Between Truth and Reconciliation: Experiments in Theater and Public Culture

Rustom Bharucha

Traversing a series of fragments — stories, anecdotes, memories, and testimonials — this essay will reflect on the instabilities of truth and reconciliation within the relatively marginal sites of theater and public culture. I would stress these instabilities not just because truth and reconciliation mean different things to different people in different cultures at different points in time, particularly at moments of crisis; more critically, I would emphasize that the relationship between truth and reconciliation is essentially volatile. This would not appear to be the case when we see these terms coupled together, as it were, bound by a seeming causality — at a normative level, an exposition of truth would seem to result in the possibility of reconciliation. In actuality, however, this is not always the case. My strategy in this essay, therefore, will be to infiltrate the seemingly innocent conjunction "and," in order to open up its troubled dynamics. Indeed, "and" could prove to be more explosive than either "truth" or "reconciliation."[1]

It is perhaps inevitable that the performative mode of analysis adopted in this essay should draw on my own background in theater. Indeed I have consciously opted for a certain play in the narrative, an informality of tone, and a nonlinear structure to expose some of the sacred cows of the truth and reconciliation discourse.[2] Not that this discourse is my immediate subject here, but arguably no reflection on truth and reconciliation today, in whatever context, can afford to ignore its spectral omnipresence. Now hegemonized as a model for truth commissions elsewhere, the postapartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, or the TRC as it is more widely known, serves as both inspiration and provocation for my own problematization of truth and reconciliation in this essay. Even as I do not confront its historical moment directly, it interrupts my narrative, asserting its presence when I least expect it. At times it strategically disappears, only to haunt my own unanswered questions. Unavoidably, I deal with the TRC experiment obliquely, or through erasure. What is *not* said about it is perhaps more significant than what gets written in this essay.

Genocide, torture, massacres, institutionalized racism: these axiomatic horrors underlying the quest for transitional justice are not the primary reference points in this narrative, even as I focus on communal violence in the Indian subcontinent. But here again the references are oblique, and when they appear more directly, they are mediated through representations of different kinds. Likewise, even as I shift the grounds of this essay from theater practice to public culture, the legacies of Dachau and Hiroshima are mediated through spectatorial speculations within the imaginary recesses of memorial museums, located within the interstitial tensions of the civil and the political. I make these qualifications at the outset of my essay to prepare the reader for the indeterminacies of what is perceived to be marginal. What is marginal need not be valorized, but it has the potential to offer another perspective on dominant narratives, and even to deflect their hegemonic assumptions. My intervention in the truth and reconciliation discourse is one such experiment in telling a different story.

The "Truth" of Storytelling

There can be few illusions about truth in the practice of theater, where truth is neither an absolute nor a given. Indeed there is no one truth but many possible truths — mutable, fluid, and above all deviant — that have to be constantly produced from the guts, bodies, and voices of actors. Given the

transitory nature of theater, truths are constantly breaking down; given its repetitions, truths have to be reconstructed, relived. The paradox of truth-making in theater increases when one acknowledges that theater can be one of the most illusory places in the world, where it is legitimate to lie knowingly.[3] And yet truth matters.

I will be focusing here not so much on the gradations of lying in relation to truth as on three motifs that run through my discourse: evidence, memory, and storytelling. Stories matter in any exposition of truth, not only because they enable us to illuminate elusive realities but because they help us to deal with the aporias of pain. The writer Isak Dinesen once said, "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them."[4] The word "borne" is equivocal: in the context of Dinesen's statement, it means "endured," but it also hints that pain is actually "born" — created, stimulated, embodied — through the telling of the story itself. Endorsing Dinesen's statement, though not my equivocal reading, Hannah Arendt extends it in her reflections *Between Past and Future*: "To the extent that the teller of factual truth is also a storyteller, he brings about that ‚reconciliation with reality' which Hegel ... understood as the ultimate goal of all philosophical thought."[5] Perhaps this is a magisterial assumption on Arendt's part, even though it is generous in its qualification ("*To the extent* that the teller of factual truth is also a storyteller"). There is no such qualification in the Report of 1998 that emerged out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, where it becomes only too clear that the teller of factual truth is not a storyteller, or, more emphatically, that the storyteller is no teller of facts.

In fact the Report differentiates sharply between "factual or forensic truth" and "personal and narrative truth," among other truths. Predictably, "factual truth" is defined as a form of scientifically "corroborated evidence," drawn on "accurate information through reliable (impartial, objective) procedures," framed within a social-science methodology of research.[6] This truth is unequivocally prioritized in the Report. "Personal and narrative truth" conveyed through the medium of storytelling, in contrast, is granted at best some kind of "healing potential" for the victims in particular.[7] Yet it would be disingenuous to deny that these stories provided the primary evidence of the TRC — indeed, the most terrible truths of the violence of apartheid were voiced through personal stories. But to what end? Ultimately it would seem that the "truth" of storytelling was too "subjective" to hold up as accurate evidence. Within the rigors of the written word, as opposed to the volatility of the spoken word, the "veracity" of stories was called into question, even if "they provided unique insights into the pain of South Africa's past."[8] Given this patronizing attitude, it is hard to imagine that apartheid's storytellers could be reconciled with reality, still less with their fractured selves — although this lapse would be emphatically denied by the TRC's advocates.

Having acknowledged this lapse, I would also emphasize that there is a privilege in telling a story, even a sense of empowerment. Some stories become epics in their own right, so much so that it is possible, in retrospect, to view the entire TRC proceedings as one master narrative, out of which have emerged best-selling documentary metafictions like Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998). This masterpiece of reportage, compiling the testimonies of both the victims and perpetrators of apartheid, has all the ingredients of a Hollywood blockbuster in the Steven Spielberg tradition. Sadly, many hundreds of truths that were never submitted to the TRC are unlikely to be part of this blockbuster. It should be remembered that out of the literally millions of South Africans who were persecuted, humiliated, tortured, and evicted from their homes during the apartheid regime, only 21,400 submitted statements in around 140 public TRC hearings countrywide. This is a record in its own right, but it also falls terribly short of exposing "the entire truth." We need to acknowledge, then, that not every history of pain finds itself articulated in a story: this truism has yet to be fully acknowledged in the globalizing of human tragedies and world crises.

In India as well, we are seeing how the narrative of the Partition is being centralized as the master narrative on the basis of which the trauma of the subcontinent can be assessed. I would not deny the importance or the pain of articulating this narrative; the problem is that it threatens to become *The* Partition, marginalizing other partitions that have yet to be narrativized. What happens to these unacknowledged partitions, these undisclosed truths? Their stories, I suspect, remain submerged in the unarticulated narratives of pain, and it is thesenarratives — these minor stories and small instances of pain — to which I would like to call attention in this essay. I draw inspiration in this regard from Walter Benjamin's finely inflected refusal to distinguish between major and minor events: "A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history."[9]

Questioning Ancestry

With this truth in mind I present my first fragment of evidence. It is drawn from a meeting with an Australian aboriginal storyteller, a grandmother figure who greeted me at a conference in Brisbane with the words, "You are walking on the land of our ancestors." I remember responding tentatively: "Yes?" A question rather than an affirmation, because her statement left me with doubt, unrest, and yet a need to believe in its truth.

1) At one level I doubted the statement because there was no visual evidence to support it — the storyteller's words signified one thing but the site of our conversation (the anonymous lobby of a modern hotel) seemed far removed from the land of anyone's ancestors. I could not relate what I was hearing to what I was seeing.

2) I also felt uneasy because I couldn't help picking up a fundamentalist echo in the words "land of our ancestors." This echo comes from the politics of my own location in post-Ayodhya India, where invocations of ancestry by the Hindu Right invariably affirm an exclusionary, territorial, atavistic "truth." This '`truth" gets verified through quasi-fascist uses of traditional categories like *pitribhumi* (fatherland) and *punyabhumi* (holy land),[10] which have assumed specific antiminoritarian connotations in India's contemporary political culture, apart from legitimizing claims on land and "disputed sites" on a communal basis.

