually on a Volkswagen Golf parked with the keys in the ignition and the driver's door wide open. Slumped unconscious over the steering wheel is Thandeka. Visibly alarmed, the attendant carefully lifts back her head before moving around to the passenger's side to shut off the music. With this welcome relief, the camera invites the audience to make a swift assessment of her present condition as it moves down from her face to the press badge attached to her jacket and, finally, to the small pool of vomit by her feet. And it is under this broadly diagnostic frame that *Zulu Love Letter*'s earliest expository scenes continue to play out.

Without rehearsing again the details of Ndebele's well-worn argument, it is enough to note the ways in which *Zulu Love Letter* here eschews any 'outward evidence' for her present catalepsy. Instead, the audience is compelled to speculate from a set of disparate visual symptoms on the particular malady that afflicts the formal arrangement of the film as much as its principal character. This is not to say that the spectacle of the past does not impose itself within the film. Rather, that the type of documentary or realist register more often preferred in this sphere is overtaken by a more experimental interpretation. With Thandeka's transfer from her car onto an ambulance gurney, for instance, the film's disjointed vision further fractures as it gives way to the first of its six schismatic flashbacks or 'interludes', as Peterson prefers to describe them, which playback at sixteen rather than twenty-four frames per second. This initial blurred, seemingly half-remembered scene is cut together from a set of coarse images that are shot from the perspective of Thandeka's colleague, Michael, a photojournalist. Tracking the outlook of his camera, which points out from the rear window of a car as it speeds through the inner streets of Johannesburg, the audience can grasp only a few fleeting images of the city. Intercut with these shots are equally transitory images of news billboards. 'PRE-ELECTION VIOLENCE PREDICTED', reads one. 'NATIONAL STATE OF EMERGENCY DECLARED', declaims another.

These headlines function, in part, as temporal markers, helping to signal not just the anterior character of these formal interludes but also something

of the historical period from which they supposedly derive. That said, in her terse review of *Zulu Love Letter*, Loren Kruger finds this initial flashback more perplexing than edifying. Erroneously, she guesses that it captures events from the 'pre-postapartheid transition (1990-93)'.[41] Her confusion is not without reasonable foundation, for the headlines appear to couple events that were never concurrent under apartheid. But neither was a state of emergency ever declared during the early 1990s, even if pre-election political violence was, at least, at its most prominent and lethal. Indeed, those motivated by historical fidelity might also protest that the headlines are mistakenly sponsored by *Mail & Guardian*, which did not come into existence as a public newspaper until 1994. But likely such claims miss the more general point of these formally frenetic and visually unsettling scenes. For it is above all the exigent political tension of the city, alloyed with the feelings of acute alarm coursing through the streets during the final decade of apartheid, that appears primary here.

For Kruger, however, the scene remains a symptom of Suleman and Peterson's more general tendency in *Zulu Love Letter* to collapse 'distinct historical moments for dramatic effect'.[42] Admittedly, even while the muffled rendition of the popular protest song 'Siyaya', which intermixes with spoken proclamations on 'freedom' and the people's 'demands on the government', helps to locate the scene in a period sometime between 1984 and 1986, this opening interlude is still vexing, especially when attempting to secure a sense of narrative stability for the difficult scenes that follow. Rather than reading it as just another example of the type of historical insouciance typical of the 'TRC films' examined above, as Kruger appears to recommend, this narrative confusion might be taken, instead, as a conscious choice on behalf of its makers to disrupt the viewer's attachment to those conventional markers of exposition that often prevail in realist cinematic representation. So while Marie Kruger reads *Zulu Love Letter*'s innovative arrangement as part of its modernist pattern of spatial and temporal disorientation, it is also possible to understand the use of subjective camera angles, in combination with the formal irregularity and temporal disorder on display in these interludes, as a visual account of Thandeka's troubled memory.[43] In other words, the seeming inconsistencies in style and content served to reflect her disturbed, broadly traumatised relationship with the apartheid past.

Under these intensely subjective terms, Suleman and Peterson's turn away from the terrain of the historical in favour of the inward and the psychological also presses the film into a space far beyond the stable ordinary terrain that governs elsewhere. It petitions its audience to take its seeming historical haphazardness apace with its restless, even at times confounding cinematic style, finding

in each an effort to discover an adequate representational form for the everyday experience of the extreme violence of apartheid and its traumatic memory. As Peterson asserts, in refusing the 'valorisation of the forensic facts', *Zulu Love Letter* 'draw[s] us into sensory experiences and knowledge that is often destabilised and erased' by an otherwise singularly veridical focus.[44] When faced by the remembered remains of apartheid, for instance, even the broad documentary faculty of the camera appears to flounder, unable to grant the viewer with a verifiable or secure account. Instead, it is the affective, experiential quality of these interludes that takes precedence. Subjecting the audience to an incessantly irregular, unsettling visual experience, these remembered scenes appear designed to provoke in the viewer—as they do in Thandeka—sudden and overwhelming feelings of anxiety. In this, *Zulu Love Letter* potentially makes for an emotionally exhausting viewing experience, especially in its earliest scenes, with the affective tension of the film regularly threatening to spill out beyond the cinematic frame, disrupting the passivity of its audience. At its broadest, this is not altogether separate from the emotional intensity of those 'TRC films' witnessed above. But instead of aiming to mollify its anxious effects as it goes, *Zulu Love Letter* continues to amplify this sense of unease.

Epistemologies of Trauma and Resistance

As Peterson suggests in his 'Writer's Statement', *Zulu Love Letter* is intent on challenging, rather than submitting before, the epistemologies that elsewhere govern recitals of the apartheid past, especially those that have come to sustain the more monumental accounts favoured nationally. 'Individuals do not always apprehend time as a neat and chronological sequence', he insists, '[n]or do they attach the same significance to the relationship between time and experience or deal with trauma in the way societies would often prefer'.[45] In their determination to contest the synchronic formal composition that elsewhere rules, then, Suleman and Peterson regularly favour the connotative over the denotative. The audience is compelled to adopt a comparatively agile attitude to the action as it unfolds on the screen, untangling the temporal confusions from the broader governing plot. Such is the disjointed, discontinuous style through which the film proceeds that as quickly as the initial rumbles of public protest surface in its earliest scenes, they also recede. Cutting back to the present, Thandeka is pictured sitting upright in a hospital bed. Her daughter, Simangaliso, is sat at her side. However, she seems reluctant to engage with her mother, staring intently at a bunch of orange gerberas set at the bedside.

Here again the film enters into a visual language more interpretive than informative. Attempting to bear down, it seems, on Simangaliso's emotional dislocation, the camera switches away from the reverse angle shots used to establish the scene, adopting instead the visual perspective of the young girl as she continues to concentrate her gaze at the flowers in the vase. A surrealist impulse momentarily takes hold of the scene as the flowers begin to wilt, drooping forlornly one by one. This symbolic portrait of enervation intervenes where the ordinary language of intimacy fails, and not just as a condition of Simangaliso's disability. Certainly, Suleman and Peterson here adopt this otherwise hallucinatory visual effect in order to establish an alternative, specifically visual lexicon, one that might grant the young girl a variety of self-expression. But in its symbolic form, it also gestures towards the emotional, rather than strictly communicational, divide that separates Simangaliso from her mother. In epistemological terms, then, this scene challenges us to reconfigure our approach to the girl's disability, which appears to operate in entirely relational rather than essential terms. For it is not so much that Simangaliso cannot hear or be heard by her mother, as much as it is Thandeka who is unable to listen past her daughter's silence. In other words, it is those other characters around the girl who arguably perform her deafness.

Critical disability studies is regularly motivated by this relational realignment between normalcy and disability. In this, as Dan Goodley elaborates, much has been done to recode disability in terms that account for the misalignment between a person and their environment, rather than simply sustaining some essentialising rubric of individual impairment. An account of disability must only ever be taken as 'situational or contextual', Goodley affirms.[46] In cultural terms too critics have sought to deconstruct the notion of disability, prioritising the radical claims that also emerge from its 'crip' perspectives. As far as *Zulu Love Letter* is concerned, there is a similarly compelling argument to be made as the film proceeds on behalf of Sigmangaliso's privileged, even reconstructive way of knowing, especially when it comes to the buried, inarticulable pain and suffering of the characters around her. But equally, when appraised in more expansive terms, Simangaliso retains a certain epistemic privilege by virtue of her deafness that proves vital when it comes to reimagining and rearticulating the terms of reconciliation. In terms not all that distant from the wounded outlook offered by Duma Kumalo, her relational sense of selfhood insists, as *Zulu Love Letter* progresses, on the familial as well as more broadly communal ends around which reconciliation must, ultimately, orient itself.

Without setting his argument out in quite such epistemic terms, this is also what Ken Lipenga suggests when he takes Simangaliso as the creative pulse of

the film. She is, he insists, its principal storyteller, 'piecing together stories of different individuals to come up with a work of art that is simultaneously her own story and that of her community'.[47] Put in more expansive terms, she may be taken as the principal agent of their mutual reconciliation with the past. Indeed, as a precipitant for the film's narrative progress from individual dysfunction to collective renewal, Simangaliso's creative outlook comes to drive more and more *Zulu Love Letter*'s visual prospect. However, this early account of her seemingly surreal imagination is also forced to compete with her mother's comparatively fractured and burdensome attachment to those traumatic remains of the apartheid past. For her own part, Thandeka does at least attempt to break the conspicuous silence between them, tapping her daughter on the shoulder, before remarking reassuringly, 'I'll be out of here long before your birthday'. 'And if not', she continues, using simple (and reportedly improvised) elements of sign language in an effort to engage her daughter, 'this ward is big enough for one hell of a party'.[48]

However, with Simangaliso's refusing even to acknowledge her mother, Thandeka relapses once more into a painful flashback. In this extended sequence, she recalls images of another young girl, Dineo, and a teenage boy as they attempt to outrun a pursuing car. The chase is stitched together from a series of crude and grainy images, all shot from a bewildering multiplicity of perspectives. From close-ups of the car's wheels as it tears across the dirt road to heavily blurred images of Dineo and her companion as they dash across the screen, the scene appears wilfully chaotic, almost incoherent, at times. We are provided with fleeting glimpses of the officers as they abandon their car and pursue the pair on foot through a maze of small township homes and shops. There are flashes too of the girl as she begins looking over her shoulder with increasing desperation before she stumbles suddenly to a halt, her route cut off by the officers.

With the chase at end, the camera appears finally to have caught up, with Dineo captured in comparatively clear terms as she slumps to the ground. The sound of her panicked breath reverberates across the scene. The perspective then switches temporarily to one of the police officers. As his eyes meet with Dineo's own, it provides the audience with a brief but intimate insight into the girl's swelling panic. But instead of submitting to her fear, she holds her arm aloft, her fist clenched in a familiar pose of resistance, as she mouths the words 'Amandla! Awethu! [Power! Is Ours!]'.[49] With this act of ultimate defiance, the sequence cuts away from the past, returning momentarily once more to Thandeka as she lies in her hospital bed. Her breath, like Dineo's own, is quick and shallow, her eyes similarly stricken with fear before we return again to this remembered

scene. In this instance, we witness Dineo from Thandeka's vantage point, hidden away in a nearby church hall. Looking out at the young girl she crouches on the floor before the group of police officers, the sound of a deafening, solitary gunshot suddenly rings out, before the scene fades to black.

This fateful interlude finally grants the audience with a narrative schema of sorts through which to approach the residual, traumatic legacies that continue to cut through and overwhelm the quotidian surface of the film. With Thandeka pictured in the consequent scene, for instance, on her return to the busy newsroom at the *Mail & Guardian*, her hostile outbursts against her colleagues begin to make narrative sense. She first reprimands a young black reporter hot-desking at her computer, before launching into a vitriolic assault against the newspaper's white, male editor-in-chief. With a photograph of Dineo in her dying salute hanging prominently on the wall above the editor's shoulder, Thandeka proceeds almost without provocation to attack the man's erstwhile complicity with the apartheid regime. 'It was nice and fine when we brought you the scoops', she barks, 'but when it came to putting your fat-white-liberal-arse on the line . . . the best you could do was to hide behind all sorts of legalities!' This familiar indictment ends with an equally voluble critique of the programme of affirmative action rolled out by the ANC in the years following their election to power.[50] Rising to her feet and gesturing in the general direction of the young journalist at her desk, Thandeka rebukes all those 'nose brigade cases who think that being black is a job description and that "the struggle" refers to which cellular network they should subscribe to'. 'Well', she concludes, regaining a measure of composure, 'fuck you all'.[51]

In establishing the depth of Thandeka's psychological turmoil, this scene serves equally to unveil her allied disquiet with the transition to democracy, articulating something of the serious disappointment that underwrites the film's narrative trajectory more generally. In the broadest of terms, Thandeka appears to stand as a relatively unmediated mouthpiece through which *Zulu Love Letter*'s makers are able to voice their own censure of the political transition. Much like Thandeka, Peterson has been consistently strident in his scholarly criticism of the compromises and contradictions that have come to blight the nation's democratic progress. As he articulates as part of his introduction to the film's published screenplay, in his view the outward political freedoms achieved by democracy have yet to deliver a 'break from the acute, pervasive and transgenerational experiences of suffering for the majority of black people'. Rather, the black body has continued to be targeted, he maintains, 'as an object of subjugation, humiliation, criminalization and disposal', much as it was under apartheid.[52] By comparison,

