

Trauma and Truth

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Introduction

Witnessing is always constituted in the shadow of muteness. The silent internalization of a firsthand experience can only be arrested if the witness decides (whether by choice or by coercion) to make that experience public. The conditions under which silent witnessing becomes public testimony are crucial to understanding the "history" constituted by memory. This history is not simply an inventory of what is remembered or forgotten; rather, it is the narrative tension between remembering and forgetting. Given the way that memories are on the one hand confirmed and protected and on the other hand abandoned, revised, and forgotten, we simply cannot begin to think of "remembering" without "forgetting".

Bodies such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are important spaces where remembered history is negotiated in preparation for the archive. Here the tension between forgetting and remembering is the tension between witnessing and testimony. The imperatives of the truth commission are to control the circumstances under which a silent witnessing becomes a testimonial of everyday life — and that control must at least be vigilant and can sometimes involve coercion — and to be alive to the weight and magnitude of the circumstances under which the archive is forged out of memory.

These four processes — witnessing, testimony, memory, and archiving — offer important understandings of the narrative underpinnings of truth commissions, and of transitional justice more generally. The dominant focus of most truth commissions has been the exploration of human-rights violations: acts and experiences of violence and violation committed (and mostly denied) in the past are rearticulated in the present, creating an emotionally charged space where witnessing, testimony, memory, and archiving come together to grapple with a sense of the future. The ways in which witnessing is prevented from becoming testimony, the articulation of testimony in the absence of any firsthand account of a series of events, and the politically prompted transition from witnessing to testimony are some examples of the historical tensions that emerge in this situation. Tensions also appear between history as it is constituted in memory and the extent of that history's absence from and presence in the constitution of the archive. These issues are nowhere more acute than in the case of the TRC, where witnessing, testimony, memory, and archiving exist in a particular relationship to acts of detention, interrogation, and torture committed during the apartheid era.

The ways in which processes of witnessing and testimony were variously articulated and restricted under apartheid is very different from the ways in which these processes have been allowed to play themselves out in the TRC hearings. The TRC, through its use of public hearings and the formulation of a notion of amnesty, effectively allowed witnessing to become testimony and provided a space in which to broker an archive that traverses the divide between private and public memories of violence and violation. This divide is evident in the differences between Paul Stopforth's graphite drawings of scenes of interrogation and torture, from 1979-83, and the newspaper photographs and television footage of Jeffrey Benzien reenacting the "wet bag" method of interrogation and torture before a public audience in 1997.

While these two examples reflect the codes and conventions of utterly different visual discourses, they also represent two very different responses to the presentation of "truth" (or "fiction"). It is the latter difference that this essay principally addresses. Stopforth's drawings are imagined responses to a witnessing that struggled to become meaningful public testimony. The artist's imagination compensates for a reality in which the continued use of interrogation and torture depended on an ability to frustrate the translation of witnessing into testimony. Benzien's demonstration of the wet-bag method breaks a crucial code of secrecy: it is "real" in so many ways that little is left to the imagination. It is important to note that it was the TRC that facilitated this representational shift from Stopforth's "imaginary" to Benzien's "real" space. This shift has a number of implications for the presentation of remembered history in a postapartheid archive that would mediate the future of a landscape marked by violence.

Apartheid's Spaces of Interrogation and Torture

In the three decades before the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, in 1990, and the unbanning of antiapartheid organizations, the South African state neurotically refined and redefined legislation pertaining to classifications of detention without trial. Detention for interrogation, preventive detention, short-term detention, detention of state witnesses, and State of Emergency detention were provided for by specifically formulated sections of a number of acts of parliament.¹ The state used its legislative powers to construct the stage upon which individual members of the South African security forces could act with impunity. Such was the state's wide widespread use of detention without trial that 80,000 people are estimated to have been detained (for varying lengths of time) between 1960 and 1990.²

Detention, interrogation, and torture are central to what Allen Feldman calls the "performative construction of state power".³ Sometimes acting within the chain of command, sometimes acting without "authority", security agents performed in ways that reiterated the power and authority of the apartheid state. Most notably, detention without trial created unchecked opportunities for the security police and other organs of the security forces to interrogate and torture detainees. Detention without trial, torture in detention, and death in detention (often as a result of injuries suffered during torture) are three narratives that went hand-in-hand with the maintenance of "law and order" in apartheid South Africa. They epitomize the power of the apartheid state not only to determine what activities were to be considered "antistate" but also to act with absolute impunity against individuals and groups involved in such activities (however remotely).