Of course I am aware that these are different contexts of ancestry. In the context of Hindutva, ancestry is claimed by sections of the majority community in power, who are inexplicably threatened by "minorities" who remain "foreigners," "barbarians," if not "traitors" at a civilizational level, and who refuse to be 366 accommodated within the presumably "tolerant" norms of brahminical Hinduism. In contrast, the First Peoples of Australia claim land rights and the restoration of dignity on ancestral grounds even as they have been ruthlessly minoritized over the years, and inadequately represented in government. Obviously different political constituencies are shaping contexts of ancestry in different ways in these cases. Even so, the fundamentalist echo remains, and I am disturbed by it.

3) A third dimension needs to be acknowledged: not every truth registers at a general, ideological level. When the aboriginal storyteller tells me, "You are walking on the land of our ancestors," it is a direct statement, made personally to me, with full eye-contact (the much fetishized sign of "authentic" communication in theater language). For all my reservations, I am compelled to recognize its "emotional truth." Indeed I can't deny that I am in the land of *her* ancestors, but these ancestors are not necessarily *ours*. Indeed I have no particular desire to connect to the land of my ancestors, because it would be irrelevant to my sense of truth.

The relativity of truth, then, depends not merely on different locations and contexts, but on different needs, privileges, and deprivations. For whom is it absolutely necessary, at an existential or political level, to assert a truth relating to ancestry? And for whom is it an irrelevance, even an embarrassment? How does one justify critiquing the valorization of one truth at the expense of ignoring another? And conversely, how can one not critique a particular truth if it offends one's "moral sense," to appropriate a phrase of Gandhi's?

Memory and Evidence

In any invocation of the past there is an activation of memory, which may be one of the most volatile agencies in determining the evidence in any context of truth and reconciliation. I recently conducted a workshop, "Land and Memory," with a group of indigenous people called the Siddi from the Indian state of Karnataka. Of negroid descent, the Siddi migrated to India some two centuries ago from the eastern states of Africa, some as slaves, others as traders. Today they live in scattered settlements in different states of South India and in Gujarat in western India, speaking different languages, practicing different faiths, almost oblivious of each other's existence. Not only do they fail to constitute an identifiable "community" within the nomenclature of the state, they are so marginal that they don't seem to matter at all. This is the fate of those minorities in India who fail to constitute a viable vote-bank. As the unacknowledged blacks of the subcontinent, the Siddi of Karnataka live for the most part an extremely marginalized existence on forest land, which is technically illegal.

Unlike the aboriginal peoples of Australia, the Siddi would seem to have no primordial link between land and memory. From my interaction with the people of Manchikeri, who work as agricultural laborers, it became clear that they do not — indeed cannot — claim land on ancestral grounds. This would be counterproductive for them, given that their origins in Africa (marked by the color of their skin) continue to highlight their "foreignness" in India. The more salient point is that the Siddi have no articulated "memory of Africa" as such, nor are they particularly traumatized by this absence of knowledge relating to their racial origins; indeed they are not even curious about it. But if they have no memory of Africa, this does not mean they have no memory of the land on which they may have lived for twenty to thirty years. Memory, it should be remembered, is an elastic phenomenon; one can go back thousands of years, or one can call attention to the moment that has just passed but that is already a memory.

From the Siddi I learned that memory is not "a storehouse of the past"; it is more like a processing agency that is constantly transforming "the present" into a historical record. Significantly, the primary source of mnemonic transformation for the Siddi is song, through a musical tradition called *damami* (which literally refers to a drum), and the richest evidence of their history is also song. *Damami* is both a means of recording the present and an inventory of the past. Unlike truth commissions, which see a definite rift between what is remembered through stories and what gets accepted as evidence in written historiography, the Siddi make no separation between what is remembered and what counts as evidence.

A problem inevitably arises when this evidence is not acceptable or intelligible within the language of the state. In their struggle for political identity, for example, the Siddi seek to be categorized within the official nomenclature of the state as Scheduled Castes (SCs) or Scheduled Tribes (STs), categories that come with specific benefits and privileges relating to housing loans and educational facilities for children. The difficulty concerns the negotiation of this language of the state with the oral tradition in which Siddi history is documented and lived. During my "Land and Memory" workshop I confronted precisely this schism of conflicting languages, not least when we encountered the minister of

social welfare for Karnataka, who disrupted our workshop with a thoroughly meaningless visit. After enduring the paternalistic non sequiturs he directed at a bunch of "lazy natives," I realized it was time for an experiment.

"Why don't we improvise the minister?" I suggested to the Siddi after the minister left. In the reenactment that followed, the actor-minister, appropriately masked, sitting regally on a red plastic chair, demanded to see the documents of the Siddi: "You're liars. You don't have any rights on this land. Where are your documents?" To which one of the Siddi women pointed out some trees: "See those trees? We planted them with our own hands some twenty years ago. Those trees are our documents." This, I realized, was a subaltern truth that countered the official truth of documentation, reversing its logic and asserting a different criterion of evidence, based on ecology rather than bureaucratic certification.

This is not the place to elaborate on how the process of generating awareness through theater can be activated in real life. What I would emphasize is that my work with the Siddi could only begin after I had confronted their seeming "reconciliation with reality" through song. Only by rupturing this tradition of song through improvisations and exercises was it possible to arrive at some critical confrontation of political truth. I had to move from reconciliation to truth, thereby reversing the dominant assumption that reconciliation is only possible through an exposition of truth. Let me now focus on this causality to demonstrate how it can be ruptured through a reflexive intervention in yet another theater experiment.

The Fiction of Reconciliation

For this I will have to tell you a story — or, more precisely, a story within a story. I have told this story elsewhere, in contexts relating to secularism and intercultural exchange.[11] If I narrate the story again, it is because it has not yet been exhausted; indeed, from its fictional interstices it yields new insights into the possibilities of reconciliation. Underlying the story is the problematic reality of caste in India as at once a politicizing agency for social change and one of the most enduring forms of dehumanization. Caste is a particularly tricky reality to tackle in theater, not least because it tends to get "invisibilized" within the seemingly secular structure of modern theater. I remember a company of actors who once reassured me, "We don't have any caste in our theater. We're all outcastes anyway." I thought this was a joke until I actually started to cast the production I was directing for them: only then did I realize how casting could catalyze a caste war in the group.

Some years ago I conducted a workshop in the rural area of Heggodu, Karnataka, where I have conducted most of my theatrical experiments. Before the workshop started I had seen a photograph of a low-caste *dalit*, a landless laborer. The photograph had been taken not far from Heggodu; it showed the laborer tied to a stake, stripped almost entirely naked, with a shit-smeared *chappal* (slipper) rammed into his mouth (as the caption to the photograph indicated). This instance of "documentary truth" detailing an atrocity on a particular *dalit* testifies to the widespread phenomenon of caste violence, particularly in rural India.

I cannot say that the photograph catalyzed my interaction with the actors, but it was there somewhere in the back of my mind. In my theater work I have found that the moment I articulate the intention underlying my intervention in a workshop, the process of finding truth has already been instrumentalized. The reality is that when you posit truth, you are unlikely to find it, because it has already been assumed or predetermined. To discover truth in theater you have to accept that it is inadvertent; it hits you when you least expect it, through an unfolding of the political unconscious.

Another truism of theater: you have to work with what is available. In this particular workshop I found myself in a large empty room with fifteen young actors from different parts of Karnataka. The only object in the room was a water container with a stainless-steel cup from which we all drank unconsciously. I began an exercise with this cup in which it was transformed into different objects. At one point it became a bomb. I took the bomb from the actor who had transformed it and placed it in the center room. "Can you believe that this is a *saligrama*?" I asked.