Suleman's own public comments have been limited to the occasional promotional interview. Nonetheless, in his 'Director's Statement', Suleman insists that 'the economy and social life of apartheid is still very much alive', despite its official legal demise. In obvious contrast with the scene of national unity promoted by the Truth Commission, 'mothers are still mourning, families are still searching for the remains of loved ones, and communities are still divided within themselves and across racial and class lines', Suleman insists.[53]

Admittedly, at their most belligerent, Thandeka's assaults against the political sphere are marred by slips into a self-righteous didacticism. But much like the melancholy remains seen to motivate Duma Kumalo, they also speak to the traumatic compulsion at the root of her political consciousness. While Kumalo's critique appears to be directed at the material and legal structures of inequality that maintain the broad racial injustice of the past, Thandeka's vociferousness stands in important contrast to the images of male compromise that elsewhere pattern the film. From the complicit editor at the *Mail & Guardian* to a drunken black police officer she encounters one afternoon at her local shebeen, these fallible male characters all stand in contradistinction to Thandeka's own staunch commitment to racial justice, individually and professionally. In this, her uncompromising political outlook compares favourably with the forthright approach adopted by other female figures like Mamphela Ramphele, who notes of her own experiences within the South African Student Organisation (SASO), led at the time by Biko:

> I became quite an aggressive debater and was known for not suffering fools gladly. Moreover, I intimidated men who did not expect aggression from women. Soon a group of similarly inclined women, Vuyelwa Mashalaba, Nomsisi Kraai, Deborah Matshoba and Thenjiwe Mtintso, became a force to be reckoned with at an annual SASO meeting.[54]

Cutting across the Black Consciousness Movement's masculine rhetoric, this form of female resistance was arguably epistemic as much as it was strictly political, adding to the movement's broad commitment to racial justice an expanded, specifically feminist account of apartheid oppression and, by extension, democratic liberation. Much like Ramphele, unwilling to suffer silently the compromised authority of her male counterparts, Thandeka refuses, as Peterson elaborates, any of the 'normative expectations of what patriarchy deems as acceptable behaviour by women'.[55]

Under these terms, Thandeka's feminist, if also traumatised political consciousness operates in complementary rather than strictly antagonistic terms

with the type of epistemological agency afforded by the film to her daughter. For just as Simangaliso's deafness conditions, say, a surrealist interpretation of the emotional environment, Thandeka's 'resistant ways of imagining', to borrow from José Medina, offer up a vital epistemic counterpoint to the failures of the political transition.[56] By this, Medina means to lobby on behalf of those disadvantaged perspectives that are vital, nonetheless, to any democratic sensibility. So while Simangaliso appears to adopt the role of storyteller, assuming responsibility for the creative imagination that, to recall Ndebele, remains pivotal to South Africa's future humanity, Thandeka arguably drives the resistant, feminist imagination that also conditions the film's political authority. For at its broadest, *Zulu Love Letter* is as much about the plural epistemologies that guide the pursuit of reconciliation as it is a story about two mothers in search of their daughters.

The Spiritual and the Secular

It is in fruitful solidarity, rather than divisive competition, then, that *Zulu Love Letter* might be said to track the diversity of interpretive approaches adopted by its central female characters. Put differently, it is their relationality that rules, a 'relationality that is', for Medina, at least, 'the heart and soul, the epistemic centerpiece, of a democratic culture'.[57] This is not to suggest their stable mutuality. Rather, as Medina also insists, it is 'the mechanisms and activities of *contestation*' that must above all drive their epistemic interaction.[58] As *Zulu Love Letter* progresses, evidence of this contestation appears more and more visible. Take, for instance, Thandeka's daily life, where her relationship with her daughter is rarely a source of epistemic, let alone emotional stability. For one, her own parents continually castigate her for abandoning Simangaliso to them for so many years. And upon visiting her daughter's school, Thandeka is confronted by the principal, an elderly white woman named Smuts, who produces for her a selection of her daughter's variously macabre paintings and drawings. 'Are there problems at home that we should know about, Ms. Khumalo?' Smuts asks provocatively.[59] But while mother and daughter here appear impossibly estranged, Suleman and Peterson also move to establish an instructive relational bond between Thandeka and Me'Tau, drawing these women into a shared, symbolic journey of familial reconciliation.

Critically, however, this bond does not also collapse the cultural, which is to say epistemic, distinctions that still divide the two women. Inhabiting outwardly discrete spheres of black life—Thandeka the modern, secular space of

the city, Me'Tau the informal township in which traditional Zulu customs and beliefs still thrive—they approach the violence of the past in markedly dissimilar ways. When they first meet in the newsroom at the *Mail & Guardian*, for instance, Thandeka appears plagued by writer's block. She is stuck at her desk long after her colleagues have left for the night, her journalistic career effectively slipping away from her. By broad comparison, Me'Tau appears spiritually, rather than psychologically, burdened, insisting that she cannot rest until she has buried her daughter's remains. 'Ma, no one knows where her body is or the bodies of thousands of others', Thandeka insists, seemingly helpless, if not altogether unsympathetic, before Me'Tau's request.

The root of their individual suffering is not, however, all that distinct, even if they each here express it in entirely separate terms. And it is this contest between the secular and the sacred that determines their debate over Dineo's remains. 'How can you people hope to heal this land', Me'Tau demands, alluding to her traditional belief in ancestral power that sustains her understanding of mourning, 'when there are so many restless souls?' Thandeka stares back in silence as Me'Tau then explains how she met with one of Dineo's alleged killers in a desperate effort to find her remains. 'We are going to bury her, won't we my child?' asks Me'Tau in supplication. 'Her soul and her bones', Me'Tau insists, 'must return to the clan; her spirit must come home'.[60] In the investigative space of the newsroom, however, Thandeka finds scant relief in the ritualism of Zulu ontology. For her, the sacred significance that Me'Tau places in her daughter's remains is of less significance than the continued impunity of the young girl's killers.

There is, it might be suggested, borrowing again from Medina, an 'epistemic friction' driving the two mothers.[61] But even as Thandeka implicitly refuses recourse to the power of the ancestors, she still attempts to reassure the elderly woman. Tentatively agreeing to help Me'Tau in her search, this pivotal concession is arguably what launches the partially restorative ritualism that ultimately drives *Zulu Love Letter*'s story of motherhood forward. Even as Me'Tau leaves the newsroom singing a traditional hymn and Thandeka is overcome by another flashback, the visual order of this interlude appears to have shifted. Earlier deployed to establish the irruption of unresolved trauma, here Dineo appears to float above the scene, gesturing instead, it seems, at the restlessness of her unburied soul. Whether intended to legitimate the role of traditional ontology that Biko envisioned originally for South Africa's modern cultural sphere or designed in more general terms to extend the set of resistant imaginations that drive *Zulu Love Letter*'s epistemic ambitions, Suleman and Peterson continue feed the film with markers of this traditional belief system.

In the very next scene, for instance, Simangaliso is pictured at her grandparents' home in Soweto engrossed in a beadwork project. She threads together a series of brightly coloured beads before gluing them along with an assortment of small decorative shapes onto a piece of fabric that she has cut into the shape of a heart. As Peterson describes in the screenplay, it is as if the young girl is performing some 'sacred ritual'.[62] In seeking to give visual form to this ritualism, the whole sequence is shot through a series of intimate close-ups of the girl's hands as they carefully but efficiently thread and stitch the materials together. Sensitively cut together, the rapid sequence of images flash across the screen with a rhythmic quality that is evidently meant to find its echo in the extra-diegetic beat of a traditional Zulu drum that plays over the scene. Simangaliso finally writes across the front of the object: 'This is a love letter'. Again, for a few brief seconds, the audience share an approximated sense of Simangaliso's richly symbolical perspective as the film's tracking slows down for a brief moment while she finishes composing her titular Zulu love letter.

Beaded letters of the sort produced by Simangaliso in this scene are traditionally stitched together by young Zulu girls during their courtship with a prospective suitor and from mothers to their daughters. They were typically designed to a specific pattern with each coloured bead holding a particular meaning that combines in the final work to produce an entire narrative system of representation. As Anitra Nettleton describes, this beadwork fits within a much wider range of traditional Zulu ceremonies and rituals designed to carry forward 'an African aesthetic that is historically rooted and yet modern'.[63] Having received the beads from her grandmother, MaKhumalo, who also instructs on the significance of each of the various colours, Sigmangaliso's love letter manifests its ancestral bond in outwardly generational terms. However, this ritualism is also critical to her growing sense of expressivity. For, as Lipenga observes, the beads provide her too with a form of communication that exceeds the ordinary sphere of language, reaching out instead towards the authority of Zulu symbolism.

Ultimately, Simangaliso intends the letter for her mother as a means of familial reunification. As yet, Thandeka remains less than convinced by the recuperative potential of the traditional sphere. She is pictured instead oscillating literally and figuratively between the formal city of Johannesburg and the informal spaces of Soweto as the film extends its epistemic rivalry between the rites and customs of Zulu ontology, on the one hand, and those practices and protocols of a secular modernity, on the other. In a particularly telling juxtaposition, Thandeka is seen at one point stumbling out from one of the township's shebeens accompanied by a former comrade, now a perennial drunk, named

Bouda'D. With the 'anniversary', as Bouda'D puts it, of their arrest looming, the pair are moved to recall the torture they both suffered some fourteen years ago at the hands of the apartheid security police. In his drunken state, Bouda'D speaks with unusual candour about the beating he suffered under interrogation, before placing a reassuring arm around Thandeka and declaiming:

> You and me, we sue the damn state for reparations. Reparations are a must, or else we look like fools in front of the Reconciliation Commission. . . . You and I, we will always remember him. Fuck reconciliation! We will freeze his face like a picture in our minds.[64]

Pre-empting the failure of the Truth Commission to provide victims with adequate financial reparations, Bouda'D also signals his disdain for the politics of reconciliation more generally. Note too the way he abridges the Commission's full name to spotlight its reconciliatory agenda over and above its truth claims. For him, as for many of the victims examined already, the prospect of reconciliation threatens to exacerbate rather than end the psychological torment inflicted under apartheid.

Crucially, as Thandeka attempts to extricate herself from this drunken recital, she turns away to stare at another young woman and her daughter as they lead a goat along the dusty road. Dressed in mourning attire, it seems that the goat is being delivered for a ceremonial slaughter. Thandeka keeps her eyes fixed on the pair as they continue, arm in arm, up the road. This alternative model of communal, ritualised negotiation, which stands in clear contrast to both the rights-based model favoured by the Truth Commission and, indeed, the numbing relief found by Bouda'D at the local shebeen, evidently begins to find an appeal for Thandeka.[65] But as the scene cuts to a busy downtown shopping mall, she is immediately brought back to her more conventional habitat within the rationalised, secular urban sphere. Accompanied by Simangaliso, the pair instead enjoy the relative comforts of city life, shopping for clothes and eating at a fast-food outlet as they discuss Thandeka's latest boyfriend. In this, the everyday serves less as a stage for the complexity and essential drama of their lives, to parse Ndebele, and more as the site for its active repression. Their seeming ease in this scenario arguably also conceals the violence wrought upon their relationship by the apartheid past and, indeed, their contemporary struggle to reconcile with each other, even if it also offers a glimpse of what might otherwise prove possible.

If the ordinary is to retain its authority in our understanding of reconciliation, then *Zulu Love Letter* makes its success entirely dependent upon the spatial and, with it, the spiritual, multisensory distinctions that appear to divide the

FIGURE 10. Thandeka and her daughter, Simangaliso, enjoy a day out in Johannesburg. From *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), directed by Ramadan Suleman. Image courtesy of JBA Production.

city from the township. And with every return to Soweto, the claims performed by the traditional sphere over the everyday, secular pursuit of reconciliation begin to take greater and greater priority. For instance, after recalling nostalgically for Simangaliso the doves that used to flock to the township before the violence of the emergency years in the 1980s, Thandeka embarks on a walk in nearby farmland. The scene precipitates a bucolic reverie of sorts. As the camera circles around her, she begins to repeat an incantatory line:

> Where does the breeze begin to blow, my sister?
> Where does the breeze begin to blow? [66]

Her invocations are broken, however, by the piercing screech of a vulture heard somewhere in the distant background. Thandeka looks around with increasing confusion as the image cuts to a picture of her former colleague, Michael. Unlike the previous interludes, in this instance, his face is depicted with relative clarity. He is even smiling as he stares directly at the camera. Thandeka, meanwhile, appears unsettled, but not immediately distressed by his sudden manifestation.

This is a momentary relief, however. For as the camera begins to lose its focus once more, the interlude subsequently slips back to the more familiar, blurred,

frenetic style that characterised Thandeka's previous flashbacks. Images of Michael's gruesome death at a remote farm in the Transvaal begin to play out in a series of typically fractured and asynchronous stills. In this, the scene holds numerous formal continuities with the type of traumatic memories that afflicted Thandeka earlier in the film. But it is also a violence to which Thandeka was never originally a witness. Locked up in a separate cell, she was shrouded from the intensity of his suffering. And rather than precipitating the type of psychological collapse that comes with these preceding interludes, this alternative, comparatively edifying visitation prompts an entirely separate response. Driving over to Me'Tau's house, Thandeka appears suddenly convinced by the need to fulfil the traditional ceremonial rites that will allow both Dineo's and Michael's spirits to proceed into the realm of the ancestors.