During interrogations by South Africa's security forces, detainees were submitted to unchecked beating, electric shock, suffocation, sexual violence, and mental abuse.⁴ Ambiguity and disorientation are vital to the interrogator's practice, and to the continued existence of this practice beyond any given victim: within an interrogation room that is often located within the heart of the public domain (but is hidden from public view), the interrogator creates a narrative of abuse that is often without any sense of time and that fractures sensory experiences. The detainee can feel but not see, and never knows when the shouting in his or her ear may fall utterly silent. Space is disordered through forms of confinement that are both real and imaginary. Within this disoriented time and space, confession is offered as an "escape" from violation.

Each of these actions fits the definition of torture outlined by the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment: "The intentional infliction of severe pain and suffering, whether physical or mental, on a person for the purposes of (1)

obtaining from that or another person information or a confession, or (2) punishing him for an act that he or a third person committed or is suspected of having committed, or (3) intimidating him or a third person, or (4) for any reason based on discrimination of any kind". This convention was used by both the TRC's Human Rights Violations Committee, in assessing submissions by survivors of human rights violations, and its Amnesty Committee, in examining applications for amnesty by perpetrators of human rights violations.⁵

But this definition of torture does not encompass the extent of the testimonial and archival silence that often surrounds both the actions of the torturers and the experiences of the tortured. Both are silent witnesses to the space and narrative of torture, but where the torturer's silence testifies to the impunity of the state, the victim's silence is a witness to disempowerment.⁶ The interrogators define the act of looking. They command visibility but their actions do not. They control whoever is trapped by vision, and vigilantly ensure that their own vision never traps them.

It was within this politically charged landscape that Stopforth produced his raphite drawings of 1979-83. Stopforth's works grapple with the visibility and invisibility of practices of interrogation and torture in apartheid-era South Africa, and in this way mediate particular forms of witnessing, testimony, memory, and the archive. Interviewed in the *Rand Daily Mail* in 1978, Stopforth said, "I want to bring the facts home to those willing to look. My figures parallel something that we can't be witness to. We can't refuse to accept that these things happen".⁷ Stopforth constituted his representations as proxy for something that most South Africans were unable to witness. His representations interrupted the carefully constructed archival silences that by and large prevented the witnessing and testimonial proof of interrogation and torture during the apartheid era. Refusing the silence that was so crucial to the history of apartheid memory, his art provides an important public testimony whose "evidence" exposes a particular politicization of the apartheid archive.

Imagined Space

The death of Black Consciousness leader Stephen Bantu Biko in police custody remains the most prominent of all deaths in detention during the apartheid era. After being arrested on August 18, 1977, Biko was detained and repeatedly interrogated and tortured at the Sanlam Building in Port Elizabeth, the regional headquarters of the security police. Although he showed overt signs of external and neurological injuries — in fact he had lapsed into a semiconscious state — a district surgeon signed a release permitting his transfer from Port Elizabeth to Pretoria, a long journey by road. He died from brain damage in a cell in Pretoria Central Prison on September 12.

The inquest into Biko's death relied on the testimonies of the three policemen involved in the interrogation, along with evidence from the two district surgeons who had "monitored" Biko's medical condition during his detention. The policemen testified that Biko had "become violent" during interrogation on September 7, and that in the police team's attempt to subdue him he had hit his head against the wall.⁸ The presiding magistrate found no evidence of wrongdoing on the part of the security police. He did, however, refer the inquest findings to the South African Medical and Dental Council, on the grounds that there was evidence of professional misconduct on the part of the district surgeons.⁹

While the magistrate cleared the three security policemen of any wrongdoing, the inquest procedure — its need for testimony from these "surviving" witnesses — introduced their identities into the public domain. In addressing the interrogation and torture of Biko, Stopforth used these identities to

"frame" a narrative. An exhibition of his work in February 1979, variously exploring themes of torture and death, included *The Interrogators* (1979), a vertical triptych of three close-up portraits of the security policemen who had beaten Biko in the weeks before his death. The substance of Stopforth's accusation, then, is based on the identities of these "witnesses" to the torture, rather than on the substance of their testimonies.