What is a *saligrama*? A small, fossillike sacred stone that can fit in the palm of the hand, it embodies the godhead. I had not seen a *saligrama* at the time, but I had imagined it through the fiction of the writer U. R. Anantha Murthy, of Karnataka. In an episode in his novel *Bharathipura*, a young Brahmin socialist returns from England to his ancestral home, which adjoins a temple-town in Karnataka. Fired with socialist truth, he embarks on a mission to free the untouchables in his village by making them enter the temple, which they are prohibited to do. Being something of a performer, he is not content merely to facilitate the action; he is compelled to *perform* it, in a ritual of de-casteing him self (and others). Taking a *saligrama* from outside the prayer room of his ancestral home into the public space of the outer courtyard, where the low-caste laborers have assembled, he shows it to them and asks them to touch it. They instinctively retreat in fear — after all, it is taboo for them even to see it. The more our socialist hero tries to reassure them that "it's only a stone," the more its sacred aura is enhanced. Finally he commands them to touch it — he may be a socialist but he is also a feudal lord. And they have no option but to do so. Then they flee in terror, leaving him examining the *saligrama* alone. Finally he throws the stone into the darkness.

"Can you believe that this cup is a *saligrama*?" How this question surfaced from my own political unconscious I cannot say, but I do know that even as I was uttering the question, the coercive possibilities of my directorial intervention were not lost on me. Such is the trust implicit in the imaginary explorations of the theater, however, that I found the actors exposing their individual caste truths through specific gestures in relation to the "*saligrama*." While some of the upper-caste actors had no difficulty in caressing, anointing, and prostrating themselves before the object, the low-caste actors either retreated from the "*saligrama*" altogether or tried to touch it only with great diffidence. This was a moving and painful revelation of the differentiations of caste, which were surfacing for the first time in our group. Needless to say, our secular solidarity was completely shattered.

It was at this point that I felt the need to intervene with another fiction, but one of my own making. When truth is exposed in theater at very personal levels, you can't retreat from it. You can't stop the process right there because it would be too painful. You have the responsibility to transform that moment of pain into something else, or you risk disrupting the possibility of reconciliation. Entering the narrative of the actors as an actor in my own right, I thought aloud: "This was a cup which we took entirely for granted. At some point it became a bomb. Then it became a *saligrama*, in which some of you believed and others didn't. But now, when I look at the *saligrama*, I realize that it's only a cup of water, from which we can all drink in a ritual of our own making." We passed the cup around, and when it returned, I asked, "Does the cup feel different from the time when you first started the exercise?" And from the smiles and intimate solidarity of the group, I could feel that it was very different, because *we* were different. Something had happened to us as a group. We had traveled from a rather painful exposition of individual truths to a reconciliation as to how we could relate to each through an acknowledgment of difference.

On a less euphoric note, I would acknowledge that even within the protected confines of theater, no reconciliation is absolute. Indeed most reconciliations are fragile, partial, and in constant need of renewal. While one group of individuals could reconcile with each other's differences, this very reconciliation could be the source of tension with another group. Such was the insight I received all

too harshly following the *communitas* of the "*saligrama*" experience. In a room adjoining the theater workshop, another "experiment" was at work, conducted by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), who were indoctrinating the young boys of the village with familiar invocations of militant Hinduism, reinforced through allusions to "our" Vedic ancestry. Needless to say, there is no place for minorities in this ancestry.

The questions that I am now compelled to ask in the aftermath of the workshop necessarily complicate the imagined comfort and endurance of reconciliation. If caste differences can be resolved within a theatrical framework, is it possible to extend these lessons to antisecularist forums? What are the limits of conflict resolution through imaginary processes? Can the imaginary be translated into the political? More concretely, is it possible to reconcile differences across religious and political communities? Or do we accept that, at the best of times, in the most democratic of circumstances, reconciliation is only possible between and across individuals? Reconciliation across entire communities is a harder proposition.[12]

Limits of Truth Commissions

With these questions we have obviously entered the political domain, a domain in relation to which the experiments in theater that I have described so far are linked yet separated. Now I would like to complicate the agencies of truth and reconciliation further as I confront the emotional dynamics of truth commissions. Obviously there can be no direct transference between the process of truth and reconciliation facilitated through an intimate workshop and the more formal proceedings of a truth commission. The workshop, it could be argued, is far too private, even hermetic, in its process of exploring truth through fiction and symbol. It can prepare the ground, as the "*saligrama*" workshop did, for a more inflected secular bonding and interactivity with cultural difference, but it would be a mistake to read in this preparation any guarantee of political enlightenment. The workshop was nothing more, though nothing less, than a performance.

It could likewise be argued that the South African TRC functioned as a performance in its own right — a grand performance, in fact, represented live in the actual forums of the hearings and also disseminated through daily radio and television programs. On these multiple sites, the "extravagant drama" of the TRC, as Albie Sachs describes it, was played out in a wide range of registers, at levels of pain and trauma that would be hard to imagine. Witnesses periodically broke down, and unlike judges in court, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the commission's chairperson, was seen weeping openly during the sessions, as well as praying, lighting candles, and bursting into song. Tellingly, this "extravagant drama" was at once authenticated as the primary site of "truth" and discredited for its emotional "excess." Instead of accepting the tears, cries, and sobs of the victims as nonverbal signs of the destruction of language through pain, they became the very grounds on which the exposition of truth was distrusted. Archbishop Tutu was taken to task for reducing the hearings to "tearful occasions," thereb undermining his own impartiality. As Claudia Braude has written, the commission's impartiality was undermined by "truth that is *felt*." Tears "raise[d] questions about the TRC's legitimacy." Indeed, "truth and tears counter[ed] each other."[13]

Only a few independent interlocutors of the TRC process were able to deal with the phenomenological complexity of emotional breakdowns in illuminating the truth underlying the witnesses' testimonials. Here is one such analysis, which focuses on a particular eruption of crying that interrupted the testimonial offered by Nomonde Calata:

> For me, the crying is the beginning of the Truth Commission — the signature tune, the definitive moment, the ultimate sound of what the process is about. She was wearing this vivid orange-red dress, and she threw herself backwards and that sound … that sound … it will haunt me for ever and ever …
> … [T]o witness that cry was to witness the destruction of language … was to realize that to remember the past of this country is to be thrown back into a time before language. And to get that memory, to fix it in words, to capture it with the precise image, is to be present at the birth of language itself.
> But more practically, this particular memory, at last captured in words, can no longer haunt you, push you around, bewilder you, because you have taken control of it — you can move it wherever you want to. So maybe that is what the Commission is all about — finding words for that cry of Nomonde Calata.[14]

Deeply sensitive as this analysis is to history and sound, the reality is that it constitutes a minority view. It would be more accurate to say: "What the Truth Commission is all about — *not* finding words for that cry of Nomonde Calata."

Apart from the incapacity to deal with the nonverbal dimensions of truthtelling, a fundamental discrepancy was built into the very structure of the hearings. If the radical though unconventional premise of the TRC was to facilitate the voicing of truth in a public forum, where the perpetrators of the crimes had the assurance of receiving amnesty for their actions (so long as they could be related to "political objectives"), then the possibility of reconciliation for the victims via the negotiation of reparations needed to be followed through within the nonjudicial structure of the hearings. To posit a nonjudicial structure for the exposition of truth, and at the same time to accept a judicially "rigorous" mode of verifying the truth through an independent committee, is to risk abdicating truth after facilitating its utterance. While amnesty for the perpetrators of political violence was the *condition* on the basis of which the TRC was allowed to be set up in the first place, the legal and moral right of the victims to obtain reparation was *postponed* until after the hearings could be adequately assessed and discriminated. Clearly there is a disruption in the time-continuum of this truth and reconciliation process, which demands a critical rethinking of the political implications of telling stories in public.