Situating Truth and Reconciliation

As a condition of its intimate, familial setting, the more general politics of reconciliation often appear at some distance from *Zulu Love Letter*'s governing narrative. There are occasional references—as noted in Bouda'D's drunken tirade—but the film's implicit pursuit of reconciliation is more often staged as an issue of interpersonal, rather than national, concern. That said, this distance is arguably also indicative of the experimentalism driving *Zulu Love Letter* in more abstractly imaginative terms. For under the guiding influence of its disruptive cinematic technique, Suleman and Peterson appear to deploy this experimentalist agenda in an effort to expand reconciliation's plausible praxis. Their approach offers a separate but entirely situated and responsive approach to the problem of collective unity, one led by the characters' own experience rather than any national imperative. Whether in its staging of Sigmangaliso's disability and the creative therapy she engages or Me'Tau's traditional understanding of ritual mourning, *Zulu Love Letter*'s offers up a super-sensory approach to the burdensome, often inarticulate remains of apartheid. At its most systematised, the film commits to a broadly interactive, multidimensional interpretation of reconciliation, one that encourages a situated integration of these separate models, as a theorist of experimentalism like John Dewey would have it. Indeed, in many ways, *Zulu Love Letter* operates at the apex of the embedded, conceptual improvisation driving this study at large. To this extent, then, it is perhaps unsurprising that it is also the only example to pursue a more assured account of reconciliation.

In all this, Thandeka's sense of traumatic as well as familial recovery proves pivotal. Pictured subsequently driving out with Me'Tau towards the home of

one of Dineo's alleged killers, a former black police officer named Dlamini, the pair eventually pull up in a desolate peri-urban space. Again, the spatial is suggestive, here serving to structure this transitional stage in the plot. However, neither Dlamini, nor indeed the information that might help them in their search appear forthcoming. Instead, they encounter the man's family at the small convenience store they run. For Me'Tau, sight of Dlamini's wife and young children, who play and sing together in the car park to the side of the store, stands at odds with his cruel and sadistic reputation:

> I have dreamt so much of this man and his friends. I never thought of him as anyone's father or husband. He's got children! Dineo also was a soloist in the church choir.[67]

From this oblique view of Dineo's killer, pointedly refracted through the everyday lives of his female relatives, Me'Tau begins to discover something of their plausibly shared humanity. This is not to say that she feels any immediate urge to reconcile with him. But this encounter does appear to precipitate an alternative way of thinking about his status in the story of Dineo's death.

It is altogether instructive at this tentative moment of realignment that the Truth Commission, otherwise latent to the film's action, intervenes to stage its own alternative claim over Me'Tau and Thandeka's mutual pursuit of reconciliation. Distressed by their failure to acquire any information, the two women return in solemn silence to Soweto. Arriving at the elderly woman's home, large crowds march past in the road carrying banners reading: 'THEY LOST THEIR LIVES' and 'WE WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH'. Me'Tau insists that they join the march as it advances up the street towards one of the Truth Commission's preliminary public hearings. As they near a local church hall, the camera slowly tracks the long, snaking queue of victims who have gathered to deliver their testimony. Apart from the odd middle-aged man in a wheelchair and the handful of teenage boys present to support their mothers, the overwhelming majority of the many hundreds waiting patiently in line are black women—mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters—all standing together in the face of their mutual grief. It is a stark return to the picture of truth *as* woman outlined by Krog above. For Me'Tau and Thandeka too it offers up a potential space in which to reflect again upon their mutual, specifically maternal suffering.

This is not to redeem the Truth Commission's public action. The sense of cautious possibility seeded by their visit to this preliminary public hearing is swiftly threatened as the narrative takes another sinister turn. Having been named by Me'Tau and Thandeka in the written submissions that they provide

FIGURE 11: Thandeka and Me'Tau queue to give their statements to the Truth Commission. From *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), directed by Ramadan Suleman. Image courtesy of JBA Production.

to the Commission, the white police officers responsible for the murders of Dineo and Michael subsequently attempt to intimidate the two women. With Me'Tau's home under constant surveillance, Thandeka is sent ominous pictures of Michael's beaten body, precipitating a series of highly disorienting interludes as she is drawn ineluctably back into her traumatised state. Making full use of the formal fracture deployed in earlier flashbacks, this latest sequence is similarly difficult and distressing to witness. No longer constructed from mnemonic flashes, Thandeka's renewed psychological torment now drags her into a fictional nightmare that twists and deforms the details of Dineo's assassination. Instead of observing the scene, Thandeka has become a participant, helping Dineo escape the pursuing officers. Me'Tau's anguished face too suddenly appears on screen, while her chilling screams of 'Dineo! Dineo!' echo over the scene.[68] Thandeka and Dineo, meanwhile, speed away in her car as a police helicopter hovers above. With the car coming to sudden halt, Dineo makes a dash for safety. The helicopter's spotlight tracks her as she sprints off. Thandeka can only scream after her in desperation, before the scene shifts to the now familiar image of the girl cowering on the ground before her killers. Two shots ring out and Dineo collapses to the ground, but not before she has looked back with seeming reproach at Thandeka.

In the wake of this renewed traumatic torment, further compounded by the suspicious death of Thandeka's ex-husband, Moola, in a road traffic accident, Me'Tau decides to withdraw her statement from the Commission. Whatever her initial interest in its redemptive capacity, it seems that the controversy surrounding its hearings have further compounded the feeling of impossible grief that Dineo's murder originally imposed upon her. Thandeka, meanwhile, seeks out her local councillor, launching into a verbal tirade against him:

> You were an activist. You were detained. How is it that we now see nothing, feel nothing, when all around us the misery continues? . . . We are supposed to be in charge in this country. You are supposed to be my testimony to the fact that you and I have finally triumphed.[69]

Taken as representative of the political elite, the councillor's seeming self-interest provides Thandeka with an individualised account of the myopia so often appended to the Commission by its critics. 'The truth will out my sister', states the councillor in an effort to placate her. But his trite phrasing only raises Thandeka's ire:

> Fuck the truth. The only truth I know is what I felt with my entire body. I know that floor, the exact measurements of that cell. . . . Five months and three days . . . enough time to see and feel the four walls of the cell even when you are fast asleep. And all the time, inside here, each kick, each movement, from a child as stubborn as her mother . . . scared the shit out of me. Do I tell them of the life inside me? Will it bring me mercy? Or will it bring new pleasures to the beatings?

Rejecting the councillor's austere attitude to her suffering, Thandeka gives up on the corrupted sphere of truth and reconciliation for which he and the Commission stand. 'Excuse me. . . . I have a child to bring up', she states wearily, leaving him to call out in even more clichéd terms, 'I'll personally ensure that the person you suspect is brought to book'.[70]

As far as the general arc of the film is concerned, Thandeka's despair in this moment might also be taken as a moment of reckoning. To borrow momentarily from the generic terminology of tragedy, it offers up the anagnorisis that clarifies her understanding of her own traumatised condition as much as its highlights the inadequacy of the Commission as a sphere of individual recovery. It is, in short, what presses Thandeka to pursue a form of reconciliation that is responsive above all to her own embodied, emotional, and, it seems, spiritual suffering, rather than some remote, strictly legal one. In this, she arguably shares with

those victims privileged elsewhere in this study a sense of injustice that proceeds not through verifiable fact but the affective claims that more often overwhelm this forensic variety of truth. But, crucially, she also begins to find a more stable sense of connection with the ritualised recovery pursed by other characters in *Zulu Love Letter*, not least the restorative rites performed by her estranged daughter, Simangaliso. For as the film works towards its climax, a sense of familial reconciliation also begins to seed itself. The clearest sign of this incipient, tentative recovery follows Simangaliso's discovery one evening of the file containing the details of her mother's torture. At its broadest, this evidence communicates a truth that Thandeka is otherwise unable to articulate, or, at least, a truth that she assumes Simangaliso is unable to hear. But it is precisely not a confessional account, not an embodied recital of the past on her mother's part. Instead, Simangaliso is forced to animate this traumatic history, reimagining Thandeka's experience in a partially speculative, partially ritualistic form.

Waking up in the middle of the night, Simangaliso leaves her bedroom at her mother's apartment to sit beneath the soft lamplight still burning in the living room. Thandeka, meanwhile, has fallen asleep on the sofa, leaving a file of documents open on the floor. Simangaliso begins to leaf through images captured of Dineo by Michael before her death. She reads the headline to an article from the *Mail & Guardian*, entitled 'Draft Bill Defines Political Crime'. Looking up at her mother, asleep on the sofa, Simangaliso begins to guess at its implications, embarking on something of the same connotative reading imposed on the audience in the film's earliest scenes. However, by now, the audience is arguably primed to share with Simangaliso in those communicative possibilities encoded by the symbolic and the gestural. And in the frequent glances she makes between her mother, who lies in a state of total exhaustion, and the newspaper report, Simangaliso encodes for the audience a clearer understanding of the past and its effects on Thandeka. Indeed, so deeply felt is this sense of realisation that the young girl appears suddenly overwhelmed. Turning towards an open window, she looks out over the Johannesburg skyline, seeming to find in the expansive, dark night sky a visual account for her own grim apprehension of the past.

As elsewhere, however, Simangaliso guards against her own emotional fragility by refracting her feelings into a broadly surreal, super-sensory reimagining of the world around her. Catching her reflection in the glass of the window, a strong gust of wind is seen suddenly to sweep into the room, pulling the girl's mirrored self out onto the window ledge. Her effigy teeters on the edge, desperately looking out over the tormenting sky as she attempts to interpolate the full

horror of her mother's suffering. Without warning, however, she drops from the window into the darkness below and the surrealism of the scene suddenly threatens to rupture into realism. We are no longer convinced of the divide that separates Simangaliso's visual imagination from her lived experience. For a few excruciating seconds as the camera pictures her falling from below with her arms spread wide, the audience is made to anticipate her tragic death. It is a vitally instructive, if also disturbing encounter between the symbolic and the real, leading us even closer to the complex, imbricated sense of being that Simangaliso upholds. For even if her embodied self is not here at risk, then her spiritual self appears to suddenly abandon her. Significantly, however, she is saved by a flock of doves that flashes across the screen, gathering around the girl to lift her up to safety. As a sign of love and companionship (according to traditional belief), the doves also return from a time before the violence that drove them away, as Thandeka earlier recalls. Read against the scenes that follow, their mystical appearance, rescuing Simangaliso from certain death, appears to signal the beginning of a more traditional, ritualised renewal for mother and daughter alike.

For instance, rather than returning to her the apartment, Simangaliso is transported by the doves into a fantastical scene in which the darkness of the Johannesburg night sky has been replaced by the vibrant warmth and verdancy of the open countryside. Gone is the sense of peril that stalked the preceding scene. Looking from Simangaliso's perspective over a field of wheat, we also see Thandeka singing and dancing with a large group of friends and family all dressed in traditional Zulu costume for what appears to be her marriage ceremony. Neither remembered, nor altogether imagined, this dream sequence appears to inaugurate an intimate but otherwise unlikely encounter between the pair. As Simangaliso begins to walk towards to the group, still dressed in her pyjamas, her mother turns to wave enthusiastically at her daughter. It is a moment of rare affection, one that gestures at the residual maternal bond that unites them, despite their more recent estrangement. And plausibly, this scene is also one that Thandeka, asleep on the sofa, dreams into being, bringing mother and daughter together into a space of mutual reverie.

Much like its more general approach to the turbulence of reconciliation, however, *Zulu Love Letter* does not present this symbolic, spiritual reunion in singularly idealised terms. In other words, it provides no swift remedy to the residual trauma of the past. As Simangaliso moves closer to her mother, two gunshots ring out, scattering the rest of the group as Thandeka is left alone to confront the police officers responsible for her original torture. Here, the symbolism is

FIGURE 12: Thandeka dressed in traditional costume. From *Zulu Love Letter* (2004), directed by Ramadan Suleman. Image courtesy of JBA Production.

lucid. Even in this shared sphere of traditional ritualism, Simangaliso remains separated from her mother and her ongoing suffering. But it is also a moment of profound reckoning for them both. For in translating Thandeka's traumatic experiences at the hands of the security police into a story of lost tradition, of a ritual practice wrecked by the agents of apartheid, Simangaliso not only arrives at a more lucid understanding of the violence inflicted on her mother, but she is also makes essential the attenuated rites that must be performed to help Thandeka resolve this rupture.

Ritual Ends

In many ways, *Zulu Love Letter* attempts to secure a climactic space for the ritualism that has also been implicit to the theatrical and filmic examples cited elsewhere in this study. Whether in the appeal made by Farber's *Molora* to the rites of tragedy or the indigenous, Xhosa mourning practice also performed by the Mtimkulu family at the very close of *Between Joyce and Remembrance*, reconciliation has been throughout the object of a broadly ritualised pursuit. But nowhere else is this ritualism pursued in quite such explicit or sustained terms. And in locating a situated, which is also to say vernacular approach to

reconciliation, its re-articulation here through the rites of Zulu cosmology offers a vital counter to the institutional model imposed by the Truth Commission. Most obviously, it serves to scale reconciliation in familial rather than national terms—that is to say, at level of mother and daughter, rather than mother country. But it also provides a distinctly performative account of reconciliation, one in which the rites inherited from traditional Zulu culture also enable the victims of racial abuse to enact a version of reconciliation that might bolster rather than diminish their collective agency. As such, reconciliation emerges armed with renewed purpose in *Zulu Love Letter*, its plausible achievement led above all by a process of familial and interpersonal ritual action, rather than some remote institutional authority.

