

Hearing Voice: A Theoretical Framework for Truth Commission Testimony

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Abstract The article proposes a new way of thinking through truth commissions by discerning the manner in which they usher in new political configurations through voices and vocalizations. It contributes to our understanding of truth commissions by way of proposing a pragmatic ontology of bonds between the body, voice, and testimony by elucidating the central features that make them *vocal assemblages*, composed of five sub-institutional capacities: (1) they affect and are affected by bodies in a complex topological relation; (2) they are driven by an apology, which itself proffers a non-human body of transformation; (3) they potentiate reconciliation through spontaneous vocalizations; (4) they are ontogenetic openings that reassemble national pasts, presents, and futures; and (5) they are temporally experiential predecessors to political action. While victim testimony is taken as a historical crowning of the edifice for nations seeking to mend their past injustices, I contend that public reparation flourishes only if the state is open to the alternative orientations the voice proffers—that is, following recent observations of transitional justice, truth commissions have the potential to seek out alternative context-specific forms of justice in place of a universal law of reconciliation. By way of a brief discussion of Aboriginal artist K.C. Adams' diptych series, *Perception*, the article proposes that voices pose a nuanced figuration of auto-affectation as a communicative possibility towards the (re)presentation and (re)invention of the (survivor) self.

Keywords Affect · Transitional justice · Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada · Voice

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The Violence of Vocal Abstraction

Intended to disinter the stories of physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse suffered by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis who had attended Indian Residential Schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has inscribed the voices of survivors and their families onto the public record in order to contribute towards the reconciliation of Canada's colonialist legacy. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's goals have been to (1) recognize the historical abuse; (2) assure survivors a safe space wherein which their stories could be recorded; (3) facilitate national and community events across Canada; (4) educate the public in regards to the Indian Residential School legacy; (5) preserve an archive of the Indian Residential School and the Commission for public use at the University of Manitoba; (6) submit a report to the Canadian government on the full range of consequences for the Indian Residential Schools; and (7) commemorate survivors in culturally appropriate ways. While the events have opened the nation to discourses of 'healing' and 'forgiveness', there have been some ruptures in regards to the distributive compensation survivors received from the federal government. That is, as survivors went on record with statement-takers (statement-taking is considered the first of six core activities of truth commissions, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' *Rule-of-Law Tools for Post-Conflict States*), trauma would be extracted and equivocated into a dollar amount according to an Independent Assessment Process. According to Robert Niezen (2013), the estimated average compensation stood in 2013 at approximately \$94,134, calculated according to a triangulation of trauma impact factors: *Acts Proven*, *Consequential Harm*, and *Consequential Loss of Opportunity*, each with its own criteria for measurement and, combined, ranging in an eventual compensation package from approximately \$5000–\$275,000. Niezen summarizes:

The lowest total of compensation points starts at 1-10, valued at \$5,000 to \$10,000, and from there it goes up by ten point increments to 110-120, worth \$211,000 to \$245,000, followed by a somewhat more open category, 121 or more, valued at up to \$275,000. To this can be added 5 to 15 per cent (rounded up to the nearest whole number) for 'aggravating factors,' such as verbal abuse, racist acts, threats, intimidation, degradation, failure to provide care, sexual abuse, accompanied by violence, abuse of a young or particularly vulnerable child, 'use of religious doctrine, paraphernalia, during, or in order to facilitate the abuse,' and abuse 'by an adult who had built a particular relationship of trust and caring with the victim,' a category captured by one word at the end of the definition: 'betrayal.' (2013, p. 47)