The cool gray graphite faces, almost translucent against the dark backgrounds, stare out at the viewer from within the frame, utterly confident in the knowledge that we will never be privy to the interiority of their space. It is only the single, barely visible chair, extending over the right side of all three portraits, that potently signals their secret practice: the ordinariness of the government-issue chair, hardly noticeable in any other public space, takes on brutal connotations when placed in the dark, empty, and private interior of a police station interrogation room. Stopforth's stated intention with *The Interrogators* was not only "to show how terribly ordinary these men looked" but, in using the chair, to emphasize the extent to which even "the most mundane objects can take on frightening connotations in prisons and interrogation spaces".¹⁰

Stopforth continued his exploration of Biko's death in a series of twenty drawings from 1979-80, details of body sections, hands, legs, and feet drawn from photographs taken during Biko's autopsy. In their focus on body parts and their inversion of light and dark spaces, a reference to X rays, the images become fragments of medical knowledge. It is especially their translucent details — from the texture of skin to the clearly numbered wrist tag — that make them both vulnerable offerings of memorialization and clinical indictments of the medical testimony of the attending district surgeons.¹¹ They focus attention on the surgeons' complicity, not only in knowledge or medical witnessing of Biko's condition but in a testimony that fails to bear full witness, a testimony that is publicly silent, an archive that conserves little about the real responsibility for Biko's death.

Both *The Interrogators* and the Biko series evidence a particular kind of witnessing and testimony in relation to apartheid-era interrogation and torture, and to the death in detention to which these practices led. They speak brutally of not only the brutal effects of interrogation but the identities of the interrogators. But they are largely silent about the blind spaces of torture. The representation of such places involved a struggle to locate the details of a room or cell in the face of an archive that neither placed members of the security police in particular spaces nor implicated them in particular acts.

While apartheid-era torture often took place in prisons, farms, detention camps, and private houses, it mostly happened behind the bland outer walls of the police stations of white South Africa. In the context of the continued concealment of human-rights violations from those years, Stopforth's *Interrogation Spaces* (1983) is crucial in attempting to bring the hidden spaces of apartheid into public view. The artist's imagination becomes a powerful substitute for the absence of an archive. While fairly abstract in its visualization of architectural containment, *Interrogation Spaces* is nonetheless a powerful rendition of the spatial isolation, dislocation, and disorientation that lie at the heart of the practices of interrogation and torture. As Stopforth suggests of this work, "The interiors are bleak and sinister, their original function no longer visible. They are now torture chambers — spaces thick with fear".¹²

The struggle to witness, and, more important, to bear meaningful witness, was one of the strategies that preoccupied antiapartheid activists. The state was struggling against witnessing, engaging in conscious repressions of memory that inevitably translated into absences in the archives. In the face of this overbearing opposition, the struggle to witness was often carried forward through the out-

put of cultural workers using a range of different media. Stopforth's desire to create visual art dealing with a form of violence carefully hidden from vision reflects a desire and a determination to bear witness not unlike the desire that underpinned so much of the work of the TRC. But the aesthetics of truth that emerged out of the TRC's emphasis on witnessing and testimony profoundly rearticulated understandings of apartheid-era interrogation and torture. It is this shift that I would now like to explore through the example of Benzien.

Witnessing Truth and Reconciliation

The TRC, established in terms of South Africa's Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995, is but one of a number of examples of transitional justice in post-World War II global politics. The TRC was intended as restorative rather than retributive in nature. Its staff traveled the country, soliciting oral testimonies from both perpetrators and survivors of apartheid-era political injustice in order to generate archives that would adequately reflect the nation's history after 1960. Running on the slogan "Truth, the Road to Reconciliation", the commission tried to paint a "true" picture of the history of political trauma in South Africa, and thereby to contribute to the reconciliation of a society polarized by racial prejudice. Promises of reparations to victims and of amnesty to agents of apartheid were the incentives for giving evidence at the public hearings. The TRC solicited some 20,000 statements of human-rights violations and received a little over 7,000 applications for amnesty.¹³