As Simangaliso's dream sequence gives way to a new day, for instance, she is pictured with Thandeka adding new decorations to her original love letter. It is scene of previously inconceivable harmony, one shaped most noticeably by their shared act of traditional creativity. In their beadwork, which is performed with the same ritualised rhythms adopted earlier, the pair appear finally to have acquired a common language through which to express to each other their mutual sense of care and love. For the audience too this shift to the sphere of traditional symbolism, in which the camera appears to delight in its slow meandering across the scene, comes as a visual relief from the fractured and intense formal experimentation conducting many of the film's previous scenes. As such, this softening in mood and pace as the film progresses towards a tentative accord between Thandeka and Simangaliso proves particularly welcome, not least for the audience, who have been compelled to share in the characters' entangled and, at times, overwhelming effort to work out the heavy legacies of the past. Of course, the cinematic experience is by no means equivalent to the traumatic one endured by mother and daughter. But *Zulu Love Letter*'s general success arguably depends on a degree of mutuality, not least in the ritualised action that begins to rescue the audience from their own much broader state of emotional anxiety.

This ritualism reaches its reconciliatory climax in the film's final scene, which returns almost the entire cast of characters to the farm where Michael was murdered and where Me'Tau believes Dineo's remains must be buried. Having given up on the Truth Commission and, indeed, the entire political sphere, Thandeka and Me'Tau visit the site to perform a ritual purification, restoring the place's sacredness while also permitting Dineo and Michael to pass into the realm of the ancestors. It is the clearest and most sustained elaboration of the traditional African rites that Biko was so eager to celebrate in his quest for a true humanity.

Its performance in the space of fictional cinema, however, is without general precedence. Certainly, African ethnographic film has sought to find ways to document such practices but at the time of *Zulu Love Letter*'s release this type of ritual practice remained largely absent from South African narrative film. As such, its inclusion here further extends the experimental ambitions of Suleman and Peterson's vernacular cinema, expanding our sense of what reconciliation might otherwise constitute in the sphere of traditional black life.

The entire ritual process of cleansing is captured with respectful sensitivity, the camera offering an embedded view of the intricacies of the process without ever intruding on the solemnity of the scene. Standing in the grounds of the now ruined farm building, Thandeka, Simangaliso, Me'Tau, and her youngest daughter, Mapule, are joined by large group of grieving wives and mothers from Soweto, all of whom gather around an enamel bowl filled with water and aloes. The women, dressed in black, form a circle around the bowl. A number of men, including the councillor previously rebuked by Thandeka and her friend from the township shebeen, Bouda'D, stand at a small remove from the scene, centering the women's primary role in the action. Remarkably, however, the ritual service is initiated by Duma Kumalo. Stepping forward into the centre of the space, he offers a prayer for the fallen victims:

> Our brothers and sister who are buried here, we will always remember you. We have come to fetch you so that we can return home. We thank you for your sacrifice.[71]

This small irruption of the real—for those attentive, at least, to the specific figures on screen—offers an important challenge to the film's broadly fictional status. For Kumalo, who is named in the screenplay simply as 'Activist', this process of remembrance and traditional cleansing marks an otherwise improbable departure from his own melancholy ritual action night after night on Farber's stage. This is not to entirely overturn the compulsive repetition that motivated his performances in *He Left Quietly*. But it is to affirm something of the alternative mode of ritualised, even reconciliatory action that *Zulu Love Letter*, by important distinction, otherwise enables. In the film's discrete space of remembrance and veneration, the sense of humanity shared between these characters appears to replace the Commission's account of reconciliation, revising the concept according to the spiritual values of Zulu tradition and custom.

It is not without vital significance that it is a group of grieving mothers and wives who serve, ultimately, as the midwives to this alternative sense of reconciled possibility, stepping forward to offer prayers for the fallen 'warriors who

died for our freedom'.[72] This climatic act is carefully choreographed between the constituent members of the ritual, reaffirming, in part, those aspects of community action and spirituality that Biko believed integral to Africa's 'human face'. But it also centres the specifically female responsibility at the constitutive root of this humanity. This is by no means meant to exclude those male participants from the cleansing process. Rather, it certifies the prominent role that these women uphold, both in bearing witness to the traumas of the past and in leading society towards a scene of plausible, mutual release. This is, in short, reconciliation *as* woman. And following in the wake of the prayers, Thandeka helps Me'Tau across to the pail of water, before one of the elderly women picks up the aloe broom and begins to spread the water onto the ground, offering another prayer to the dead:

> My children, come and let us go home. Let us return to where you were born, where your relatives, friends, teachers are waiting for you. It is time to go home.[73]

The woman's voice cracks at times as she attempts to retain her composure through this moving performance. Looking out at the group, her call for them to go home, however, emerges with clarity and resolve. The camera then cuts to Me'Tau, who is rendered in an almost statuesque pose as she looks out over the scene with a fortitude absent elsewhere in the film. She returns the aloe branch to the enamel bowl, before the women begin to sing one final traditional hymn.

Evidently, this collective ritual is not a direct confession to the suffering inflicted on these women under apartheid or, indeed, a recital of their final reckoning with the past. But it does attempt to interpolate and make symbolic the mournful legacies of their emotional and, indeed, spiritual distress. Put differently, the rites performed at the farm may not narrate the precise details of Michael's brutal murder or the callousness with which Dineo's remains were discarded by the police. Nonetheless, in attempting to enact a spiritual resolution, the women succeed in performing a mutually restorative and profoundly moving account of these historical truths. Its sense of resolution is, by extension, collectively distributed, avoiding a scene of monumental personal recovery for Thandeka. In this, *Zulu Love Letter*'s way of telling its story of mother and daughter transforms the logic of individual healing that motivated the Truth Commission, prioritising instead a situated, highly ritualised and above all collective response to the past. This is not to discount the basic function of the Commission as a space of personal testimony or to dismiss the possibility of psychological healing. Rather, it is to underscore Suleman and Peterson's challenge

to the gendered, epistemic injustice implicit to the Commission in its abstract, institutionalised pursuit of truth and reconciliation. For here, in the ritualised space that these women prioritise, an entirely separate, vernacular model of reconciliation begins to flourish, a model founded on the shared humanity of apartheid's ordinary victims and their interdependent recovery.

Conclusion

Whatever Suleman and Peterson claim of their film's modest narrative ambitions, *Zulu Love Letter* is evidently not without its challenges, in both visual as well as more interpretive terms. But, arguably, it is at its most valuable when it is also at its most demanding. Extending the Truth Commission's account of the apartheid past beyond the terrain of the strictly verifiable, reaching out into the realm of the spiritual, the symbolic, and the super-sensory, the film demands a certain epistemic humility before the particular sense of reconciliation levied by the traditional sphere. This is, in other ways, the move adopted more generally by the adjacent sphere privileged throughout in this study. Whether in Duma Kumalo's melancholy insights, or the sphere of fragile renewal in *Molora*, or the sense of agency that emerges in refusing to forgive as evidenced in *Between Joyce and Remembrance*, the works surveyed in previous chapters have sought similarly to challenge the prevailing wisdom of the Truth Commission. They each seek out an alternative epistemic account of 'this thing called reconciliation'. Nonetheless, where *Zulu Love Letter* distinguishes itself is in its comparative autonomy. Eschewing the generic attachments and precedents observed elsewhere, it is liberated from the imaginative limits that otherwise shape and define the rest of this repertoire.

This is as much a conceptual liberation as it is an aesthetic one, unmooring reconciliation from the forms of redemption implied by the Truth Commission as a performative event. Deferring, by contrast, to an alternately ritualised, non-linear, spiritual pursuit of reconciliation, *Zulu Love Letter* centres in uniquely ambitious, stirring terms a sense of the collective humanity that may yet emerge from South Africa's faltering democracy. To this extent, Suleman and Peterson's film is not just the most vociferous in its critique of the Commission, it is also the most optimistic of those works reviewed as part of this study. Of course, this is no necessary corrective to the material impoverishment that still conditions the lives of the country's black majority, something the filmmakers repeat time and again in their own public commentary. As such, there can be no denying the serious challenges that continue to corrupt the country in its wider

pursuit of reconciliation. Nonetheless, to return to Biko's guiding philosophy, in its modest, intimate story of two mothers in search of their daughters, *Zulu Love Letter* helps inaugurate the sphere of autonomous black expression that is also essential to the defeat of racial injustice in South Africa and the quest for a new humanity.

Conclusion

As far as the logic of improvisation is concerned, it can be hard to settle on an end point. Conclusions tend to prove provisional, serving better as a relief from which to survey the failures and relative successes of the foregoing action. They are more generative than strictly climactic. This present study has sought to discover in reconciliation the benefits that improvisation's pattern of repetition and renewal might afford. Refusing any final word on the topic, each of the preceding chapters has tried instead to loosen and disrupt reconciliation's supposed computation of 'healing + closure', as John Galtung first described it. But this has also risked shattering the concept, rendering it useless in the wider pursuit of racial justice. As such, I have tried to resist too agitational a mode of analysis—by which I mean, one that would insist without due restraint on improvisation's separate accomplishments. Those scenes of confession favoured by my analysis are not convincing because of the rhetorical or actual triumph that they deliver. Forging a faith with their tentative, intimate everyday effects, I have strived instead to account for the fragile conditions under which reconciliation might otherwise emerge. To this extent, this study has served more as a workshop for reconciliation's rehearsal than a showcase for its ultimate realisation.

To advocate on behalf of this comparatively cautious attitude has necessarily meant managing the heavy pressures placed on reconciliation from above—that is, from those who consistently hail its institutionalised achievement. 'Let us shut the door on the past', declared Desmond Tutu indicatively as part of his foreword to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report.[1] This was always likely to prove a hopeful rather than judicious appeal. In the field of racial justice, such declarative ends necessarily risk more than they resolve. When it comes to the Truth Commission, Tutu's willed sense of closure was also forced to compete with the priorities of a state that found in this institutional action a convenient distraction from its own failures in governance. Even after the majority of its public hearings had concluded and the first five volumes of its report had been delivered to President Nelson Mandela in October 1998, the Commission's findings were repeatedly cast by its political readership as an interim account liable to future revision. Much of this talk was strategic. For one thing, the ANC saw

the equivalence drawn at the Commission between the violence persecuted by the party's armed wing and that enacted by the apartheid government as a threat to its democratic dispensation. Heaping scorn on its many procedural 'imperfections', the party arguably helped undermine the Commission's public efficacy.[2]

Nonetheless, it is important not to confuse the political imperatives that have conspired to damage the Commission's legacy for its own internal compromises. For instance, at the time of the final report's publication, its Amnesty Committee had barely begun to process the thousands of applications it had received. This work would take another five years to complete. But the Amnesty Committee's final report only served to encode yet more controversies. Of the 7,116 applicants, only 1,167 were granted amnesty, with the majority of the rest refused on administrative grounds. Moreover, many perpetrators, including the former apartheid leadership, simply elected to remain silent, effectively stymying the flow of information. Given the devastating scale of abuse recorded by the Commission's Human Rights Violation Committee, such poor justice has resulted in many calling out the Truth Commission's unfinished business, even still.[3]

More than a procedural critique, this sense of disappointment contains its own correlative demands, demands that often begin with the Commission but end with much broader calls for political reform and economic redistribution. Even Tutu has been compelled in more recent years to call out the corrupted promise under which South Africa's reconciled future now labours. Speaking to the *Mail & Guardian* in 2014, his disappointment was remarkably clear:

> As we reflect on the commission's contribution to re-weaving the fabric of our society, we do so against a backdrop of appalling violence being perpetrated, especially against women and children across our country. We do so against a backdrop of a hopelessly inequitable country in which most of the rich have hung on to their wealth, while the 'freedom dividend' for most of the poor has been to continue to survive on scraps. We do so against the backdrop of an education system that is failing to prepare our youth adequately to contribute to their own and our nation's development. We do against the backdrop of the Marikana massacre and the public protector's report into the obscene spending on [President Jacob Zuma's] property in Nkandla. We do so against the backdrop of a death of magnanimity and accountability and ethical incorruptibility.[4]

Tutu's attempt here to situate the Commission within a much wider field of political failure has been taken up elsewhere. However, others are less quick to forgive the Commission its original faults. For instance, at an event to mark the

twentieth anniversary of the Commission's interim report, critics continued to attack its rights-based approach, actively aligning this myopic view of apartheid injustice with the violence of a comparatively unreformed and, under Zuma's presidency, increasingly authoritarian state. While many spoke of the sense of general impunity still enjoyed by the political elite, something not without resonance given the litany of corruption scandals that have plagued the ANC in recent years, Ditebogo Diale also coupled the Commission's self-confessed gender bias to the ongoing and often vicious misogyny that continues to structure South African society.[5]

Such discordancy is signal as much of the despair that has overtaken South Africa's public sphere as the Truth Commission's own obvious failings. As a result of this despondent mood, however, the Commission has also come more and more to serve as an open conduit for all manner of opprobrium. And to turn the Commission into a totem for the failures of the democratic transition is arguably to overemphasise its institutional authority, retrospectively granting it a responsibility it was never designed to uphold. Put bluntly, South Africa's transition is far more complex than any single, time-limited event can be presumed to remedy. This is in no way to excuse the Commission from reproach. It is instead to situate its failures within a much wider culture of political misgiving. Whether valid or not, the critiques levied against the Commission might well be understood as an indicative summary of the problems faced nationally in the wake of apartheid—that is, as generalizable complaints that also position the Commission in a broader field of disappointment, as critics like Andrew van der Vlies have sought to show.[6]

This wider view returns us somewhere close to the intentions set out originally in my introduction. In drawing attention to the expediency with which the Truth Commission was dispatched by critics during and immediately after its public hearings had concluded, I here cited Eric Doxtader and Joseph Salazar's call for a more expansive frame of inquiry. The two decades or so that have elapsed since their intervention have only further underscored the relative benefits of this type of deliberative, durable, and above all improvised attitude to an ideal like reconciliation. To this extent, the deferred perspective at work in this study—that is, in a time and place beyond the intense conditions that governed the earliest years of the transition—is also what might permit the basic reconciliatory ambition behind the Truth Commission to take root and eventually flourish. For while the Commission's many faults still reverberate, so do its principle objectives, though arguably at a lower pitch that perhaps penetrates more deeply. Take, for instance, the rising appetite for prosecuting prominent Special

Branch officers, like Joao Rodrigues, who was taken to trial in December 2019 for the murder of anti-apartheid activist Ahmed Timolin; or, more recently, the inquest into the death of Neil Aggett in police custody in 1982, which opened at the high court in Johannesburg in February 2020. Such cases imply that the political conditions are beginning at last to catch up with the legal imperative to investigate those crimes left unsettled by the Truth Commission.