Consequential Harm was measured in terms of how little the survivor could sleep, how much anxiety they experienced, the addictions they acquired, and so on, while *Loss of Opportunity* was scrutinized against the survivor's employment record. The situation leads to a problem whereby a survivor's reliving of the past simply intensifies the trauma that brought them to testify in the first place. No wonder, given how effectively the violence of colonialism was inscribed upon the principles

of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, that Turner (2013) destines states of transitional justice generally towards deconstructive analysis. That is, ensconced in a series of binary oppositions between past/future, survivor/accused, law/lawlessness, forgiveness/contrition, public/private, and many others, transitional justice is a starkly polarizing term that searches for alternative non-punitive models of resolution in post-conflict and post-authoritarian societies. Turner laments that the global rise of transitional justice has not been sufficiently analyzed in such a way that would further elucidate the complexity of this otherwise globally renowned model of reconciliation. The emergence of transitional justice in general, and truth commissions in particular, summons the necessity to broaden the theorization of justice and jurisprudence in terms neither retributive nor distributive, but, rather, according to their spatial qualifications and affective rearrangements. Transitional justice awaits deconstructivist analysis, but more importantly it awaits its own transfiguration through vocal affects, through the recognition of vocal affects in the public, and ones whose points of general equivalence are not necessarily destined towards their equivocation into monetary distribution.

My purpose here is to circumvent discursive and epistemological categorization of traumatic colonial encounters by centralizing the voice as an agent of affective transformation. Thus, while answering Turner's plea for more critical tropes of analysis, I propose an affective analysis of the truth commissions in general, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in particular, from the spatial rearrangements proffered by the voice and by vocalizations. Likewise, I propose a novel theoretical framework for examining truth commission testimony as vocal assemblages, responsible less for discursive production than for affective orientations. And while the idea that truth commissions do important work in social, political, and affective dimensions is not new, my perspective brings to this topic a deeper engagement with social theory and philosophical schools of thought, to bring transitional justice in general and truth commissions in particular within purview of their affective materiality.

While I ground my argument, generally, in the 'affective turn' (Clough and Halley 2007), I favour current claims that affect is best accessed through its historically specific manifestations (Ahmed 2004, 2006; Agnew 2007; Clough and Halley 2007; Leys 2011; Bollmer 2014; Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2014; Young 2014), which goes against the opposing rarefaction that affect is biological, neurological, and, as composed of 'subindividual... capacities' (Clough 2004, p. 3), is best consigned to pre-social fields of human subjectivity (Connolly 2002; Massumi 2002; Damasio 2004; Hansen 2004; Thrift 2008; McCormack 2007). This is not to discredit such neuro-social theoretical advancements, but rather to politicize affect, and to suggest that under truth commissions, affect is sub-institutionally sub-individual. Truth commissions, in other words, are less discursive/epistemological than they are affective/ontological. Their resultant transformation demands not only the regeneration of national memory and its inclusion of citizenship through collective action, but furthermore reforms the way in which all members of a nation approach reconciliation in widely divergent ways.

First, a word on affect in support of the claim for its pre-symbolized yet political attributes: specific to Deleuze (1978) and his conceptualization of affect, affect is divided into two non-representational modes of thought: *affectio* (affection) and *affectus* (affect). The first, *affectus*, is a mode of thinking, but unlike an *idea*, *affectus* is non-representational. *Affectus* subsumes ideas as the stream of variation which ideas use as a resource for thinking through representations. But *affectus* is neither pre- nor a-political. Instead, political power is garnered through the administration of affective capacity of the central organizing body of government, where certain affects are encouraged (*affirmative-* or *joyful-affects*) while others discouraged (*negative-* or *sadness-affects*). *Affectio*, meanwhile, is a matter entirely opposed. *Affectio* (affection) is the state of the body as it is subject to the action of another body, as it *becomes that which it no longer is*. Simply, if *affectus* marks the potential for action in its negativistic or affirmative value, *affectio* is the degree to which one body is altered by the action of another. Every body is by law of the *affectus* always already modified through external forces, which tells us more about the affected body than the one facilitating the affection. Therefore: *affectio deterritorializes affectus*. Affects pose the following ethical question: *what is the common notion to the affected and the affecting body?* For Deleuze, this is a question that can only be answered by way of joyful affect, it is what constitutes his affirmative ethics, since negative affects limit attention to solitary passions and affirmative affects bring the perceiving subject into a new orientation towards the multiplicity of desires. There is a necessity of calling for the outside through orientations, and we are always at once oriented towards a space while oriented towards its transgression, despite the fictionalized aspect of the transgression.