The irony is staggering: even as the victims continue to wait for their meager reparations, the perpetrators of violence have assumed their new roles as the beneficiaries of the South African global economy. Instead of using this irony to initiate a new process of truth, the majority of the TRC's supporters continue to uphold the reconciliatory power of sharing "the pain of South Africa's past" through stories. "What is important," as the TRC Report implies, is "not so much *what* is told (which has to be verified, and is thus suspect), but rather *that* telling occurs."[15] Likewise, skeptical as he is that "truth" can be regarded as "a road to reconciliation," the philosopher Avishai Margalit is sanguine because, even if retributive justice for the victims is unavailable (this "can be too costly or a political impossibility"), the positive outcome of the TRC was that the suffering of apartheid's victims was duly "recognized."[16]

One could quote many other instances in which the perceived emotional catharsis of telling stories has been interpreted as a contribution to the culture of reconciliation. Here is a diary extract from one of the Commissioners of the TRC, Piet Meiring, who approaches an old Xhosa woman shortly after she has narrated the brutal torture and subsequent killing of her fourteen-year-old son:

> "Please, tell me: was it worth it?" The tear marks were still on her cheeks. But when she raised her head and smiled, it was like the dawn breaking: "Oh yes, sir, absolutely! It was difficult to talk

about these things. But tonight for the first time in sixteen years, I think I will be able to sleep through the night."[17]

One wonders if this is still the case, or whether the old woman has been summarily forgotten after her heartbreaking evidence. It would be useful to know, for instance, if she received any medical or material help while waiting to hear from the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee, if indeed she qualified for any compensation in the first place. Reconciliation without reparation, it would seem, is at best a wish-fulfillment for the TRC's historians, at worst a perpetuation of injustice for apartheid's victims. First the victim tells her story, she is ostensibly "healed" through the process, she "touches the hearts" of her listeners, the TRC is duly "enriched" through the process, but ultimately she is subject to the rhetoric of a reconciliatory discourse over which she has no control. It is assumed that she endorses the official point of view being articulated in her name, but in actuality the possibility of her dissent or sense of betrayal or frustration with the TRC process is not even acknowledged.

As the TRC has formally come to an end, the utopian hope built into the voicing of victims' stories becomes increasingly more difficult to sustain, both at human and ideological levels. It would be better to acknowledge the limits of the South African "experiment," whose premises, however idealistic and quirky, were not intrinsically flawed; the problem is that the experiment didn't go far enough on its own terms. It allowed itself to be hijacked by other bureaucratic, judicial, and political protocols and strictures that not only compromised the moral authority of the commission but may even have perpetuated the trauma of the victims themselves.

Between the exposition of truth and the possibility of reconciliation there needs to be a modulation of energies whereby the listeners and interlocutors of truth, including the perpetrators, assume a collective responsibility in caring for the future of the victims. The keyword here is "care," which, more often than not, is circumvented within the nonjudicial processes of truth commissions, despite tokenistic gestures for providing remedial and psychological facilities for the victims and their families. In the absence of any sustained follow-up in consolidating new modalities for "caring," it could be charged that the TRC in South Africa merely imitated formal judicial procedures in which the very idea of "caring" is obliterated within the mechanisms of justice.

In this regard I would call attention to an astonishingly "transgressive" truth acknowledged by the Indian legal scholar Upendra Baxi in relation to the absence of the "spheres of caring" within "the governing rhetoric of rights and justice."[18] I emphasize "transgressive" because Baxi's prioritization of "care" works totally against the grain of judicial omniscience and nonnegotiability, which is the source of much activist disillusionment in India today. As he puts it, "Constitutional decision or policy-makers present themselves as being just, even when not caring. ... it is notorious that constitutional cultures remain rights-bound, not care-bound."[19] Baxi attributes this indifference to "the poverty of social theory imagination," where justice is actually separated from fraternity (or sisterhood) — fraternity, "in its most minimal sense, of concern for fellow-citizens." In any case it becomes necessary to uphold other agencies of caring that can supplement the amnesia of the law. "Just" verdicts "beyond all reasonable doubt" can and frequently do result in the traumatization or displacement of ordinary people with no adequate rehabilitation or reparation, still less reconciliation to their fractured lives. This is a fact that demands a different reading of truth in relation to the abdication of justice.

The Performativity of Suffering

Moving farther outside the theater into the public sphere, I will now elaborate on other ways of giving testimonials, way that are not catalyzed by directors or writers or truth commissions but are per-

formed by ordinary people in states of crisis. I consciously use the word "performed" because there is a strong gestural, somatic, and visual dimension to the ways in which victims choose on occasion to present themselves, not to highlight their victimhood but to protest the crimes inflicted on them. In this regard I would like to focus now on the sociologist Veena Das's research on the anti- Sikh riots in New Delhi in 1984 following the assassination of Indira Gandhi by two Sikh security guards, leading to a carnage of communal violence that activated memories of Partition. In one fragment of her research, Das describes a group of Sikh women whose men have been slaughtered in the riots:

> As long as their suffering was not acknowledged and addressed, [the women] insisted on sitting outside their ruined houses, refusing to comb their hair, clean their bodies, or return to other signs of normality. Here the somatic practice drew deeply from the Hindu tradition of mourning and death pollution … I am not claiming that this discourse was explicit — it functioned rather as an unconscious grammar, but fragments of it were evoked when the women insisted that the deaths of their men should not go unavenged. I remember one instance in which there were rumors that Mother Teresa would visit the colony. X [a politician from the Congress Party] … implored the women to go back to their houses, to clean up the dirt and to return to some normality. They simply refused, saying he could himself sweep the remains of the disaster if that offended him.[20]

Anger and revenge, so emphatically silenced in the proceedings of the South African TRC, are the two motifs that surface in this fragment. What matters to these women is not reconciliation but the recognition of the truth of violence on their own terms, which assumes a performative dimension. On the one hand there is the collective display of bodies in a state of "pollution," which, as Das reminds us, recalls at a mythic level the violated figure of Draupadi from the *Mahabharata*. Shared by the five Pandava brothers, lost in a game of dice, and subsequently humiliated and raped, Draupadi refuses to remove the "signs of pollution from her body" — notably her disheveled hair, which is invariably used as a sign of her anger. In Kathakali performance the actor playing Draupadi always tugs "her" hair as a reminder of what has been done to her. In their Draupadi- like mythic personae, the women described by Das are not grieving widows and victims; they are not doing what we expect them to do, as demonstrated in documentary reportage and the television news, which capitalize on the grief of others. Instead they are witnesses, even sentinels, of their own suffering.

Along with this witnessing there is a decision-making process at work here relating specifically to how the women wish to be seen in the eyes of the law, which in turn would prefer *not* to see them in that state. In this process Das emphasizes that the "passive display of pollution" is so "terrible" that "it could not even be gazed at." However, this very difficulty (if not assault on the eyes) converts the "female body into a political subject that forcibly [gives] birth to a counter-truth of the official truth about the riots."[21] The body, then, is not just a source of pollution; it becomes a site of political evidence.

There are many such instances in the contemporary history of activism in India, where women activists have been assaulted and even gang-raped. Instead of covering up their scars, they have vigilantly "guarded" the signs of violence on their bodies *as evidence* in order to obtain adequate testimonies, through medical examination, of the crimes inflicted on them. While these testimonies have not always resulted in justice, they invariably assume a symbolic significance, becoming "stories" that feed the imaginaries of resistance and provoke renewed struggle in the absence of reconciliation.[22]

Representing Victimhood

Once again we return to stories and to what happens to the truth of evidence in the process of telling them. It is one thing for a woman to tell her own story, quite another when it is told for her. While one cannot assume that the first narration is necessarily more "true" than the other, the exploitative potential of another telling the story of her life cannot be ruled out. It all depends on *how* the story is told, to whom it is being shared in the first place, and *why*.