The Commission's fundamental language of truth and reconciliation has also found a more abstract revival in contemporary political movements, most obviously the #FeesMustFall protests that rocked higher education institutions in 2015 and 2016. Part of a programme to decolonise the university system, the 'fallist' movement set out to achieve a number of symbolic victories, like the toppling of statues venerating the colonial and apartheid past, most notably the imposing bronze of Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town (UCT). But it also sought more substantial reforms, particularly to the university curriculum and access programmes. After months of violence on campuses across the country, which included countless student suspensions and expulsions, student leaders negotiated a temporary hiatus to the protests in 2016, with those at UCT also petitioning for the inauguration of a truth and reconciliation commission. This Institutional Commission of Inquiry was to grant clemency to those students previously excluded and amnesty for those implicated in the violence on campus, while also providing a forum within which students and managers could engage in a more reflective dialogue. Procedurally, then, it was to have many of the hallmarks of the original Truth Commission. Seemingly absent from this latest forum, however, was the scepticism under which its institutional predecessor has been forced to labour. Very few spoke out against the conceptual limitations of such a commission of truth and reconciliation. Even for those more senior academics who opposed its institution, at issue was the capitulation to violence that it arguably sanctioned. This is not a specific criticism of UCT's proposed Institutional Commission. Rather, what emerges here is a sense of the ways in which the original Truth Commission has been subject to a rehabilitation of sorts, especially among those who were not witness to its original action. Under the administration of UCT's student body, the principles of truth and reconciliation appear to serve as important instruments for a much wider, ongoing process of structural reform, rather than its end point.

A similar sense of necessity and corresponding deficiency has been at work in this study. Most particularly, in elaborating upon the shortcomings of the Truth Commission, I have sought to balance its institutional failures against the complex history of injustice over which it was made to adjudicate. However,

I do not wish to vindicate the Commission's faulty action. For one thing, there is no satisfaction to be derived from the lingering shadow of racial injustice in South Africa, a problem sustained in no small measure by the Commission's preference for scenes of individual healing over and above state reform and collective action. Nor should this study be taken to encourage other, more targeted commissions of truth and reconciliation. As a method of justice, their aims are generally too discrete and their achievements too incremental to render them in any way sufficient in the face of racial oppression, however necessary these aims and achievements also remain.

Evidently, the balance between reconciliation's ordinary, daily action and its lofty aspirations can be a challenging one to sustain. When it comes to reviewing the comparative achievements of the chapters above, I am conscious too of the ways in which their fragile, often anticipatory claims may mirror something of the Commission's own faltering effort to resolve itself. In part, this is a shared condition of reconciliation's imprecise agenda. But it also points to reconciliation's chronic deferral as a national priority. In an age of renewed state violence, broad underdevelopment and a stubborn sense of political cronyism, reconciliation is liable to appear as an anachronism, distant from the country's contemporary exigencies. Nonetheless, part of my aim here has been to renew reconciliation in terms that make it pliable before the volatilities that necessarily drive the political sphere. As I have sought to present it, reconciliation is at its most vital when the conditions for its achievement also appear to be at their most inhospitable. It is for this reason that any defence of the concept must proceed under a rubric of the plausible, rather than the probable, and at a vital distance from the turbulent priorities of the state.

Nonetheless, to insist on reconciliation's less than climactic ends brings its own emotional burdens, especially for those implicated in its everyday negotiation. In the melancholy compulsions that afflict Duma Kumalo or the repeated injustice inflicted upon the Mtimkulu family, the sense of implausibility that nettles 'this thing called reconciliation' evidently also manifests itself in a variety of violent symptoms, both inward and outward. In maintaining reconciliation's ethical primacy, I have tried hard not to redeem this record of violence or presume its necessary conclusion. Instead, I have sought to discover those scenes of tentative possibility that gather around the concept. Improvisation may prove insufficient at describing the possibilities that guide reconciliation's equitable otherwise. But in taking seriously the situated demands as well as the corresponding failures that improvisation offers up, I have tried to maintain a view of reconciliation that does not collapse before its inevitable inadequacies.

My analysis has been motivated, instead, by the possibilities that emerge alongside these limitations.

If this study has been about the risks and returns of this improvised attitude, then it cannot remain entirely blind to its own particular shortcomings, especially those that appear to limit the scope of its intended aftereffects. Chief among them is the manifest lack of black female practitioners on display, especially given the many black female voices that animate its chapters. As far as South Africa's aesthetic sphere is concerned, there are certain historical disadvantages that partially account for their absence here, without also justifying them. White practitioners are still overwhelmingly privileged in terms of their access to resources and patronage. Redress of sorts has begun to emerge in recent years, but this study extends this deficit by privileging those theatre- and filmmakers who circulate nationally and internationally, rather than locally or communally. Even if there are some strategic reasons for this choice, the allied effect is far from desirable. My modest hope is that the vital range of black, broadly female voices that I try to privilege here will echo elsewhere and with deeper resonance as a result.

Indeed, reconciliation's improvisation does not end with the repertoire appraised in the above chapters. Its pursuit must be ongoing, adaptive before the country's tempestuous political climate. In the sphere of theatre and film, access to financial and institutional support remains vital. Here, at least, the Truth Commission can boast a modest, ongoing contribution, even if there is still much more to be achieved. Each year, the Ministry of Justice continues to solicit applications from those victims of apartheid abuse and their families identified by the Commission for educational grants. But this type of material restitution must also be joined by a sweep of ethical and epistemic reforms, not least to basic idea of what reconciliation might otherwise constitute. By contrast to the Commission's own declarative ends, this means situating reconciliation's achievement in terms that also make proximate the possible and the impossible, the known and the unknown, the fixed and the unfixed. When it comes to the collective, equitable life of the nation, what arrives decided also delimits what is thinkable and achievable. The aim, therefore, of *Improvising Reconciliation* has been to keep the concept open to the less than calculable. For it is here that reconciliation's claim to justice thrives.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in Amferica*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 515.

2. Johan Galtung, 'After Violence, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Resolution: Coping with the Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence', in *Reconciliation, Justice, and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2001), 4.

3. See Albie Sachs, 'The Banality of Good', in *S. A. 27 April 1994: An Authors' Diary*, ed. André Brink (Cape Town: Queillerie, 1994), 111.

4. This cautious phrase was first used by Cynthia Ngeweu, the mother of an activist, Christopher Piet, who was murdered by police in 1986, as part of her testimony at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. For more, see Brandon Hamber and Hugo van der Merwe, 'What Is This Thing Called Reconciliation?', *Reconciliation in Review* 1, no.1 (1998): 3–6.

5. John Borneman, 'Reconciliation after Ethnic Cleansing: Listening, Retribution, Affiliation', *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 283.

6. Deborah Posel, 'History as Confession: The Case of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Public Culture* 20, no.1 (2008): 122.

7. See Mahmood Mamdani, 'A Diminished Truth', *Siyaya* 3 (1998): 38–40.

8. Posel, 'History as Confession', 133.

9. Gerhard Werle, '"Without Truth, No Reconciliation," The South African Rechtsstaat and the Apartheid Past', *Verfassung und Recht in Übersee/Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America* 29 (1996): 58.

10. Erik Doxtader and Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: The Fundamental Documents* (Claremont, South Africa: New Africa Books, 2007), xiii.

11. Richard Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xvii.

12. Bhekizizwe Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future Under Siege: Reconciliation and Nation-Building in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in *The New Violent Cartography: Geo-Analysis after the Aesthetic Turn*, ed. Sam Okoth Opondo and Michael J. Shapiro (New York: Routledge, 2012), 217.

13. For more, see Stewart Motha, 'Reconciliation as Domination', in *Law and the Politics of Reconciliation*, ed. Scott Veitch (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 70.

14. Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow, *Improvisation in Drama, Theatre and Performance: History, Practice, Theory* (London: Palgrave, 2015), xvi. Emphasis in original.

15. Gary Peters, *Improvising Improvisation: From Out of Philosophy, Music, Dance and Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2018), 4.

16. Edgar Landgraf, *Improvisation as Art: Conceptual Challenges, Historical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 18.

17. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

18. Tracy McMullen, 'Improvisation Within a Scene of Constraint: Judith Butler interviewed by Tracy McMullen', in *Negotiated Moments: Improvisation, Sound and Subjectivity*, ed. Gillian Siddal and Ellen Waterman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 22.

19. Peters, *Improvising Improvisation*, 10.

20. Barbara Herman, *Moral Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 287–288. Herman takes up some of the arguments made by Nussbaum in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

21. Herman, *Moral Literacy*, 288.

22. Yves Citton, 'Politics as Hypergestural Improvisation in the Age of Mediocracy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies: Volume One*, ed. George E. Lewis and Benjamin Piekut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 162.

23. Citton, 'Politics as Hypergestural Improvisation', 167–171.

24. Sara Ramshaw, *Justice as Improvisation: The Law of the Extempore* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1–3.

25. Ramshaw, *Justice as Improvisation*, 4.

26. Paul van Zyl, 'Dilemmas of Transitional Justice: The Case of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Journal of International Affairs* 52, no. 2 (Spring, 1999): 663.

27. Andrew Schaap, 'Reconciliation as Ideology and Politics', *Constellations* 15, no. 2 (2008): 250.

28. For more, see John Dewey, *Essays in Experimental Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916).

29. Landgraf, *Improvisation as Art*, 36.

30. For an indicative account of South Africa's shift to neoliberal orthodoxy after apartheid, see Zine Magubane, 'The Revolution Betrayed? Globalization, Neoliberalism, and the Post-Apartheid State', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 4 (2004): 657–671.

31. For more on the notion of 'afterwardsness' in the sphere of trauma studies, see Gregory Bistoen, Stijn Vanheule, and Stef Craps, 'Nachträglichkeit: A Freudian Perspective on Delayed Traumatic Reactions', *Theory and Psychology* 24, no. 5 (2014): 668–687.

32. Njabulo Ndebele, 'Afterword', in *At Risk: Writing On and Over the Edge of South Africa*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and Liz McGregor (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2007), 243.

33. Ramshaw, *Justice as Improvisation*, 9.

34. Under pressure from former detainees, the African National Congress also staged two internal commissions of enquiry in 1992 and 1993 focussed on the abuses committed in detention centres across Southern Africa.

35. The Commission received 21,290 written statements from victims of human rights abuse, but only heard a small percentage of these at its HRVC hearings, which ran from April 1996 until June 1997. The eighteen months originally permitted for the Commission to complete its public function stretched to more than three and a half years with respect to the Amnesty Committee, which did not conclude its hearings until 2001. This delay also postponed the final publication of the final report, the seventh volume of which was not delivered to President Thabo Mbeki until 21 March 2003, almost five years later than planned.

36. Michael Onyebuchi Eze, 'Foreword', in Christian Gade, *A Discourse on African Philosophy: A New Perspective on Ubuntu and Transitional Justice in South Africa* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), ix.

37. Gade, *A Discourse on African Philosophy*, 6.

38. Gade notes, by way of early comparison, the way in which ubuntu was also deployed in Zimbabwe during the early years of independence in terms altogether similar to those in South Africa.

39. Ruti Teitel, *Globalizing Transitional Justice: Contemporary Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xii.

40. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 200 of 1993*, chapter 16, National Unity and Reconciliation.

41. Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History, Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 2.

42. The Commission did have the power to subpoena witnesses, but this was rarely ever expressed.

43. John Saul, 'Globalism, Socialism and Democracy in the South African Transition', *Socialist Register* (1994): 195.

44. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation*, 3.

45. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation*, 3.

46. Posel, 'History as Confession', 126.

47. Landgraf, *Improvisation as Art*, 126.

48. For more, see Charles Villa-Vicencio, 'Restorative Justice: Ambiguities and Limitations of a Theory', in *The Provocations of Amnesty: Memory, Justice and Impunity*, ed. Erik Doxtader and Charles Villa-Vicencio (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 30–50.

49. For a useful account on the recent rise of autobiography, see Paulina Grzeda, 'Trauma and Testimony: Autobiographical Writing in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance*, ed. Abigail Ward (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 65–82. There are, of course, many contemporaneous accounts of the abuses committed under apartheid, even if the publishing industry was somewhat constrained by the censors.

50. Catherine Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 50.

51. Sean Field, 'Disappointed Remains: Trauma, Testimony, and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 154.

52. Verne Harris, 'Archives', in *Truth and Reconciliation: 10 Years On*, ed. Charles Villa-Vicencio and Fanie du Toit (Claremont, South Africa: David Philip, 2006), 53.