My use of affect is aligned with those arguments most recently forwarded by Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2014). Generally speaking, Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos spatializes justice as an all-at-once demand for transformation in spatial relations while inducing a cry for a space beyond jurisdiction. Space demands its own 'immanent transcendence' (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2014, p. 1), which, as an offspring of dwelling, the imagination provides through the very necessity of fictionalizing the outside as a possible alternative to dwelling. But there are never, objectively speaking, outsides, only their possibility through variegated ruptures in the spatial continuum. The question of the assemblage is always the question of the *possibility* of an outside, since the world always posits the possibility of escape. But the escape does not necessarily need to be thought through as a fundamental lack so much as an affirmation of that world. By principle of extension, then, and to facilitate a maximization of perceptibility, I read these interruptions as possibilities procured through the voice. The voice, in its material affectivity, should be taken as a cry to the porousness or a calling toward the porousness of the event.

My call for affect theory and political responsibility frames affect as a historical contingency. As such, truth commissions are at once responsible for the dissemination and distribution of affects, though distributed affects are always interrupted by affects of resistance; to understand the affects of resistance, we must orient ourselves to the voice less as a final destination or a mode of inscription, and more as a zone of discoverability.

The Injunctions of Social Transformation

While truth commissions have been taken as points of capture for the radical reconfiguration of subjectivity, I argue that subjectivity is less the appropriate destination to understand the transformative truth as an event than is the affective dimension which opens testimony. Certainly, truth commissions require the fundamental redistribution of law and justice, as reparation and transformation have come to stand as the commonsense replacement terms for discipline and punishment in order to describe nations in transition from trauma to reconciliation. By encouraging citizens to assemble collectively, to testify, witness, and narrate their experiences into socially sanctioned means of advancing towards forgiveness, truth commissions are anything if culturally topological zones of transformation (Shields 2013), zones wherein cause-and-effect models are deeply problematized.

According to the *Rule-of-Law Tools for Post-Conflict States*, truth commissions maintain a quasi-legal status as 'officially sanctioned, temporary, non-judicial investigating' units whose activities are inscribed on a 'final public report' (2006, p. 1). While they are not necessarily legal institutions, truth commissions gather information that may be used as a step towards a future trial and judicial liability (unless the commission has agreed to protect identities of the accused, as did the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada). Instead of guidelines, the *Rule-of-Law Tools* establishes a set of best practices, which allows the opportunity to bring the voices of the victim and their stories into view of the public, and to recommend policy reforms to prevent the repetition of historical atrocity. It stipulates, however, that truth commissions should *not* be seen as determinants of transformation, forgiveness, or reconciliation, and that seeing them as such does damage to the process. Thus, every nation must to go into its own truth commission independently, every nation knows its own time for a truth commission, but it always depends on the historical and national context, usually based on three criteria:

1. There must be a political will and a transparency to the process that will not block the inquiry into the nation's history;
2. The atrocity in question must fully be put to rest, lest anyone coming forward feel threatened;
3. Victims and the witnesses must be complicit with the proceedings, and must be served *by* the proceedings (formal alternatives may also be sought).

Despite their apparent universal appeal, truth commissions are widely divergent in their procedures. And having gained an international distinction for transfiguring historic human rights violations into the non-punitive component of social justice between a nation and its citizens, they have come a long way from their beginnings. The first truth commission was established in 1974 (Commission of Inquiry into the Disappearance of People in Uganda) and was widely reputed for its corruption, but the current model of public reconciliation is more or less based upon the South

African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995–2002), which formed to mend the fissure between past violence under Apartheid and contemporary regeneration of the nation. Their procedure was one of discovery, and the involvement of the public was something born of the necessity of imagination. But there remains no official procedure for truth commissions: for instance, while it was crucial for South Africa to reveal the identity of the perpetrators to the public, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2008–2015) ensured the perpetrators would not be named, even in the transcribed testimony from victims (Niezen 2013). In the case of Australia, years of ambiguous non-apologies were aligned with a series of citizen-led coalitions (such as ‘sorry books’ and a national day of apology), followed finally by what many dubbed a ‘sincere apology’ from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008. Indeed, every nation proceeds according to its specific historical context of human rights violations. However, one of the most consistent and dramatic technologies of truth commissions is located within its consistent claims for national reconstruction, a popular form of national reinvention proliferating throughout their manifestations. The Constitution of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission clearly states:

This Constitution provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful coexistence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of color, race, class, belief or sex. The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society.