The TRC faced a number of social and political challenges when it began its proceedings in East London in April 1996, not least of them to ensure that the process became, as Sander Gilman suggests, "the memory of the past made real in the present".¹⁴ The two outstanding features of the TRC process were the public nature of the hearings and the "individualizing" of the applications for amnesty, in other words, examining actions in relation to the individuals who had performed them rather than to the institutions or organizations to which those individuals belonged. These were the vehicles through which the TRC attempted to bring the past into the present by individualizing applications for amnesty, it ensured a minimum accountability for the details of the past, details that it hoped would paint a more complete picture of apartheid-era humanrights violations; by holding hearings in public rather than in camera (as had been the practice of most of the truth commissions preceding South Africa's), it provided a public space in which witnesses could articulate their personal testimonials of violence and violation. No previous truth commission had held public hearings on the scale conducted by the TRC, and this public space also allowed the testimonies to be accessed and witnessed by an audience in situ.

As a retelling and reenactment of narratives of apartheid-era violence, the TRC process was driven by the performances of individual witnesses. These testimonies, some defending apartheid and some decrying it, awkwardly traversed the lopsided space between victimization and vindication. The TRC's prioritization of these unique stories over and above institutional accountability was meant to encompass the circumstances of a history of the "everyday". Flawed as the TRC process may have been, it was an important mechanism that, in allowing individuals and communities a space in which to articulate experiences of oppression, attempted to ensure that the history of apartheid remain part of the consciousness (at least the archival consciousness) of the South African nation.

Making and maintaining the relationship between past, present, and future is one of the primary functions of the archive. Rather than recording the past neutrally, archives are structural forms that make ideological offerings of the past to fuel the fire of humanity's movement into the future. The TRC proceedings were inspired by the desire to remember. Its archive has been constructed at the

expense of the ambivalence that drives forgetting. As Kenneth Foote writes, "Few events produce such strong ambivalent feelings as acts of violence, and as societies grapple with these feelings in public debate, the struggle comes to imprint itself on landscape".¹⁵ But rather than letting this struggle imprint itself on the landscape of the archive, the TRC has reconstituted violence and violation in a manner that does not acknowledge or account for the slippages in meaning and value attached to violence. This is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the formulation of amnesty.

Both amnesty and the archive are intimately linked to memory. But where the TRC's amnesty applications have often been characterized by appeal to the failure of memory, the mechanism of the archive is driven by a desire to sustain memory. The TRC granted amnesty to applicants whose actions fulfilled basic requirements. (The action had to be politically motivated, and committed between March 1960 and May 1994; there had to be a reasonable proportion between motive and method; the applicant had to make a full disclosure.) Indirectly, then, this amnesty legitimizes certain forms of violence, setting up hierarchies of violent acts that are alternately condoned and condemned within the same archive. As such, for example, the formulation of the amnesty archive is driven by questions of the criminal and the political. In distinguishing criminal from political acts, the code of the amnesty associates "criminal" acts with individual or personal motive and "political" acts with institutional or state sponsorship. With the amnesty hearings the TRC decided whether the criminal acts of agents of the state — acts that were criminal at a fundamental level, in the sense that apartheid can be characterized as a crime against humanity — should be decriminalized if they were politically motivated.¹⁶

Amnesty and the Archive

On July 14, 1997, after an adjournment for lunch, the TRC resumed its hearing into the amnesty application of Captain Jeffrey Benzien, a former investigator with the Terrorist Tracing Unit of the South African security police. In a community hall in Cape Town, Tony Yengeni, a victim of interrogation by Benzien in the late 1980s, continued his cross-examination of the applicant. Following a series of questions regarding the use of the wet bag method, Yengeni asked the commission to have Benzien demonstrate this particular form of interrogation and torture. After deliberation over the suddenness of the request, and uncertainty over the availability of a suitable bag, handcuffs, and a volunteer to play the victim role, the commission agreed, and Benzien proceeded to reenact the wet-bag method to a frenzied audience and media. Antjie Krog, a radio journalist for the South African Broadcasting Corporation, later described Benzien's demonstration as "one of the most loaded and disturbing images in the life of the Truth Commission".¹⁷

The bag used in wet-bag interrogation was a cloth bag normally used in police stations to hold a prisoner's loose articles of property for the duration of his or her arrest. In his amnesty application, Benzien describes his use of the method as follows:

"I get the person to lie down on the ground on his stomach ... with that person's hands handcuffed behind his back. Then I would take up a position in the small of the person's back, put my feet through between his arms to maintain my balance and then pull the bag over the person's head and twist it closed around the neck in that way, cutting off the air supply to the person. ... On occasions people have, I presume, and I say presume, lost consciousness. They would go slack and every time that was done, I would release the bag."¹⁸