53. Julian Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics* London: Zero Books, 2015), 43–6.

54. Harris, 'Archives', 54.

55. The National Archive in Pretoria holds recordings of the hearings, which are available to review on site and under supervision.

56. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, 8.

57. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, xvi.

58. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, 65.

59. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, 64.

60. Yvette Hutchison, *South African Performance and Archives of Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 21.

61. Hutchison, *South African Performance*, 34. See also Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

62. See Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).

63. Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007), 5.

64. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, 24.

65. Wendy Orr, *From Biko to Basson: Wendy Orr's Search for the Soul of South Africa as a Commissioner of the TRC* (Johannesburg: Contra Press, 2000), 30.

66. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, 39. Citing evidence of the reductive attitude applied by the Commission to the twenty-one thousand written depositions it initially received, with professional data processors collapsing each statement into an admixture of forensic, narrative, social, and restorative truth categories, Cole also describes here how representative 'window cases' were strategically selected for the HRVC's public hearings.

67. See, for example, Loren Kruger, 'Beyond the TRC: Truth, Power, and Representation in South Africa after the Transition', *Research in African Literatures* 42, no. 2 (Summer, 2011): 185–196.

68. See Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 'Trauma, Forgiveness, and Witnessing the Dance: Making Public Spaces Intimate', *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 53, no. 2 (2008): 169–188.

69. Ndebele, 'Afterword', 243–45.

70. Loren Kruger, 'Theatre: Regulation, Resistance and Recovery', in *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, ed. David Attwell and Derek Attridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 577.

71. Hutchison, *South African Performance*, 56–7.

72. Shane Graham, *South African Literature after the Truth Commission: Mapping Loss* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 33.

73. Graham, *South African Literature after the Truth Commission*, 40.

74. Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 10.

75. Georg Gugelberger, 'Introduction: Institutionalization of Transgression: Testimonial Discourse and Beyond', in *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, ed. Georg Gugelberger (London: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.

76. Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), 102.

77. Christopher Grobe, *The Art of Confession: The Performance of Self from Robert Lowell to Reality TV* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), x.

78. Grobe, *The Art of Confession*, x.

79. Susannah Radstone, *The Sexual Politics of Time: Confession, Nostalgia, Memory* (London: Routledge, 2007), 166.

80. Leigh A. Payne, *Unsettling Accounts: Neither Truth Nor Reconciliation in Confessions of State Violence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 3.

81. Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 153.

82. Caruth, *Trauma*, 155.

83. Mark Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 24.

84. Sanders, *Ambiguities*, 6. Emphasis in original.

85. Njabulo Ndebele, 'Memory, Metaphor, and the Triumph of Narrative', in *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 21.

86. Grobe, *The Art of Confession*, xiii.

87. John Beverley, 'Margin at the Centre: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative)', *Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 1 (Spring, 1989): 17. Emphasis in original.

88. Beverley, 'Margin at the Centre', 15.

89. Gayle Greene, 'Feminist Fictions and the Uses of Memory', *Signs* 16, no. 2 (1991): 317.

90. Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 99

91. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 'Empathic Repair After Mass Trauma: When Vengeance Is Arrested', *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 3 (2008): 347.

92. See Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

93. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

94. Schaap, 'Reconciliation as Ideology', 251.

95. This is Patrick Bond's original phrase. See Bond, *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (London: Pluto, 1998).

96. Mark Kaplan, 'Reconstructing Memories and Inventing Myths', (paper presented at Facts Bordering Fiction Symposium, Stellenbosch University, 2005), n. pag.

97. Dennis Walder, 'Resituating Fugard: South African Drama as Witness', *New Theatre Quarterly* 8, no. 32 (1992): 347.

98. Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 3.

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Chapter One

1. Njabulo Ndebele, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (Claremont: David Philip, 2003), 113.

2. Duma Kumalo, *He Left Quietly*, in Yaël Farber, *Theatre as Witness: Three Testimonial Plays from South Africa* (London: Oberon Books, 2008), 218.

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4. Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 2.

5. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 188.

6. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 188.

7. Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 11.

8. Deborah Posel, 'History as Confession: The Case of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Public Culture* 20, no.1 (2008):120.

9. Catherine Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), xii–xv.

10. For more, see Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, 15. See also, Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Books, 1986).

11. See Richard Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

12. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, xvi. As part of her analysis, Cole examines the layers of performance at work in the Truth Commission, paying particular attention to the repetitious, or rehearsed, nature of the testimony eventually heard at its public hearings. For more, see 11–18.

13. Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report: Volume One* (Cape Town: Juta and Company, 1998), 367.

14. John Borneman, 'Reconciliation after Ethnic Cleansing: Listening, Retribution, Affiliation', *Public Culture*, 14, no. 2 (2002), 283.

15. For more on the internal, often violent constitution of state sovereignty, see Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds., *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Here, the editors suggest that the notion of state sovereignty can no longer be legitimated externally by territorial control but must be internally constituted though the exercise of

violence against their own people. From this perspective, the Truth Commission might be understood in relatively censorious terms as a form of moral violence deployed, in part, to help constitute the sovereignty of the incipient South African state.

16. For a particularly uncompromising review, see Bhekizizwe Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future Under Siege', in *The New Violent Cartography: Geo-Analysis after the Aesthetic Turn*, ed. Sam Okoth Opondo and Michael J. Shapiro (New York: Routledge, 2012), 214–233.

17. For more on *The Story I Am About to Tell*, see Stephanie Marlin-Curiel, 'The Long Road to Healing: From TRC to TfD', *Theatre Research International* 27, no. 3 (2002): 275–288.

18. Like many of the TRC's official transcripts, proper nouns are frequently misspelt, and Zwane Street is mistakenly recorded in Kumalo's transcript as Zwine Street.

19. Peter Parker and Joyce Mokhesi-Parker, *In the Shadow of Sharpeville: Apartheid and Criminal Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 192.

20. The five others convicted alongside Kumalo were Reginald Sefatsa, thirty-two, a fruit and vegetable vendor; Melebo Reid Mokoena, twenty-four, employed at an engineering firm; Aupa Moses Diniso, thirty-two, a building inspector; Theresa Machabane Ramashamole, twenty-five, a waitress; and Francis Don Mokhesi, thirty, a professional footballer and supermarket worker. The remaining two on trial, Christiaan Mokubung and Gideon Mokone, were found not guilty of murder but guilty of public violence and were each sentenced to eight years imprisonment.

21. For the full transcript of Kumalo's submission to the Truth Commission, visit justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/sebokeng/seb861.htm; accessed 12 June 2014.

22. For more on the Khulumani Support Group, see Aletta J. Norval, '"No Reconciliation Without Redress": Articulating Political Demands in Post-Transitional South Africa', *Critical Discourse Studies* 6, no. 5 (2009), 311–321.

23. Yaël Farber, 'Director's Note', in *Theatre as Witness: Three Testimonial Plays from South Africa* (London: Oberon Books, 2008), 184.

24. All transcriptions are my own.

25. The ancient Greek word for witness shares its root, *martus*, with martyr.

26. Farber, 'Director's Note', 184.

27. Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 165.

28. Athol Fugard, *Notebooks: 1960–1977*, ed. Mary Benson (London: Faber & Faber, 1983), 172.

29. Notable productions that emerged following the conclusion of the Truth Commission's public hearings include John Kani's *Nothing But the Truth* (2002), Yaël Farber's *Molora* (2004), Philip Miller's *Rewind: A Cantata for Voice, Tape and Testimony* (2006), and Michael Lessac's collaborative *Truth in Translation* (2006). There were also a number of critical productions staged while the Commission's hearings were ongoing, including Pieter Dirk-Uys' *Truth Omissions* (1996) and Jane Taylor and the Handspring Puppet Company's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997).

30. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 6.

31. Maggie Inchley, 'Theatre as Advocacy: Asking for It and the Audibility of Women in *Nirbhaya*, the Fearless One', *Theatre Research International* 40, no. 3 (2015): 276. Emphasis in original.

32. Inchley, 'Theatre as Advocacy', 276.

33. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 25.

34. Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume Fourteen,* translated by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 247.

35. Dominck LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 22.

36. LaCapra, *Writing History*, 20.

37. Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', 243.

38. Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', 244.

39. LaCapra, *Writing History*, 21.

40. Patrick Duggan and Mick Wallis, 'Trauma and Performance: Maps, Narratives and Folds', *Performance Research* 16, no. 1 (2011), 8.

41. Duggan and Wallis, 'Trauma and Performance', 16.

42. Duggan and Wallis, 'Trauma and Performance', 6.

43. LaCapra, *Writing History*, 152.

44. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 191.

45. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 191. All translations are provided in the published playtext.

46. Farber suggests that it is 'likely that within the pile of uniforms and shoes, were those once worn by Duma Kumalo and his co-accused'. See Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 187.

47. LaCapra, *Writing History*, 21.

48. Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 36.

49. Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, 37.

50. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 196.

51. Helena Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 22.

52. Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship*, 22.

53. Darryl Accone, 'The Truth That Sets Us Free', *Cue*, 5 July 2002, 3.

54. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Routledge, 1992), 38.

55. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 193.

56. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 194.

57. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 189.

58. *He Left Quietly*, 205.

59. Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 19.

60. Sanders, *Complicities*, 8. Emphasis in original.

61. Sanders, *Complicities*, 11.

62. For more, see Donna McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives and the Ethics of Witnessing* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 1–40.

63. Accone, 'The Truth', 3.

64. Richard Turner, *The Eye of the Needle: Toward Participatory Democracy in South Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1975), 1–2.

65. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 210.

66. Farber, *He Left Quietly*, 238.

67. LaCapra, *Writing History*, 22–3.

68. Allen Feldman, 'Memory Theatres, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma-Aesthetic', *Biography* 27, no. 1 (2004): 185.

69. Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 16.

70. Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 19–21.

71. Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 38.

72. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 2. See also Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

73. Khanna, *Dark Continents*, 190, 21–24.

74. Khanna, *Dark Continents*, 24.

75. Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics*, 11.

76. IDFFA provided €13,200 of funding for Gavshon's production.

77. For more on the problem of reparations and socio-economic injustice in South Africa, see Nevin T. Aitken, 'The Distributive Dimension in Transitional Justice: Reassessing the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Ability to Advance Interracial Reconciliation in South Africa', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 34, no. 2 (2016): 190–202.

78. Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*, x.

79. Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*, 11.

80. Andrew van der Vlies, *Present Imperfect: Contemporary South African Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

81. Van der Vlies draws from the critical tradition of melancholy as part of his study. As I understand it, however, melancholy is primary, rather than one among a host of similarly 'bad feelings', as he puts it.

82. Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances in Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 109.

83. Christopher Colvin, *Traumatic Storytelling and Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Performing Signs of Injury* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 10–12.

84. Colvin, *Traumatic Storytelling*, 11.

85. Colvin, *Traumatic Storytelling*, 115.

86. By the late 1990s, Khulumani's nationwide membership totalled more than fifty-four thousand and, since 2016, stands at more than one hundred thousand.

87. Colvin, *Traumatic Storytelling*, 123.

88. Colvin, *Traumatic Storytelling*, 123.

89. David Scott, Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1, 13.

Chapter Two

1. Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), 89.

2. David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 2.

3. Loren Kruger, 'Theatre for Development and TV Nation: Notes on an Educational Soap Opera in South Africa', *Research in African Literatures* 30, no. 4 (Winter, 1999): 106–126, 108.

4. For more on Hegel's evaluative criteria, see Clayton Koelb, '"Tragedy" as an Evaluative Term', *Comparative Literary Studies* 11, no. 1 (1974): 69–84.

5. These are the alternative spellings used by Farber in her published playtext. They reference both *Molora*'s African setting and its original Greek source.

6. George Steiner, '"Tragedy," Reconsidered', *New Literary History* 35, no. 1 (2004): 4.

7. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 2009), 109.

8. See, for instance, Martha Nussbaum, 'Aeschylus and Practical Conflict', *Ethics* 95, no. 2 (1985): 233–267.

9. Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, 87–8.

10. For the full transcript of this opening hearing, see justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/hrvel1/mohape.htm; accessed 12 March 2012.

11. Catherine M. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 65.

12. Yaël Farber, *Molora* (London: Oberon Books, 2008), 2. To audiences at its initial staging in 2003 at the South African National Arts Festival, this scenic gesture to the Truth Commission would have been immediately plain. The festival's home in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape was among the first locations visited by the Commission as part of its national enterprise. The Eastern Cape was also the region where activists suffered some of the most sustained and violent state repression, particularly during the final decade of apartheid. To this extent, the festival provided a potentially telling space in which to begin to challenge and renegotiate the Commission's shortcomings. For those international audiences in Europe and America, where *Molora* toured from 2007 to 2011, Farber is clear in her production notes about its mise-en-scène and the wider significance of the Truth Commission.

13. Farber, *Molora*, 22. At the Commission itself, audience members were able to listen through headphones to a live translation of the witness' testimony in any of South Africa's eleven official languages.

14. Farber, *Molora*, 22–23.

15. Farber, *Molora*, 23.

16. Farber, *Molora*, 24.

17. Farber, *Molora*, 24–25.

18. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999), 25.

19. See, for example, Stewart Motha, 'Reconciliation as Domination', in *Law and the Politics of Reconciliation*, ed. Scott Veitch (Edinburgh: Ashgate, 2006), 69–91; and Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation* (London: Routledge, 2005).

20. John Borneman, 'Reconciliation after Ethnic Cleansing: Listening, Retribution, Affiliation', *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 282.