The reconfiguration of temporal relations is critical to the success of truth commissions and creates a cyclical rhythm of them: when the past is framed in terms of conflict the future is a ‘standing reserve’ of harmonious social relations, which is itself a fantasy of the future that is the requisite for the discovery of past atrocity—its call to the outside. The future is a dimension of the possible that creates its own image. The future contains the set of tools that reframe the past in the present.

According to Oliver (2010, p. 83), reconstruction encourages heretofore displaced subjectivities to voice their historic positions in struggles for recognition, rendering the truth commission as a sententious meeting ground for intersubjective differentiations, ‘reconstructing the addressability that makes witnessing subjectivity possible’. Givoni (2013) notes that such a notion of reconstruction inevitably comes from the theories of subjectivity proposed by Giorgi Agamben and Jean-Francois Lyotard (namely *homo sacer* and the *differend*), who themselves argued that the verifiable details of history were less important in testimony of historical trauma than were the recognitions of those who occupy unutterable positions or ‘states of exception’ (Agamben 2005). In other words, Givoni (2013, p. 134) claims, reconstruction does not simply allow a new story to be inserted into the narrative of a nation, but rather opens a newly spoken subjectivity in the discursive field of policy, polity and possibility, ‘in humanitarian acts of testimony that took the more familiar form of speaking truth to power’. It is such a subject position that Clough

(2009) terms *enactive witnessing*, the narration of memory that subsumes the very possibility of reconstruction; affect, Clough argues, is always locating the *potential for ongoing reconstruction of the self in its attempt to re-narrativize trauma*:

The movement from witnessing and affect to narrative and the analysis of transference, therefore, can only be tentative, by no means linear or irreversible, as it is marked by the disjuncture between affect and narration. At any time, bodily irritation or affective capacity can flood the narration. The analysis of transference is stalled, at least temporarily, emptied of potential for ongoing interpretation and narration. Yet a flood of affect can also start up analysis again, enliven again. To be with each other again. (Clough 2009, p. 156)

But subjectivity is far too state-imposed a destination for some scholars, who turn instead to the discursive productions of truth commissions themselves, such as testimony, to examine the ways in which language proffers alternative ethical models for radical recognition and reconstruction. Although Humphrey (2000) had warned that such a public testimony (as it was publicly disseminated) is only efficient for those 'culturally attuned' to register testimony, it appears that testimony, as it has been recently theorized through historical case studies, is fostering radical alternatives to reconstruction that deny the nihilistic route of state-imposed injunctions. Regarding political recognition for the purposes of reconstruction, Coulthard (2007, p. 456) recommends approaching testimony, especially in the context of political recognition, as a radical alternative for cultural traditions to be freed of psycho-social colonial domination. For instance, Driver (2005) pays particular attention to the Xhosa and Zulu term, *ubuntu*. The term *ubuntu* is a lexical addition to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission that describes a primordial process of recognizing the value of being human simply through the intersubjective recognition of one another as existing through that recognition, and is something testifiers claimed White South Africans did not possess as a consequence of their colonial legacy. Reconstruction in South Africa, itself driven by a majority of testimony by women (Driver 2005, p. 220), is thus recognized as this *radical alternative* to self-recognition and, thus, is reconstruction not in state-imposed terms.