Benzien's demonstration of the wet-bag method catapulted his testimony into the international me-

dia spotlight and subsequently became one of the bestremembered contributions of any of the TRC's amnesty applicants. His performative reenactment of what had remained hidden within the words of so many TRC submissions and testimonies suddenly brought to light a vision of the physical brutalities that had underpinned the hidden spaces of interrogation and torture in apartheid-era South Africa. Visual representations of Benzien's demonstration in the media (through press photographs and to a lesser extent television footage) have become archival moments and icons of the TRC process.

The space of interrogation, so intimate to the construction of power, suddenly shifted from a police station to a TRC hearing. If "the prisoner's confession is the interrogator's violence reaudited and redoubled as truth"¹⁹, as Feldman suggests, then Benzien's confession, in the context of an amnesty application before the TRC, is his own violence reaudited and redoubled as a narrative of remembering and forgetting, of conceding to the accusations of his victims without necessarily remembering particular acts of violence, of apologizing for what he remembers (as a "different" past) and of forgetting for the sake of a shared future. Benzien's performance thus visualizes history, with the perpetrator as the "knowing" performer, the narrator of the story. Benzien's demonstrative testimony invoked the double performance of violence, the original act and its reenactment in performance.²⁰

At crucial moments in Benzien's confession his testimony enacted his own disempowerment. This was a narrative of inversion, a shift from the position of torturer to that of "tortured". Just as the torturer had marked the tortured in apartheid space, so was the torturer "marked" by the tortured in this particular postapartheid setting.²¹ Captured by the waiting photojournalists and television crews, the physical act of Benzien's confession to the use of the wet-bag method visually marked his body at the moment of material complicity. Benzien became "marked" by the "violence" of the photographic image: "The Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed."²² This visual image refuses the context of Benzien's amnesty application; so too does the space of spectacle.

Mediated Space

By making individuals account for a history and by allowing the public and the media to stand witness to that account of history, the TRC allowed itself to become a space of individual performance and public spectacle. Woven together, these cultural articulations of performance and spectacle often served to confound the TRC's narrative re-presentations of the memory of the past, and their meaningfulness as a sustainable archive. The TRC's archive is overwhelmingly a narrative of the body as the performative site of violence. In the South African context, it is the physically and emotionally marked body that narrates the history of apartheid-era violence. As Feldman writes, "The very act of violence invests the body with agency. The body, altered by violence, reenacts other altered bodies dispersed in time and space; it also reenacts political discourse and even the movement of history itself"²³. The marked body is not only a physical "site", a place, but also a visualized "sight", a space — a space of the discursive reenactment of violence — in that the photographic record of the performances before the TRC honed in on the body as a primary narrative agent. The photographic record of the TRC process became an archive of the body (as archive) and a visualization of the physical traces of the performative body as a site of trauma (both past and present).

Benzien's testimony on the wet-bag method was one of the most overt examples of the theatrical re-presentation of pain during the TRC amnesty hearings. The sight of Benzien demonstrating something that had until then been hidden from view became an iconic image of the TRC's work, and, as a consequence, invoked a space of spectacle. From Yengeni's desire to see what had been done to him

to the TRC Commissioner Khampere's comment "We can't see Mr. Benzien" when the former investigator sat down on top of the volunteer (to which the chairperson responded, "We will just have to stand and have a look"), the politics of looking are fundamental to the narrative at hand. Further: they become an act of surveillance, of capturing Benzien in the act of his own complicity.

The photographic record of the TRC's performative body archive is primarily a media archive.²⁴ In addition to what the TRC has collected, ordered, and preserved in its own "official" archive, there is a vast archive of media images of its process; in fact press photographs, along with television coverage, constitute one of the dominant visual records of the commission's work. This record was made by careful watching of the performances of individual witnesses (whether as victims or perpetrators) to acts of violence. But the press's photographic archive was also instrumental in generating a public spectacle out of these performances. Public perceptions of amnesty applicants such as Benzien have been mediated by photographic and television images more than by any other testimony before the TRC. In Benzien's case this is mostly because of the uniqueness of his demonstration and visualization of the wet-bag torture method.²⁵

This body of media-derived visual narratives is an archive that stands in the face of the TRC's own archive and five-volume report. In generating its own visual narratives around performance and spectacle, the media's archive has implications for the representational politics of the memory of violence. Fundamentally, the relationship between victim and perpetrator has been informed by the visual archive of this history as it has been constructed in the media. The generation of postapartheid identities in South Africa, and specifically the attempt to move beyond the edges of apartheid memory, is partly dependent on the construction and interpretation of these archival spaces.