21. Borneman, 'Reconciliation after Ethnic Cleansing', 283.

22. Glenn Odom, 'South African Truth and Tragedy: Yaël Farber's *Molora* and Reconciliation Aesthetics', *Comparative Literature* 63, no. 1 (2012): 47.

23. See Julian Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics* (London: Zero Books, 2015), 1–10.

24. Odom, 'South African Truth and Tragedy', 50.

25. Odom, 'South African Truth and Tragedy', 60.

26. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 18–19.

27. Betine Van Zyl Smit, '*Antigone* in South Africa', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 49, s.87 (2006): 283.

28. Don MacLennan, 'The Palimpsest: Some Observations on Fugard's Plays' in *Athol Fugard*, ed. Stephen Gray (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 217.

29. Athol Fugard, 'A Catholic Antigone: An Episode in the Life of Hildegard of Bingen', public lecture, University of California, San Diego, 1 April 2003.

30. Ron Jenkins, '*Antigone* as a Protest Tactic', *The New York Times*, 30 March 2003, 6.

31. Fugard, 'A Catholic Antigone'.

32. Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona, *Statements: Three Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), xi.

33. Athol Fugard, *Notebooks: 1960–1977*, ed. Mary Benson (London: Faber & Faber, 1983), 184.

34. Hodoshe is an isiXhosa word meaning carrion-fly and makes references to the unseen prison guard in the play who hovers over the inmates like they are corpses.

35. Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona, *Statements*, 52. Emphasis in original.

36. Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona, *Statements*, 52–53.

37. Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona, *Statements*, 54.

38. Fugard, *Notebooks*, 212.

39. Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona, *Statements*, 77.

40. See Kevin J. Wetmore, *The Athenian Sun in an African Sky: Modern African Adaptations of Classical Greek Tragedy* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 201–202.

41. See Deborah Foster, '*The Blood Knot* and *The Island* as Anti-Tragedy', in *Athol Fugard*, ed. Stephen Gray (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 202–217.

42. Róisín O'Gorman and Margaret Werry, 'On Failure (On Pedagogy): Editorial Introduction', *Performance Research: A Journal of Performing Arts* 17, no. 1. (2012): 2.

43. Cormac Power, 'The Space of Doubt: *The Chairs* and the Aesthetics of Failure', *Performance Research: A Journal of Performing Arts* 17, no. 1. (2012): 70.

44. Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service* (London: Routledge, 2010), 2–3. Emphasis in original.

45. Fugard, *Notebooks*, 96.

46. See Robert Mshengu Kavanagh, 'Political Theatre in South Africa and the Work of Athol Fugard', *Theatre Research International* 7, no. 3 (1982): 160–179.

47. Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay of Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 270.

48. Fugard, *Notebooks*, 73.

49. Bailes, *Performance Theatre*, 8.

50. O'Gorman and Werry, 'On Failure', 2.

51. Brian Astbury, 'Athol Fugard at The Space', in *Athol Fugard*, ed. Stephen Gray (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 57.

52. Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona, *Statements*, xi.

53. Stephen Gray also provides a number of short newspaper reviews of *Orestes*. See Stephen Gray, *File on Fugard* (London: Methuen, 1991), 40–43.

54. Athol Fugard, '*Orestes*: An Experiment in Theatre Described in a Letter to an American Friend', in *Theatre One: New South African Drama*, ed. Stephen Gray (London: Ad. Donker, 1978), 84.

55. Gordon Winter, *Inside BOSS: South Africa's Secret Police* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1981), 93.

56. Fugard, *Notebooks*, 188.

57. Andrew Foley, 'Interview with Athol Fugard', *New Contrast* 22, no. 4 (1994): 63.

58. Fugard, '*Orestes*: An Experiment', 85.

59. Farber, *Molora*, 27.

60. Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1992), 90.

61. By contrast, this attempt at empathy is something that Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, a prominent black psychologist who served on the Commission, has sought to pursue. See, for example, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness* (Claremont, South Africa: David Philip, 2003); and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 'Empathetic Repair after Mass Trauma: When Vengeance Is Arrested', *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 3 (2008): 331–350.

62. Fugard, '*Orestes*: An Experiment', 87.

63. Fugard, '*Orestes*: An Experiment', 89.

64. Fugard, '*Orestes*: An Experiment', 90.

65. Foley, 'Interview with Athol Fugard', 65.
66. Fugard, '*Orestes*: An Experiment', 91.
67. Fugard, '*Orestes*: An Experiment', 91.
68. Fugard, '*Orestes*: An Experiment', 91.
69. Fugard, '*Orestes*: An Experiment', 92.
70. Fugard, '*Orestes*: An Experiment', 93.
71. Mervyn McMurtry, 'Experiencing the "Living Moment": Athol Fugard's Directing Process and the Orestes Project', *South African Theatre Journal* 20, no. 1 (2006): 32.
72. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 166.
73. Farber, *Molora*, 31.
74. Farber, *Molora*, 32.
75. Farber, *Molora*, 33.
76. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 166.
77. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 143.
78. Dianne de Beer, 'Everything Remains Raw', *The Star Tonight*, 22 May 2007, 1; Sam Marlowe, '*Molora* at the Barbican Pit', *The Times*, 11 April 2008.
79. See Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 143.
80. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre*, trans. Erik Butler (London: Routledge, 2016), 87.
81. Lehmann, *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre*, 87.
82. See Sean Field, 'Disappointed Remains: Trauma, Testimony, and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 154.
83. Farber, *Molora*, 47.
84. For the full transcript of the hearing, see: justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_benzien.htm; accessed 20 March 2014.
85. See Mark Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 59.
86. Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (London: Random House, 1999), 221.
87. For the full transcript of the hearing, see: https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans/capetown/capetown_benzien.htm; accessed 30 March 2014.
88. Allen Feldman, 'Memory Theatres, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma-Aesthetic', *Biography* 27, no. 1 (2004): 192.
89. See Lynne Rippenaar and Beauregard Tromp, 'South Africa: Outrage over TRC's Pardon for Benzien', *Cape Argus*, 18 February 1999.
90. Lehman, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 96. Emphasis in original.
91. Farber, *Molora*, 78.
92. Farber, *Molora*, 83
93. Farber, *Molora*, 81–84.
94. Farber, *Molora*, 87.
95. Farber, *Molora*, 86. Mvotyo delivers her prayer in isiXhosa. Farber offers this English translation in her published play-text. However, no translations were offered to her

audiences during the original performances. Farber also notes that the specific contents of Mvotyo's prayer differed each night.

96. 'Molora', a vernacular Sesotho word for 'ash', is, as Farber expresses in her introductory notes, 'the truth we must all return to'. See Farber, *Molora*, 8.

97. Farber, *Molora*, 87.

98. For more, see Odom, 'South African Truth and Tragedy', 53.

99. See Richard Seaford, 'Historicizing Tragic Ambivalence: The Vote of Athena', in *History, Tragedy, Theory: Dialogues in Athenian Drama*, ed. Barbara Goff (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 205.

100. Odom, 'South African Truth and Tragedy', 53.

101. See, most significantly, Loren Kruger, 'On the Tragedy of the Commoner: Elektra, Orestes, and Others in South Africa', *Comparative Drama* 46, no. 3 (2012): 355–377.

Chapter Three

1. Deborah Posel, 'History as Confession: The Case of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Public Culture* 20, no.1 (2008): 128.

2. See Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (London: Random House, 1999); and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness* (Claremont, South Africa: David Philip, 2003).

3. Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History, Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 14.

4. Lucia Saks, *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa: The Race for Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 90.

5. Videovision Entertainment, 'Standing Ovation for Videovision Entertainment's *Red Dust*', 18 November 2004. Other commissioners present at the screening included Mary Burton and Denzil Potgieter, as well as the Commission's national research director, Charles Villa-Vicencio.

6. Desmond Tutu, 'Foreword by Chairperson', in *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume One* by Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Cape Town: Truth and Reconciliation Commission), 1998, 2.

7. Lesley Marx, '"Cinema, Glamour, Atrocity": Narratives of Trauma', *Social Dynamics* 32, no. 2 (2006): 27–28.

8. Patrick Flanery, '*In My Country*'s Filmic Betrayals: Reification and the Ethics of Adapting *Country of My Skull*'. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 11, no. 3 (2010): 240.

9. Posel, 'History as Confession', 128.

10. Anton Van der Hoven and Jill Arnott, 'The Anxiety of Affect: Melodrama and South African Film Studies', *Social Dynamics* 35, no.1 (2009): 166.

11. Van der Hoven and Arnott, 'The Anxiety of Affect', 173. Emphasis in original.

12. Flanery, 'Filmic Betrayals', 244.

13. Van der Hoven and Arnott, 'The Anxiety of Affect', 165.

14. Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 27.

15. Quoted in Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill, eds., *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 6.

16. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), vii.

17. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 16.

18. Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005), 100–101.

19. See Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann, eds., *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2005).

20. The melodramatic, in Van der Hoven and Arnott's conception at least, is a marker reserved not just for these 'TRC films', but extends equally to other recent South African films such as *Yesterday*, Gavin Hood's *Tsotsi* (2005), and Mark Dornford-May's *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (2005).

21. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 15.

22. Matthew S. Buckley, 'Refugee Theatre: Melodrama and Modernity's Loss', *Theatre Journal* 61, no 2 (2009): 180.

23. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 15.

24. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 14, 20.

25. Perry Anderson, 'From Progress to Catastrophe', *London Review of Books*, 28 July 2011, 24.

26. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, xiii.

27. Christine Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and Women's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 7.

28. Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 14.

29. Van der Hoven and Arnott, 'The Anxiety of Affect', 164, 171.

30. Van der Hoven and Arnott, 'The Anxiety of Affect', 168–169.

31. Alex Boraine, *A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 162.

32. Boraine, *A Country Unmasked*, 162; Van der Hoven and Arnott, 'The Anxiety of Affect', 168.

33. Van der Hoven and Arnott, 'The Anxiety of Affect', 165.

34. All transcriptions are my own.

35. David Philips, 'Looking the Beast in the (Fictional) Eye: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Film', in *Black and White in Colour: African History on Screen*, eds. Vivian Bickford Smith and Richard Mendelsohn (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), 306.

36. Flanery, 'Filmic Betrayals', 242.

37. Flanery, 'Filmic Betrayals', 240.

38. Daniel Gerould, 'Russian Formalist Theories of Melodrama', *Journal of American Culture* 1, no. 1 (1978): 154.

39. Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, 15.

40. Bhekizizwe Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future Under Siege: Reconciliation and Nation-Building in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in *The New Violent*

Cartography: Geo-Analysis after the Aesthetic Turn, eds. Sam Okoth Opondo and Michael J. Shapiro (New York: Routledge, 2012), 217.

41. Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future', 220, 225.

42. See, for example, Audrey Chapman, 'Truth Commissions and Intergroup Forgiveness: The Case of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 13, no.1 (2007): 51–69; James Gibson 'Does Truth Lead to Reconciliation? Testing the Causal Assumptions of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Process', *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 2 (2004): 201–217; and James Gibson and Amanda Gouws, 'Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Attributions of Blame and the Struggle over Apartheid', *The American Political Science Review* 93, no. 3 (1999): 501–517.

43. Schreiner was one of fourteen arrested in September 1987 under Section 29 of the Internal Security Act. Her home was raided following Yengeni's confession under duress, where, according to Benzien, the Security Police discovered a large cache of weaponry, including limpet mines, grenades, and firearms. Schreiner, along with Yengeni, was put on trial for treason in 1989, before gaining indemnity in 1991. For more on the specifics of Jennifer Schreiner's case, see Else Schreiner, *Time Stretching Fear: The Detention and Solitary Confinement of 14 Anti-Apartheid Trialists, 1987–1991* (Cape Town: Robben Island Museum, 2000).

44. All transcriptions are my own.

45. Saks, *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa*, 33.

46. Patrick Flanery, 'What National Cinema?: South African Film Cultures and the Transnational', *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*10, no. 2 (2009): 239.

47. Saks, *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa*, 111.

48. Saks, *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa*, 8. Emphasis original.

49. For more on national box-office receipts, see National Film and Video Foundation, *SA Films, 2000–2007* (Johannesburg: Department of Arts and Culture, 2007).

50. For more on Ster-Kinekor and distribution in South Africa, see Arnold Shepperson and Kenyan G. Tomaselli, 'Restructuring the Industry: South African Cinema Beyond Apartheid', *South African Theatre Journal* 16, no. 1 (2002): 63–79.

51. By this measure, *Forgiveness* was a relative success, having been screened to 14,211 spectators in South Africa and grossing R 334,144 from its seven prints. It still fairs badly by comparison to Leon Schuster's popular South African comedy *Oh Schuks . . . I'm Gatvol*, however, which grossed in excess of R 23 million from 106 prints in 2004.

52. Van der Hoven and Arnott, 'The Anxiety of Affect', 174.

53. Rita Barnard, 'Oprah's Paton, or South Africa and the Globalization of Suffering', *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 7, no. 3 (2006): 12.

54. Achille Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 260.

55. Barnard, 'Oprah's Paton', 13.

56. Alan Paton, *Cry, the Beloved Country* (London: Vintage, 2002), 7.

57. Herman Wittenberg, 'Alan Paton's Sublime: Race, Landscape and Transcendence of the Liberal Imagination', *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 17, no. 2 (2005): 12.