At one point in the multilayered narrative of *Country of My Skull*, which is as much an experiment in storytelling as it is an agonized reflection on telling the truth of the TRC in South Africa, Krog recalls a conversation with Ariel Dorfman. Known for his stories dealing with the truth commission in Chile, which unlike the South African TRC was held behind closed doors, closed off from public scrutiny, Dorfman acknowledges that his writing is a hybrid of "what he's heard" and of "what he makes up."[23] Krog questions him: "Isn't that a sacrilege — to use someone else's story, a story that has cost him his life?" To which Dorfman responds candidly, "Do you want the awful truth? How else would it get out? How else would the story be told?"[24]

This stark revelation is made "fictional" in an extraordinary stroke of reflexivity as Krog incorporates this conversation into another, more intimate conversation that she is having with an unnamed male companion.[25] While she agonizes about the idea that writers in South Africa should "shut up for a while" since they have no right to "appropriate a story paid for with a lifetime of pain and destruction," her companion remonstrates with her "*over*-respectfulness" to the victims' suffering through allusions to the history of Germany.[26] More specifically he recalls the taboos relating to the representation of Auschwitz, which almost assumed a "holy character" that could not be "trivialized" through fictional narration. Encapsulating the antirepresentational argument, Krog's companion says,

> It's all well and good to listen to victims in court cases … but artists should keep their grubby hands off the stories. German artists could not find a form in which to deal with Auschwitz. They refused to take possession of their own history. So the inevitable happened. Hollywood took it away from them. A soap opera laid claim to the statistic, the metaphor, the abstraction that was Auschwitz.[27]

From this intervention it is possible to reiterate the endless debate on the ethics and necessity of representing the unspeakable horrors of ethnic cleansing, genocide, and mass slaughter, even while acknowledging the difficult, even exploitive dimension of the enterprise. For the purpose of this essay, however, I would like to steer the discussion back to the modalities of reconciliation. Taking Auschwitz as a cue, I will focus now on memorial museums, in which the dialectics of solitude and trauma are played out in increasingly more complex and controversial ways in public culture. If the earlier sections of this essay have dealt with different modes of performing (or dissimulating) truth, I would now like to focus on the aporias of spectatorship. Moving away from my participatory interaction as a director with the truths unfolding in theater workshops, I would now like to enter the more anonymous yet troubling intimacy of museums as dream-sites.

As a prelude to this closing section of my essay, and as a bridge with the earlier sections, I would like to raise a few questions: What happens when you are not a victim yourself, but you become a spectator of someone else's pain? How do you deal with it? How do you resist the obvious possibilities of voyeurism, or the mere consumption of other peoples' suffering? How do you sensitize yourself politically to the histories of others that might not have touched on your own? Memorial museums

enable us to address these questions. Since they constitute a vast area of research, I will extrapolate my analysis around two moments of spectatorship through which I will further question received assumptions of truth and reconciliation.

In Dachau, the journey through the concentration camp, at once simulated and real, ends in a statement that underlies the raison d'être of every memorial museum: *What happened must never happen again*. This reads like an affirmation of world citizenship and humanitarian solidarity, which one is compelled to endorse dutifully. However, as one exits the protected civil space of the museum, where one passes as a tourist, and enters the public sphere, where one is marked as a foreigner, one realizes that the statement may be something of an illusion. Back in the desolate anonymity of one's Munich hotel, one suffers with the memory of Dachau, and it is this post-Holocaust museumized suffering to which I would like to call your attention now.

Is not this suffering essentially narcissistic, masochistic, parasitic, unproductive, even factitious? How can one accept the condition of becoming an imaginary surrogate victim of a reality to which one is not connected at a historical level? Ian Buruma has written ironically of the "joys and perils of victimhood," which he contextualizes specifically within the second generation of Holocaust survivors, who fabricate identities for themselves. He makes the strong point that the survivors of Auschwitz themselves did not mark themselves as victims; they wanted to get on with their lives and integrate with society as far as possible. It was their sons and daughters who developed a "vicarious virtue" by marking themselves as minorities through a "sentimental solidarity of remembered victimhood."[28] In an even more scathing critique, Buruma dwells on the effects of the Holocaust industry — its celebration of "kitsch and death," its "pseudo-- religion," and even its stimulation of an "Olympics of suffering." These are epithets used by a growing number of the Holocaust's critics, some of whom would regard the Jewish tragedy as overrepresented at the expense of acknowledging other tragedies faced by other communities.

Buruma's critique is legitimate, but it is also insufficiently reflexive, if not unconsciously derisive of the suffering of others. There are at least three problems with his position:

1) In focusing on the second generation of victims and survivors in predominantly Western societies, particularly in the United States, and in assuming all too readily that they have been atomized by a homogenized, metropolitan, global culture, Buruma uses his critique of fictitious victimhood to undermine the legitimate search of minorities in diasporic cultures to assert new identities for themselves. Not every assertion of a minority identity is necessarily a product of victimhood, imagined or real, but this seems to be the underlying assumption of Buruma's critique. In essence this position cannot be separated from a larger agenda of multicultural-bashing from a liberal secular-humanist perspective.[29] It is one thing to expose the limitations or even racist implications of multicultural statism, quite another to play into the antiminoritarian rhetoric that reduces advocates of identitarian politics to opportunistic "victims."

2) While there is evidence that "historical truth" is being replaced in academia by theories of "social construction" and "subjectivity," Buruma overstates his fears by claiming that "when all truth is subjective, only feelings are authentic, and only the subject can know whether his or her feelings are true or false."[30] Feelings for Buruma can only be "expressed, not discussed or argued about."[31] This is precisely the unstated animus that underlies the reticence on the part of the TRC Report to acknowledge the veracity of "personal or narrative truth," as conveyed through stories and testimonials. Buruma is articulating the same prejudice, but with considerably more eloquence and precision.

Other echoes of the antiperformative prejudice examined earlier in the essay can be traced in Buruma's refusal to accept any ritualization of suffering or healing — he even has problems with the lighting of candles in the precincts of Auschwitz. Without undermining the possible excesses of relating such rituals to larger instances of historical trauma, it is necessary to point out that these seemingly ahistorical signs of subjectivity and emotion have a place in the writing of history. They do not necessarily *replace* facts; they *complicate* them. And that is what Buruma fails to acknowledge — that while the history that replaces "historical truth" with "subjectivity" is flawed, the omniscient, objective, factbound history that seems to "write itself," in Roland Barthes's words, is also flawed in its own right.

3) Finally there is an unacknowledged cosmopolitan insularity in Buruma's position. As he puts it somewhat too breezily, "It is perhaps time for those of us who have lost religious, linguistic, or cultural ties with our ancestors to admit to that and let go."[32] Perhaps it would be prudent to qualify that assertion with the suggestion that there are millions of people in the world for whom such ancestral ties cannot be so easily severed. We may have problems with these ties — and I have indicated their "fundamentalist echoes" in my encounter with the aboriginal storyteller earlier in the essay — but we cannot dismiss them as irrelevant, as indeed I did in my first response to the subject. The surest way of playing into fundamentalist prejudice is to dismiss claims of ancestry instead of subjecting them to critical scrutiny.

Problematizing Memorial Museums

Having acknowledged these problems, I would also admit that the cult of victimhood has been uncritically celebrated in the context of memorial museums, where there has been a tendency to spectacularize suffering and to market it within the logic of global capitalism. Curatorial practices have also reified the remnants of destruction and genocide without sufficiently historicizing them. The hermetic confines of the museums themselves have enhanced the self-absorption of specific communal histories. In this regard it would be almost blasphemous to imagine that a Jewish museum could contain even a fleeting reference to the predicament of the Palestinian peoples. Memorial museums do not deal with the process of history as such, including peace processes, however flawed. Essentially they are embodiments of time warps, where it is assumed that "what happened" should "never happen again," even if there has been no confrontation with "what has happened" in the intervening years. The memorial museum memorializes itself.