Spectacles of Violence

Benzien's performative reenactment of the wet-bag method is evidence of a particular return to the spectacle of violence. The spectacle generated by visual representations of the performance established a tension between the image of Benzien framed in an admission of guilt and the image of Benzien being granted amnesty in February 1999.²⁶ The nature and extent of this particular slippage — between his performative confession of guilt and the archival decriminalization of his actions (through the amnesty granted him by the TRC) — are crucial to the relationship between witnessing, testimony, memory, and the archive. Effected through the ideological space of the TRC, this memorial inversion of the relationship between torturer and tortured also raises issues regarding the role of photographic media in narrating testimony, engendering spectacle from performative acts, and archiving memories of violence.

The slippage of expectations, between the refusal of amnesty and the granting of it, is irritated by the spectacle of the violated body. Activated by the media's coverage of the process, this is a spectacle of the mediation of social relationships through images. Spectacle, as Guy Debord writes, "is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images. ... All that was once directly lived has become mere representation"²⁷. The memory that is the future of the archive is blunted by the mediation of disparate expectations by means of photographic images.

Within the performative space of the TRC process, which was often gripped by a sense of theatricality and drama, the trauma of the private space of individual witnesses was transformed into the public spectacle of the violated body. Effected, in part, through the role played by the print and electronic

media, spectacle runs the risk of reducing performative space to a cultural traffic in body parts. The dismembered identities of trauma are traded as the currency of different cultural psychoses. Benzien's demonstration of the wet-bag method, in functioning as a narrative confirmation of the trauma of apartheid-era interrogation and torture, is one of the most overt examples of the threat that the spectacle of performance will dismember the body from its narrative. Castrated and frozen by the frame of the camera, the body is made available for seditious judgments. But the media's representations mutilated Benzien's performance of violence, castrating the original narrative in a spectacle of mediated vision that establishes the conditions for a slippage between the archived vision and the amnesty verdict.

It is here that the photograph implicates itself in the TRC archive, not so much as witness than as visual evidence and proof of guilt. Through an appeal to a notion of politically motivated action, the TRC's reconstitution of the violated body (as archive) attempted to distinguish between overlapping narratives of criminalization and decriminalization. TRC photography, to some extent, is a re-presentation of this narrative reconstruction of criminalized and decriminalized violence. But like surveillance photography, this visual re-presentation is a vigilant observation that searches out and frames the moment of the incrimination of the performative body. Benzien's demonstration of the wet-bag method provided one such moment. In making the act of incrimination the focus of the re-presentation, TRC photography establishes a narrative of the expectation of decriminalization that stands in the face of the prospect of amnesty.

Conclusion

The TRC process has two important archival features. The first is the relationship between the ability to access the archive and the development of a culture of transparency; the second is the TRC's potential to generate a truly participatory archive. Writing about South African archival practice, Verne Harris and Christopher Merrett suggest that the right of access to official records is crucial to the development of a culture of transparency.²⁸ The TRC process is fundamentally about generating a culture of historical transparency that will ensure the public's right of access to a past that has until recently been not just unacknowledged but deliberately hidden from view. For Jacques Derrida, "Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation"²⁹. The second important archival feature of the TRC process is its potential as a participatory archive. The way in which the TRC was established has allowed everyone in South Africa the possibility of contributing to its archive. The statements and testimonies of victims and perpetrators of violence constitute an important oral archive of memories of apartheid-era history.