58. Wittenberg, 'Alan Paton's Sublime', 15.

59. For more on Dv8's mantra, see dv8.co.za/index.html; accessed 15 April 2013.

60. Ian Gabriel, personal correspondence with author, 24 August 2013.

61. See dv8.co.za; accessed 15 April 2013.

62. Christine Gledhill, 'Between Melodrama and Realism: Anthony Asquith's *Underground* and King Vidor's *The Crowd*', in Jane Gaines, ed., *Classical Hollywood Narrative: The Paradigm Wars* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 137.

63. Gledhill, *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 38.

64. Van der Hoven and Arnott, 'The Anxiety of Affect', 170.

65. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 72.

66. Greg Latter, Ian Gabriel, and Sheena Brighton, *Forgiveness: Filmscript and Filmstudy* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2006), 28.

67. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999), 220.

68. Latter, Gabriel, and Brighton, *Forgiveness*, 33.

69. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 220.

70. Marx, 'Cinema, Glamour, Atrocity', 43.

71. Latter, Gabriel, and Brighton, *Forgiveness*, 63.

72. All translations are provided in the published screenplay.

73. Latter, Gabriel, and Brighton, *Forgiveness*, 71.

74. Latter, Gabriel, and Brighton, *Forgiveness*, 91.

75. Kaplan's earlier version of the documentary, *Where Truth Lies*, which was released widely at numerous national and international festivals in 1999, undoubtedly provided the stimulus for Gabriel's film. Here, however, I prefer to focus on its longer adaptation, *Between Joyce and Remembrance,* which was televised on 20 October 2003, following its premiere at the Encounters South African International Documentary Festival in August the same year, and which also offers a fuller account of the Mtimkulu family's experiences at the Truth Commission and a more advanced reflection of Kaplan's own perspective on the idea of forgiveness.

76. SAPA, 'Tutu Says He's Shocked By "Exquisite Cruelty" of Apartheid Government', 23 April 1996. For the full article, see justice.gov.za/trc/media/1996/9604/s960423g.htm; accessed 15 April 2013.

77. For an account of events that led to Nieuwoudt's conviction, see George Bizos, *No One to Blame?: In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998), 163–228.

78. Kaplan relies for his version of events upon an affidavit made by Siphiwo in the aftermath of his initial arrest in 1981, which left him hospitalised with suspected thallium poisoning.

79. All transcriptions are my own.

80. For the full transcript of the hearing, see justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/hrvpe2/mtimkhul.htm; accessed 15 April 2013.

81. Jillian Edelstein produced a startling image of Joyce holding the clump of Siphiwo's hair in her collection, *Truth and Lies: Stories from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Granta, 2001). It was subsequently used as the cover art for the first paperback edition of Krog's *Country of My Skull*.

82. Marx, 'Cinema, Glamour, Atrocity', 30.

83. David Philips, 'The Student, the Mother and the Security Policeman: Truth and Reconciliation in the Siphiwo Mtimkulu Case?', *ANZLH E–Journal* (2005): 225.

84. Saks, *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa*, 91; Marx, 'Cinema, Glamour, Atrocity', 34.

85. Sanders, *Ambiguities*, 57.

86. It is worth noting that Sanders mistakenly believes that Nieuwoudt's visit occurred in 1998, after he had been granted amnesty by the Truth Commission, which perhaps impinges upon his analysis. He also uses Jillian Edelstein's faulty description of the scene as the basis for his analysis; Edelstein understands Sikhumbuzo to have thrown a brick or vase at Nieuwoudt through a window of the house. Sikhumbuzo is, in fact, present throughout the meeting, sitting silently at the back of the room, altogether less detached from the scene than Edelstein supposes. For Edelstein's original description, see *Truth and Lies*.

87. Mark Kaplan, 'Reconstructing Memories and Inventing Myths', (paper presented at Facts Bordering Fiction Symposium, Stellenbosch University, 2005), n. pag.

88. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concept in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 4.

89. Daniel Lehman, 'Fiction Faces the Facts: Cinematic Retaliation in Two South African Truth and Reconciliation Narratives', *Film Criticism* 36, no. 2 (2011): 55.

90. Latter, Gabriel, and Brighton, *Forgiveness*, 13.

91. Kaplan, 'Reconstructing Memories and Inventing Myths', n. pag.

92. Murray Smith, 'Imagining from the Inside', in *Film, Theory, Philosophy*, eds. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 415.

93. Karen Malpede, 'Theatre as Witness: Passage into a New Millennium'. *New Theatre Quarterly* 12, no. 47 (1996): 272.

94. Malpede, 'Theatre as Witness', 272.

95. For more on CVRA, see Jacqueline Maingard, 'Trends in South African Documentary Film and Video: Questions of Identity and Subjectivity', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21, no. 4 (1995): 657–667.

96. Harriet Gavshon, '"Bearing Witness": Ten Years Towards an Oppositional Film Movement in South Africa', *Radical History Review* 46, no. 7 (1990): 338.

97. See Gillian Whitlock, Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007).

Chapter Four

1. Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (London: Heinemann, 1978), 98.

2. For a précis of the various criticisms launched against Krog's *Country of My Skull*, see Patrick Flanery, '*In My Country*'s Filmic Betrayals: Reification and the Ethics of

Adapting *Country of My Skull*', *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 11, no. 3 (2010): 233–235.

3. Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (London: Random House, 1999), 84.

4. Krog, *Country of My Skull*, 84.

5. Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 17.

6. Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes, 'Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission'. For the full submission, see https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/gender.htm; accessed 30 November 2014.

7. This new gender-sensitive approach was little other than a coda added to the basic statement-taking guidelines. It read: 'IMPORTANT: Some women testify about violations of human rights that happened to family members or friends, but they have also suffered abuses. Don't forget to tell us what happened to you yourself if you were the victim of a gross human rights abuse'. See TRC, *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume Four* (Cape Town: Juta and Company, 1998), 285.

8. Ramphele calls herself a 'political widow who could never be' by virtue of the fact that she was never formally married to Biko. See Mamphela Ramphele, 'Political Widowhood in South Africa: The Embodiment of Ambiguity', *Daedalus* 125, no. 1 (1996): 102.

9. TRC, *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume Four* (Cape Town: Juta and Company, 1998), 290.

10. Bhekizizwe Peterson, 'Writer's Statement: Trauma, Art and Healing', in *Zulu Love Letter: A Screenplay*, Ramadan Suleman and Bhekizizwe Peterson (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 23.

11. Bhekizizwe Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future Under Siege: Reconciliation and Nation-Building in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in *The New Violent Cartography: Geo-Analysis after the Aesthetic Turn*, eds. Sam Okoth Opondo and Michael J. Shapiro (New York: Routledge, 2012), 215.

12. Peterson, 'Writer's Statement', 21.

13. Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future', 224.

14. Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future', 224.

15. Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future', 215.

16. Guiliana Lund, '"Healing the Nation": Medicolonial Discourse and the State of Emergency from Apartheid to Truth and Reconciliation', *Cultural Critique* 54 (2003): 88.

17. See, for instance, Ato Quayson, 'Looking Awry: Tropes of Disability in Post-Colonial Writing', in *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in England Since 1970*, ed. Rod Mengham (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 53–68.

18. See Lesley Marx, '"Cinema, Glamour, Atrocity": Narratives of Trauma', *Social Dynamics* 32, no. 2 (2006): 22–49; Lindiwe Dovey, *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 54; Heidi Grunebaum, *Memorializing the Past: Everyday Life in South Africa after the Truth and*

Reconciliation Commission (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 14; Annalisa Oboe, 'The TRC Women's Hearings as Performance and Protest in the New South Africa', *Research in African Literatures* 28, no. 3 (Fall, 2007): 74; Josef Gugler, 'African Films in the Classroom', *African Studies Review* 53, no. 3 (2010): 6; and Martin Botha, 'Post-Apartheid Cinema: A Thematic and Aesthetic Exploration of Selected Short and Feature Films', *Florianópolis* 61 (2011): 235.

19. There has been a rising general interest in *Zulu Love Letter* among critics, but not perhaps in terms that also centre its status in the national repertoire. For a more general analysis, see, for example, A. Yolisa Kenqu 'Fraught Starts, Fragmented Twists, and Forged Endings: (Re)Imagining and (Re)Imaging Black Womanhood in Zulu Love Letter and Yesterday', *Black Cinema* 9, no. 2 (2018): 277–294.

20. Marie Kruger, '"The Only Truth I Know Is What I Felt with My Entire Body": Traumatic Memory in *Zulu Love Letter*', *Research in African Literatures* 43, no. 1 (Spring, 2012): 139, 142.

21. Jacqueline Maingard, *South African National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

22. Maingard, *South African National Cinema*, 1.

23. Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future', 217.

24. Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future', 228.

25. Since *Zulu Love Letter* was screened in 2004, Jyoti Mistry has produced a series of important, often experimental films about black identity, memory, and recovery in South Africa. Black female directors like Omelga Mthiyane, who have produced a number of documentary films in recent years, and Nosipho Dumisa, who released *Nommer 37*, an Afrikaans language film, in 2014, have also helped to expand the national cinematic field.

26. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 92.

27. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 49.

28. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 28.

29. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 49.

30. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 29, 41, 22.

31. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 47; Peterson, 'Writer's Statement', 24.

32. See, for instance, Chris Van Wyk, ed., *We Write What We Like: Celebrating Steve Biko* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007); and Andile Mgnxitama, Amanda Alexander, and Nigel C. Gibson, eds., *Biko Lives: Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

33. Mosibudi Mangena, 'Thirty Years On and Not Much Has Changed', in *We Write What We Like*, ed. Chris Van Wyk (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007), 12.

34. Njabulo Ndebele, 'Iph'indlela?: Finding Our Way Into the Future', *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 26, no.1 (2000): 48.

35. Ndebele, 'Iph'indlela?', 48

36. Njabulo Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Johannesburg: COSAW, 1991), 110.

37. Masego Panyane, 'The Conscious Women', in *The Black Consciousness Reader*, eds. Baldwin Ndaba, Therese Owen, Maseho Panyane, Rabbir Serumula, and Janet Smith (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2017), 245.

38. Anthony O'Brien, *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 54. Emphasis in original.

39. O'Brien, *Against Normalization*, 55.

40. O'Brien, *Against Normalization*, 57

41. Loren Kruger, '*Encountering Modernity*, and: *South African National Cinema* (Review)', *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 4 (2008): 168.

42. Kruger, '(Review)', 168.

43. See Marie Kruger, 'Traumatic Memory in *Zulu Love Letter*', 142.

44. Peterson, 'Writer's Statement', 22.

45. Peterson, 'Writer's Statement', 23.

46. Dan Goodley, *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Sage, 2011), 16.

47. Ken Lipenga, 'Weaving a Path from the Past: Gender, Disability and Narrative Enablement in *Zulu Love Letter*', *Agenda* 29, no. 2 (2015): 116.

48. Bhekizizwe Peterson and Ramadan Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter: A Screenplay* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 41.

49. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 43.

50. Thandeka's prescient evaluation of affirmative action is potentially anachronistic. The Employment Equity Act of 1998 against which Thandeka ostensibly rails was yet to be passed into law. And while affirmative employment policies were written into the Interim Constitution of 1993 and advanced from the start of the ANC's first term, their impact, particularly the policy of Black Economic Empowerment, had barely been felt in society in the short period before the Truth Commission began, let alone found itself an object of resentment as *Zulu Love Letter* attempts to suggest.

51. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 47.

52. Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future', 219–20.

53. Ramdan Suleman, 'Director's Statement', *Zulu Love Letter: A Screenplay* by Bhekizizwe Peterson and Ramadan Suleman (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 30–1.

54. Mamphela Ramphele, *Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader* (New York: Feminist Press, 1995), 66. See also Mamphela Ramphele, 'Political Widowhood in South Africa', 99–117.

55. Peterson, 'Dignity, Memory and the Future', 222.

56. José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistance Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26.

57. Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 5.

58. Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 7. Emphasis in original.

59. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 49.

60. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 65.

61. Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 29.

62. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 66. For more, see Hlenge Dube, *Zulu Beadwork: Talk with Beads* (Denver: Africa Direct, 2009).

63. Anitra Nettleton, 'Beadworks and Visual Praise Poems', *Zulu Love Letter: A Screenplay*, by Bhekizizwe Peterson and Ramadan Suleman (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 3.

64. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 70.

65. For more on the interconnection between transitional justice, human rights and the ideals of the Enlightenment, see, for example, Fadoua Loudiy, *Transitional Justice and Human Rights in Morocco: Negotiating the Years of Lead* (London: Routledge, 2014).

66. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 77.

67. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 89.

68. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 107.

69. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 116.

70. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 116–117.

71. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 120. All translations are provided in the published screenplay.

72. Peterson and Suleman, *Zulu Love Letter*, 121.

73. Peterson and Suleman, Zulu Love Letter, 121.

Conclusion

1. Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report: Volume 1* (Cape Town: Juta and Company, 1998), 22.

2. 'Statement by Nelson Mandela on receiving Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 29 October 1998'; mandela.gov.za/mandela_speeches/1998/981029_trcreport.htm; accessed 12 October 2019.

3. See, for instance, Terry Bell, *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and Truth* (London: Verso, 2003).

4. Staff Reporter, 'Tutu: "Unfinished Business" of the TRC's healing', *Mail & Guardian*, 24 April 2014, mg.co.za/article/2014-04-24-unfinished-business-of-the-trc-healing; accessed 12 October 2019.

5. For more, see Verne Harris, 'Twenty Years On: Where Is Truth and Reconciliation?', *The Nelson Mandela Foundation*, 31 October 2018, nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/reckoning-with-reconciliation; accessed 12 October 2019.

6. See Andrew van der Vlies, Present Imperfect: Contemporary South African Writing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7.

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