The way out of this impasse could be to seek a dialogic space within the museum whereby the seemingly heuristic divisions of the civil and the political can be brought into crisis. To activate this dialogic space one may have no other option but to invite controversy rather than to pretend that it doesn't exist. Perhaps memorial museums are not meant for reconciliation alone, but for reconciliation ruptured with disturbing truths. The reality is, however, that the rhetoric of reconciliation more often than not camouflages truth, as in the declarations of peace that have accumulated since Hiroshima was destroyed, eliding any real confrontation with Japanese imperialism and colonial aggression during World War II. The nationalist historiography around that war has yet to be destabilized.

Within this impasse, the Peace Memorial Museum of Hiroshima can be regarded as a particularly strong propagandist agency of reconciliation — reconciliation cast in the symbol of "peace," not least because this propaganda is implicit and rendered through some undeniably heart-wrenching evidence. To submit my own spectatorship to critical scrutiny, I would call attention to one particular image in the museum dealing with the reconstruction of Hiroshima, which, inexplicably, had a more harrowing effect on me than the meticulous documentation of the bombing itself. It is well known

that every living being in the human, animal, and plant world in the immediate periphery of the atom bomb blast was reduced to nuclear dust. Miraculously, however, beyond the planned agenda of the reconstruction process itself, a sign of ecological renewal manifested itself a few years later. This renewal was represented through a photograph of a particular bamboo plant, if I remember correctly, that started to grow out of the devastated Hiroshima soil.

Today I continue to be profoundly moved by this image, but I am also troubled by what it compels me to forget: namely, the ruthless policy perpetrated by the Japanese government of leveling entire forests in poorer Asian countries in order to protect its own environment. The most excruciating lesson — I am tempted to say blessing — of ecology, embodied in the photograph of the bamboo plant, needs to be juxtaposed in my view with the ongoing ecocide legitimized by the Japanese government within the priorities of industrial capital and national environmental protectionism. Ecology cannot be used to justify ecocide.

However, there is another symbol of the Peace Memorial Museum that I would uphold precisely because it incorporates its own contradiction: the flame of peace that flickers outside the museum precincts is meant to burn "forever" — so long as there are nuclear weapons in this world. This is a troubling symbol, because fire is sacred and is meant to last infinitely, without any conditions imposed on its longevity. Symbolically the extinction of fire signifies the end of the world. Here I cannot "unmark" my Zoroastrian background, where fire has a specific religio-cultural significance that I do not question, for all my secular priorities. Perhaps, the atash (the Holy Fire) is the only sign in my life that approximates the condition of an absolute. And yet, in confronting the flame of peace in Hiroshima, I realize that almost nothing could be a greater source of celebration — indeed, the beginnings of a nuclear-free utopia — than if this flame could be extinguished forever. I am caught in an aporia between wanting to accept the reconciliation provided by the sacredness and eternity of fire and recognizing the truth of its extinction. This in-between space, I believe, is not just liminal but troubling. If memorial museums can create trouble, then they are worth supporting.

Rethinking Silence

One other reason for the significance of the flame of peace could be linked to the intercivilizational, interreligious, and intercultural resonances that are tapped, perhaps inadvertently, through the cultural memories of the museum's international spectators, of which I am one. Memorial museums need to work across the borders of the imagination in order to destabilize the nationalist holds of specific governments in territorializing the tragedies of the past. Perhaps we need to hyphenate museums — Jewish-Palestinian, Japanese- Korean, Indo-Pakistani — or, better still, we need to get rid of these national and communal categories and imagine an altogether different nomenclature for museums on a conceptual and symbolic basis.

It could be argued, however, that some cultures could resist the very idea of memorial museums as an aberration, a deviation from their own civilizational norms. In India, for instance, we do not have memorial museums commemorating the Partition, among other communal atrocities. A pragmatic explanation could be that while we have many museums in India, we don't have a museum culture — unlike Germany, for instance, where going to the museum is part of everyday cultural life, at least for a large section of the population. Within this culture the Jewish Museum in Berlin is merely a postmodern extension (and partial subversion) of a museological ethos and grammatology that have been nurtured over the years.

At a more political level, one could argue that memorial museums in the Indian subcontinent at this point in time could only intensify the xenophobic hold of nationalists in claiming cross-border tragedies on an exclusionary basis. At a more philosophical level, one could question whether "the past" can be meaningfully museumized in a country like India, where the past is alive in so many ways, hybridizing, mutating, and intersecting with conflicting "presents." [33] At a moral level, however, it is questionable whether "suffering" and "trauma" need to be memorialized at all.

Here it becomes necessary to question the cultural valences and resonances of silence, which more often than not are equated in monolithic terms with repression, cowardice, or fear. Indeed, if there is any element in the discourse of truth and reconciliation that is consistently rejected, it is silence. Silence is unacceptable in dealing with any tragedy or atrocity, even if the absence of justice is tolerated. You have to speak out. That is the underlying imperative of almost any exposure of violence, whether it concerns apartheid or the genocide in Rwanda or the Partition in India. While it is ethically and morally questionable to endorse silence when the truth of a particular crime has yet to be acknowledged, however, it could also be argued that the breaking of silence should not be made into a dictum. Silence can be a political or cultural choice. As "the other side of silence"[34] gets articulated with significant effect, we should not forget the worlds within silence for which it is much harder to find an adequate language in words. Perhaps we should acknowledge that silence can be, in certain cases, for particular individuals, the only means of "reconciling with reality."

Time and Reconciliation

Along with silence we need to open the dimension of time, which underlies whatever I have addressed in this essay, as I have traced the instabilities of evidence, memory, and storytelling through experiments in theater and public culture. It is commonly assumed that time heals, and that with the passing of time, the scars are supposed to fade away. Certainly we know that this is not the case when there is a time-frame on the processes of truth and reconciliation, as in South Africa, where there were specific schedules for hearings, consultations, meetings, and submissions of reports. This bureaucratic pressure of time seems almost ludicrous when one confronts the truism that centuries of oppression cannot be removed overnight. And yet, as the veteran of the Chilean truth commission José Zalaquett has affirmed, "The process [of Truth and Reconciliation] must stop! Just as a patient undergoing a critical operation should not stay in the theater too long, a truth commission should know when to call it a day."[35] Hopefully one assumes that the unacknowledged doctor in Zalaquett's metaphor will not prematurely stitch up the patient before attending fully to his or her problem, or worse still, after dismissing the patient as a "hopeless case." Whether or not the operation is "successful," the point is that while the process of reconciliation may begin with the deliberations of a truth commission, it certainly doesn't end there.

We should not presume to imagine that new societies can be born in the aftermath of even the most time-conscious and efficient of commissions. Thiskind of hubris would place an act of social engineering over and above the capacities of human beings to understand and live together through the violence that continues to divide them at civic and political levels. In her epilogue to *Country of My Skull*, Krog acknowledges that few people believe that the TRC process achieved reconciliation; indeed surveys indicate that "people are further apart than before."[36] This does not mean that the process of reconciliation is not going on, but to realize its outcome we need a larger envisioning of time. As Krog sees it, "Reconciliation is not a process. It is a cycle that will be repeated many times."[37] The unspoken assumption here is that if reconciliation is destined to repeat itself, so will the memories of violence that refuse to die.

Rejecting any attempt to read reconciliation as "a mysterious Judaeo-Christian process," Krog implicitly works against the ethos of forgiveness that animated Tutu's almost evangelical faith in the redemptive powers of the TRC. The point is not, as some dissenters have argued, that forgiveness is a specifically Christian virtue that is psychologically unacceptable or unintelligible in indigenous African contexts, even though, in Xhosa, "reconciliation" is rendered as "*uxolelwano*," which is much closer in meaning to "forgiveness."[38] Forgiveness, it could be argued, is an important element of many other faiths, and indeed it may be necessary to forgive in order to survive the trials of the past.[39] The problem does not concern the cross-cultural epistemological valences of "forgiveness" as such; the problem is whether forgiveness can be activated across individuals and communities for the restoration of a new society. Sadly, the realities on the ground in South Africa reveal that forgiveness, insofar as it has been activated, individually or collectively, has not produced the kind of reconciliation that was anticipated by the TRC.