But the participation in the constitution of the archive is not sufficient for effective democratization of South Africa to take place. The interpretation of archival materials is as important as access to them. In providing access to its archive and offering interpretations of its archival material, the TRC has to think about mechanisms for reconciling the image of Benzien demonstrating the wet-bag method with the fact that he was granted amnesty. In TRC photography, the performative body becomes a vehicle for spectacle. In the construction of an archive of violence, where material so easily takes on the authority of "truth", will the Benzien narrative eternally remain spectacle? To what extent will the TRC archive produce and embody the performance of spectacle? What do the photographs of Benzien do to a sense of the visibility and invisibility of his amnesty narrative? What do this visibility and invisibility mark? What is absent in the violence represented in photographs like those of Benzien demonstrating the wet-bag method? These are just a few of the questions that need to be asked of

the makers of the TRC archive. They are important questions, because, as Allan Sekula suggests, the archive not only authenticates the truth claims of the photograph but is embedded in the photograph itself.³⁰

Between the disbelief and the grief, the TRC, as a mechanism of selfscrutiny, has not only to wrestle with heavy questions of forgiveness and responsibility but also to grapple with the extent to which reconciliation is dependent upon offering forgiveness and acknowledging responsibility. The emotional cost associated with acts and gestures of shame, humiliation, and betrayal, or else of benign lack of acknowledgment and open dismissal, have all made the TRC one of the most contested sites of postapartheid identity in South Africa. As the TRC phrase "Truth, the Road to Reconciliation" suggests, the generation of a narrative "truth" (in whatever form) is but the first step in a long journey toward reconciliation. What is going to take these testimonial performances beyond their "truth" toward a proper sense of healing is the construction of an archive that engages the problems and limitations of the "unofficial" archives in ways that negate the spectacle that has been so much a part of the TRC process. In the media's spectacular commodification of body and performance, meaning becomes overpowered by silence. The TRC has to guard against this silence in constructing its archive. This particular vigilance of archivability is crucial in ensuring that the road to reconciliation, to healing, remain unobstructed.

Like media images that position violence in a particular way, the archive plays an important role in positioning experiences of violence. Benzien's performative reenactment of the wet-bag interrogation method, and the representation of that performance by the media, have implications for the construction of an archival desire that is driven by amnesty. In that a postapartheid archive has to be constructed out of the narratives of amnesty applicants (who are prone to forgetting), there is a need for critical engagement with the practices and discourses of archives and archiving. This has to be done in a way that would account for the failure of memory, both on the part of applicants themselves and in the representations of the media. Fundamentally, what role, if any, will the TRC archive play in neutralizing the spectacle imagined in Benzien's demonstration of the wet-bag method?

There is also a need for vigilance against what the Benzien press photographs are bending toward. In the representation of violence, and the recuperation of memories of violence (whether overt or covert), there is a precarious relationship between history, memory, and representation. Slippages occur between the original act, its embodiment in performance, and its re-presentation in photographs. What do these slippages do to a sense of culpability, responsibility, and complicity? This essay is an attempt to understand the moments of public disaffection with the TRC through a discussion of visual images as representation and narrative. When Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the chairperson of the TRC, thanked "the electronic and print media for helping to tell ... the stories", little did he realize the narrative implications of his remark.³¹ The complicity of media spectacle in the creation of a space of disaffection from the TRC process needs to be addressed in the construction of the TRC's archive. In the space between memory and amnesia, between the trauma of memory and the comfort of forgetting, how do we re-present the TRC without turning it into spectacle? It is imperative that the place of the past in contemporary social practice be examined, especially the extent to which the invocation of a contemporary is a negation of the past (or vice versa). Linked to this is a critical urgency to theorize the archive not only as an assumed space of uncontested memory but also as a site of retribution. And we must not forget, of course, who speaks in the name of archival recuperation.

Rory Bester. Trauma and Truth. In: Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya (Hrsg.): Experiments with Truth. Documenta11_Platform2. Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit. 2002, S.155-173.