Confronting this reality, Krog opts for more secular solutions to human coexistence, for which she draws on evidence that is more likely to be associated with a social scientist than with a poet. Pragmatically, and in a tone totally at odds with the questioning nature of her book, Krog falls back in the closing paragraphs of her epilogue on the most banal truism of conflict resolution. She reduces reconciliation to "one of the most basic skills applied in order to survive conflict"; its "essence" is "survival," its "key" the art of "negotiation" — less negotiation than an almost biological need to get on with life.[40]

This resilience is determined less by civility or good faith than by "our genetic make-up," as Krog puts it all too emphatically, in a vocabulary that is clearly not her own.

An equally unconvincing source of evidence comes from the postapartheid refashioning of identities, which Krog views as a "fundamental step" toward reconciliation.[41] It is hard to share this optimism, particularly as she views "blacks" redefining themselves within the "African renaissance." One is compelled to ask: Which sections of the blacks are in the process of "redefining" themselves in this mode? Can this so-called "renaissance" (replicating the "Asian renaissance" of East Asian global capitalism) not be seen as another form of neoimperialism in the new South Africa? Even as the beneficiaries of global capital among the black elite are ready to assert a new, cosmopolitan, neoliberal, "renaissance" identity for themselves, they are not prepared to share the economic benefits of this "renaissance" with their less privileged brothers and sisters. Nonetheless, they hold on to the racial category of "black" in its most literal and essentializing sense. This privileged position of "wanting to have it both ways" — race and capital — can certainly fuel the propagation of new identities, but are these likely to produce a culture of reconciliation, as Krog seems to imply? Or is not a new culture of emergent disparities and divisions in the making?

I have problematized just one "identity" here to point out that the politics of identity can catalyze, metabolize, and disrupt the hierarchies of any given society, but there is no guarantee that in this process new hierarchies are unlikely to emerge, or that reconciliation across older divides is likely to be stabilized. To seek reconciliation beyond the constraints of specific identity constructions, we need to do more than posit the multiple or hybrid identities that have become postmodern tropes. Perhaps we need to counter the very concept of "identity" with the enigmas of the "self," just as we have to complicate the exigencies of "time-frames" for the implementation of truth commissions with the "cycles of time" in which reconciliation is destined to play itself out.

For this we need another vocabulary and perspective, for which I would like to turn, unexpectedly perhaps, at the conclusion of this essay, to the philosophy offered by the one of greatest seers of time in the contemporary world, Jiddu Krishnamurti. Unlike the architects of truth commissions,

Krishnamurti questions the very assumption that there can be a positive outcome in negotiating a path from truth to reconciliation or from violence to nonviolence. In his barely veiled critique of Gandhi, for instance, he emphasizes that the evolution from violence to nonviolence implies that you need time to become nonviolent. In working toward this "ideal," which Krishnamurti equates with an "escaping process," all that emerges is a "division" in the mind, which can only perpetuate "conflict."[42] Indeed "the very resistance to conflict is itself a form of conflict."[43]

If this is not a language that one associates with activism of any kind, I should qualify that Krishnamurti is addressing not political time but what he describes as "psychological time," which is determined by the interval, the division, the gap, between "this" and "that," between "one action and another," between "one understanding and another," between "seeing something, thinking about it, and acting."[44] This very *movement* embodied in time, carrying the conceptual baggage of our thoughts, memories, desires, and motives, which are the very cause of our suffering, compels Krishnamurti to posit "a time of nonmovement" that is without momentum, direction, or continuity.[45] Calling attention to the state of "passive awareness" in which the dissolution of psychological time becomes possible, he advocates nothing less than "the ending of time."[46] This is not an apocalyptic narrative but a tentatively posited "new beginning" by which we can begin to reinvent and sustain our inner selves on a different "ground" of being.

If I choose to inscribe "the ending of time" at the end of my essay, it is not because I see it as some kind of solution. Indeed Krishnamurti would not want us to believe in solutions, because that would imply a progression in time, which is the very source of our pain. He would be skeptical of our attempts to articulate this "ending," as indeed he was frustrated by his own attempts to put vision into words: "We are using words to measure the immeasurable, and our words have become time."[47] I use Krishnamurti as a provocation because in a sense he works against the premises of this essay — he complicates the agenda. He makes us want to requestion its priorities. Most decisively, he infiltrates the conjunction "and" that separates (and links) "truth" and "reconciliation." He breaks the causality by collapsing these terms. And in that sense he fills us with profound unease. Should it be otherwise?

Rustom Bharucha. Between Truth and Reconciliation: Experiments in Theater and Public Culture In: Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya (ed.): Experiments with the Truth. Documenta11_Platform2. Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit. 2002, pp. 361-388.

References

1 By problematizing what lies between "truth" and "reconciliation," rather than "truth" itself as "the road to reconciliation," I take a somewhat different strategy from the philosopher Avishai Margalit, who also questions "the putative causal relation" between truth and reconciliation. For a pithy critique of this causality, read his essay "Is Truth the Road to Reconciliation?," presented at a seminar on Truth and Reconciliation, organized by the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development and Documenat11, The Hague, July 6, 2000 [see pp. 61-64 in this volume].

2 This discourse has grown in several languages and spans several continents where truth commissions have functioned in societies confronting the vicissitudes of "transitional justice." Between 1974 and 1994 there were at least nineteen such commissions, in Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, Uganda, Chad, and Ethiopia. In recent years, however, it is the commission in South

Africa that has dominated the truth and reconciliation discourse through the sheer depth and range with which it has been discussed, not least in the global media. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) officially started its work on February 1, 1996, following its formal sanction in the South African parliament in July 1995, through the Act on the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation. In December 1996, President Nelson Mandela appointed seventeen commissioners of the TRC, who, along with eleven co-opted members, formed three committees: the Human Rights Violations Committee, the Amnesty Committee, and the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee. The proceedings of the TRC ended on July 31, 1998, and its final report was handed to President Mandela on October 29 of the same year. Its repercussions in postapartheid South Africa have spawned a growing discourse on truth and reconciliation, in both the civil and the political sectors of society.

3 This is somewhat different from the political realm, where lying can be regarded as the unconscious prerogative of politicians, their second nature. Certainly Hannah Arendt has no illusions in this regard: she designates lies as "necessary and justifiable tools not only of the politician's or the demagogue's but also of the statesman's trade." While the professional truth-teller is out of place in the world of politics, the liar is "already in the midst of it." An "actor by nature," he refuses "to say what is" (the truth-teller's responsibility); rather, he "says what is not so because he wants things to be different from what they are." In short, he is a "man of action," which the truth-teller is not. Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993). The question is: how do we view the actor in theater, who is neither a professional truth-teller nor a habitual liar? It would seem that the actor's position is more liminal, as he or she is committed to conveying the truth of "what is" while recognizing the illusion of "what is not."

4 Isak Dinesen [Tania Blixen], quoted in Arendt, Between Past and Future, p. 262.

5 Ibid.

6 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, quoted by Mark Sanders, "Truth, Telling, Questioning: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Antjie Krog's Country of My Skull, and Literature after Apartheid," Transformation 42 (2000): 74. these

7 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Truth and Reconciliation Commission ofSouth Africa Report, 5 vols. (Cape Town: Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998), 1:112.

8 Ibid.

9 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Illuminations: Essays and Reflections (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 62.

10 The history of these terms goes back to the rhetorical foundations of Hindutva, whose ideologue V. D. Savarkar defined "The Hindu" in 1923 as "a person who regards the land of Bharatvarsha from Indus to the Seas as his Fatherland [pitribhumi], as well as his Holy Land fpunyabhumi] — that is the cradle land of his religion." Quoted in Tapan Basu, Pradip Datta, Sumita Sarkar, et al., Khaki Shorts, Saffron Flags (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993), p. 8. Since this particular authentication of ancestry is unavailable for other religious communities, notably Muslims, this logic inevitably brands them as foreigners, if not as mlecchas (barbarians).

11 Rustom Bharucha, The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theatre in an Age of Globalization (London: The Athlone Press, Hanover: The University of New England Press/Wesleyan, and New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 121-22, and Bharucha, "Negotiating the ‚River': Intercultural Interactions and Interventions," The Drama Review 41, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 34-35.

12 The paradigmatic example of reconciliation across communities is the much cited aftermath of the Great Calcutta Killing of August 16, 1946, in which 4,000 people were killed. In a historic intervention, Gandhi became a one-man truth commission to whom perpetrators and victims on both sides of the communal divide presented their testimonials, and peace gradually prevailed with the acceptance of collective responsibility and the advice of the Mahatma to "turn the searchlight inwards." While this event is a landmark in the history of conflict resolution, it begs the question of whether the reconciliation across communities could have been initiated and sustained without Gandhi's messianic and personalized intervention. To whom were "Muslims" and "Hindus" reconciling — to each other? To Gandhi? Or to each other via Gandhi? For a sound analysis of this event in a larger cross-cultural perspective on truth commissions, see Rajeev Bhargava, "Between Revenge and Reconciliation: The Significance of Truth Commissions," unpublished ms., 2000.

13 Claudia Braude, "The Archbishop, the Private Detective and the Angel of History: The Production of South African Public Memory and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," Current Writing 8, no. 2 (1996): 61.

14 This fragment from the dense analysis of Nomonde Calata's cry is made by one of Antjie Krog's numerous interlocutors in Country of My Skull (Johannesburg: Random House, 1998), pp. 55-66. The interlocutor is identified as "Professor Kondlo, the Xhosa intellectual from Grahamstown," who makes his comments while listening to extracts from Nomonde's testimonial on tape. Krog is both a listener and the recorder of the entire event, including both the voices of Nomonde (on tape) and Kondlo (live).

15 Sanders, "Truth, Telling, Questioning," p. 75.

16 Margalit, "Is Truth the Road to Reconciliation?" p. 64 in this volume.

17 Piet Meiring, "Truth before Justice and Reconciliation: The South African Experience," address at the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation, New Delhi, December 2, 2000, pp. 5-6.

18 Upendra Baxi, "Saint Granville's Gosepl: Reflections," Economic and Political Weekly, March 17, 2001, p. 928.

19 Ibid.

20 Veena Das, "The Spatialization of Violence: Case Study of a ‚Communal Riot," in ICaushik Basu and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., Unravelling the Nation: Sectarian Conflict and India's Secular Identity (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 201.

21 Ibid.

22 The case of Bhanwari Devi is symptomatic here. A sathin or social worker based in the most feudal constituencies of Rajasthan, she was the target of a gang rape by a group of upper-caste men who reacted violently to her activist interventions in the propagation of child marriage. While her exemplary courage in testifying to the violence inflicted on her is widely recognized, the rapists

were acquitted of all charges in November 1995 by the district sessions judge in Rajasthan, who claimed, "Since the offenders were ‚upper' caste men and included a Brahmin, the rape could not have taken place because she [Bhanwari Devi] was from a ‚lower' caste." Quoted in Teesta Setalvad, "Thrice Oppressed," Communalism Combat, May 2001, p. 13. This is the kind of judgment that legitimizes dalit women's slogans like "We are untouchable by day and touchable by night." Ibid, p. 9. More recently Bhanwari Devi has been subjected to yet another form of violence through a sensationalized version of her life story in a commercial film, rlising many of the same issues precipitated by Shekhar Kapur's representation of the life of Phoolan Devi in Bandit Queen. While I do not deal with these specific controversies in this essay, I have them in mind as I question the politics of representation in the next section.

23 Ariel Dorfman, quoted in Krog, Country of My Skull, p. 361.

24 Ibid.

25 The intimacy of the conversation is framed, and distanced, by Krog's prefatory note that she is drawing on at least four texts: Het Loon van de Schuld, by Ian Buruma; Guilt and Shame, ed. Herbert Morris; Imagination, Fiction, Myth, by Johan Dagenaar; and After the Catastrophe, by Carl Jung (Krog, Country of My Skull, p. 359). These citations contribute to the metacritical dimensions of Krog's conversation, which can also be read as an unacknowledged love story. For a Derridean reading of how Krog invents the figure of the beloved to complicate her mode of storytelling, see Sanders, "Truth, Telling, Questioning," pp. 80-83.

26 Krog, Country of My Skull, p. 360.

27 Ibid., p. 361.

28 Ian Buruma, "The Joys and Perils of Victimhood," The New York Review of Books, April 8, 1999, p.4.

29 It comes as no surprise that Buruma should endorse Kwame Anthony Appiah's urbane yet condescending dismissal of the search for new identities by middle-class "hyphenated Americans" who seem to "fear that unless the rest of us acknowledge the importance of their difference, there soon won't be anything worth acknowledging" (my italics). Appiah, "The Multicultural Misunderstanding," The New York Review of Books, October 9, 1997. It would be interesting to question how Appiah positions himself in relation to "the rest of us" — as a nonhyphenated American, or as a hyphenated American-Ghanaian, upper class and cosmopolitan, who doesn't need "the rich, old kitchen comforts of ethnicity"? There are far too many putdowns in this disparagement of the less cosmopolitan seekers of multicultural identity, and it needs to be countered or at least counterpointed by the more sympathetic reading of "new ethnicities" offered by Stuart Hall in "New Ethnicities," in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., The Post-Colonial Studies Reader (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

30 Buruma "The Joys and Perils of Victimhood," p. 7.

31 Ibid., p. 8.

32 Ibid.

33 See Bharucha, "Beyond the Box: Problematizing the ‚New Asian Museum,— Third Text, no. 52 (Autumn 2000): 15-18.

34 See Urvashi Butalia, The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998).

35 José Zalaquett, quoted in Meiring, "Truth before Justice and Reconciliation," p. 9.

36 Krog, Country of My Skull, p. 448.

37 Ibid., p. 449.

38 Ibid., p. 243.

39 See the concluding section of Bhargava, "Between Revenge and Reconciliation," for a broader pespective on "forgiveness" that counters Mahmoud Mamdani's more provocative position that forgiveness is an "invitation to reconcile with rather than conquer evil." See Mamdani, "Reconciliation without Justice," South African Review of Books CIV (1996).

40 Krog, Country of My Skull, p. 448.

41 Ibid.

42 Jiddu Krishnamurti, "On Time," Mind without Measure (Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1983), p. 87.

43 Krishnamurti, "Time and Transformation," The First and Last Freedom (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1986), p. 134.

44 Krishnamurti, quoted in Pupul Jayakar, "Is There a Time of Non-Movement?" Fire in the Mind: Dialogues with J. Krishnamurti (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 250.

45 Ibid., pp. 250-51.

46 The Ending of Time is a series of thirteen dialogues that Krishnamurti conducted with the quantum physicist David Bohm. The keyword here is "dialogue," the kind of which there is very little evidence in political and social forums, even as "dialogue" is prioritized by nongovernmental organizations, truth commissions, and activist groups. Countering the seemingly apocalyptic resonance of its title, The Ending of Time reflects a tentative yet rigorous process of questioning that moves from abstract subjects like "Ground of Being, Mind of Man," "Mutation of the Brain Cells?" and "Ending of ‚Psychological' Knowledge" into a very fundamental question: "Can Personal Problems Be Solved and Fragmentation End?" There is a humbling process of "truth and reconciliation" here that is explored through active thinking — and listening. See Krishnamurti and David Bohm, The Ending of Time (Chennai: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1996).

47 Krishnamurti, quoted in Jayakar, "Is There a Time of Non-Movement?" p. 254.