References

- 1 These acts included the Internal Security Act (1950), the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), the Public Safety Act (1953), the General Laws Amendment acts (1963 and 1966), the Criminal Procedures Act (1965), the Terrorism Act (1967), the Internal Security Act (1982), and the infamous Proclamation R121 (1985), which initiated three successive states of emergency in the second half of the 1980s.
- 2 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report (Cape Town: Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998), 2:187.
- 3 Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 86.
- 4 Beating was always the most common form of torture used by the security forces, but the use of suffocation increased dramatically in the mid-1980s. See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, 2:190.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 189.
- 6 The deep sense of humiliation and vulnerability experienced by victims of interrogation and torture often prevented them from speaking about their experiences. The cries and screams of emotional breakdown, the loss of bladder or bowel control during electric shock or suffocation, sexual violation, and the ultimate surrender of information all contributed to the victim's experience of shame in remembering his or her experiences. See *ibid.*, pp. 188-89.
- 7 Paul Stopforth, quoted in Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1989), p. 112.
- 8 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, 2:211-12, 4:112-13.
- 9 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, 4:112-13. The South African Medical and Dental Council took more than two years to make a ruling, and ruled in favor of the doctors. Eight years after Biko's death, however, the Council reopened the case against Dr. Benjamin Tucker, who was found guilty on three counts of improper and disgraceful conduct and was struck off the role of medical practitioners.
- 10 Stopforth, quoted in Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa*, p. 112.
- 11 The TRC's special hearings on the health sector highlight the awkward relationship between medicine and political will in apartheid South Africa: „Of all the health professionals in South Africa, district surgeons working under the apartheid government probably had one of the most difficult jobs in terms of upholding medical standards and human rights. On the one hand, they were under a statutory obligation to provide medical care for prisoners and detainees, to record information on the mental and physical health of inmates and to ensure that proper health conditions existed in terms of basic sanitation, food and general health care. On the other hand, there was great pressure on them to support the police and prison authorities for ‚national security‘ reasons.“ See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, 4:111.

- 12 Stopforth, quoted in Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa*, p. 114.
- 13 Only 10 percent of the statements of human-rights violations were heard at public hearings, but all of the applicants who applied for amnesty and met its requirements had to appear before the commission. Over half of the amnesty applications received by the TRC were refused, for one or more of the following reasons: the applicant denied any guilt; the action for which the applicant sought amnesty was not politically motivated; the action was outside the jurisdiction of the TRC; the action had been committed outside the amnesty's stipulated dates (March 1960— May 1994).
- 14 Sander Gilman, „Truth Seeking, Memory and Art: Comments Following Four Weeks of Life in the New South Africa,“ in Allan Boyer and Candice Breitz, eds., *Africus Johannesburg Biennale*, exh. cat. (Johannesburg: Transitional Metropolitan Council, 1995), p. 36.
- 15 Kenneth E. Foote, „To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture,“ *American Archivist* 53 (Summer 1990): 385.
- 16 The narratives of criminalization and decriminalization established by the TRC operate differently in the Human Rights Violations Hearings. One of the strengths of these hearings is that the apartheid victim's once-criminalized body undergoes a process of decriminalization through the performative reconstruction of violence and violation, a return of „citizenship“ („official“ belonging) to the once-criminalized victim.
- 17 Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull* (Johannesburg: Random House, 1998), p. 73.
- 18 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, 2:192-93.
- 19 Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, p. 136.
- 20 The volunteer who played the „victim“ in Jeffrey Benzien's demonstration was Mncebisi Sildiwatsaha, a leader in the African National Congress's Youth League.
- 21 Throughout his amnesty application Benzien's sense of himself constantly shifts between „torturer“ and „tortured.“ His obvious discomfort with the latter role probably accounts for his efforts to reestablish the former one, or at least remind audiences of it. This rearticulation was most overt in his boast that the wet-bag method usually yielded results within thirty minutes, and in his declaration of its success when used on Tony Yengeni.
- 22 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 1980 (Eng. trans. New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), p. 91.
- 23 Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, p. 7.
- 24 Most of the photographs produced in the context of the TRC were taken for publication in the news media. A number of photo-essays, however, stand out as editorial commentaries on the TRC's work. Most notable of these are the portrait essays by Jillian Edelstein and Geoff Grundlingh.

- 25** The most common image of amnesty applicants in media representation of the TRC process was that of the impassive, stone-faced individual listening to the accusations made against him.
- 26** During and following his amnesty application Benzien continued to be an official in the South African Police Service. He is currently a captain in the Service's Air Wing in Cape Town.
- 27** Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 1967 (Eng. trans. New York: Zone Books, 1994), pp. 12, 14.
- 28** Verne Harris and Christopher Merrett, „Towards a Culture of Transparency: Public Rights of Access to Official Records in South Africa,” *American Archivist* 57 (Fall 1994): 680-92.
- 29** Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 4.
- 30** Allan Sekula, „The Body and the Archive,” in Richard Bolton, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989), p. 374.
- 31** Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Human Rights Violations Committee Hearing, East London, South Africa, April 8, 1996. See www.truth.org.za.