If subjectivity is too final a destination, then, so too, for many, is transformation. Why transformation must be coupled so closely with reconciliation is a puzzle to some scholars, who wonder where the clear beginning and end points of transformation may be located. Although transformation, generally speaking, is key to the worldview of Western civilization and modernity, in truth commissions it does not signify the movement from 'one state' to 'another' (as in pre- to post-trauma). Verdoolaege (2005, p. 186) stresses the openness of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was compelled to straddle a 'deeply divided past of suffering and injustice and a future founded upon human rights, democracy and equality', which offered all survivors who testified a feeling of 'belonging to both the transitional processes and the new nation, which was beneficial for the entire project of nation building' (Verdoolaege 2009, p. 304). Claire Moon's extensive archival discussion of the South African Truth and

Reconciliation Commission as a performative space offered the opportunity to see 'reconciliation as the prefigured closure of transition' which co-constructs the past to uncover repressed truths, while using those truths to fund an 'imaginary condition of co-existence' in an immutable future (Moon 2008, p. 271). In either case, transformation becomes central to the idea of a truth commission, the narratives filling these commissions reinforcing the image of a benevolent state rectifying its past wrongs: transformation from above, certainly, though demanded from below.

Affects of Control: Vocal Distribution

As much as the voice is a political technology that beholds the confession, it remains radically indeterminate and is, according to the model of assemblage, a zone of discoverability that no truth commission is necessarily prepared to contain or to discipline. That Desmond Tutu, in the context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, designated the 'wail' as the 'defining sound of the TRC' is no small measure of evidence for the *affective labour* required of and in truth commissions (Cole 2010, p. 79). A wail, scream, or sob signifies a pre-rational encounter between a subject and its unrecognizable form, a form which terrifies and induces vocalizations. Interviews that break the silence of Canada's past hinge on their emotional situatedness, such as the interview here:

Nearly always, when I taped interviews with former students, they would begin to cry as they recalled their experiences at the school. One man showed me physical scars that he still bore. I began to feel that I was carrying their pain, as well as my own, around with me... For me too the ruined school began to take on its own individual personality. Even in its derelict state it seemed menacing. I spent a lot of time up on the hill, walking around the school grounds, looking at the decayed building. It was if I wanted it to talk to me. (Quoted in Hamilton 2011, p. 104)

The voice is thus simultaneously an opening, doubly bound by (1) the utterances that trace the outlines of subjectivation, but (2) a political tool for the reconfiguration of grassroots transformations of state-imposed temporal dimensions. Consistently, the voice is taken as an intertwining dimension of invisibility in the aesthetic, political and ethical registers of contemporary subjectivity. Yet there is another dimension of the voice suggested by affect theory, that is, the voice as a zone of potential and incorporeal transformation, the haptic and *sui generis* affect of the voice, not just in the sense of the hearing/speaking subject but in the sense of a body which resonates its own voice as well as the voice of its others. This also points to the importance of orientation, of the way the body is directed towards the voice of others as well as the voice of the self in everyday life and in political injunctions. Certainly, we attend to the auditory spectrum in terms of our orientation towards it, our choices to attend to it, in opposition to the gaze which comes at the body from the outside; the voice is both inner and outer, neither the ear nor the mouth nor any one organ, but *a capacity for orientating oneself towards the*

invisible. Such a horizon is constitutive of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as well, as described by Niezen in his account of one of these spontaneous moments in which silence played a key role:

The witness, a small Inuit man with a long grey beard and ponytail, was overwhelmed with grief as he sat before the microphone. He was comforted by a woman, his 'support person,' who put her hand on his back and shoulder as he spoke. Try as he might, he could not talk past the sobs and constriction of his throat that took away control of his voice whenever he approached the topic of his abuse as a child in school. He eventually stopped his testimony, pulled his chair back from the table and wept deeply, his body heaving, while he received a long, comforting embrace from his support person. When he had regained enough composure he got up to return to his seat. The audience was itself sympathetically grief-stricken and silent. Commissioner Wilson moved her hands as though to clap, as had been done after every presentation by every witness in every other meeting to that point, but then stopped her hands in mid-motion. After a brief look of confusion, she pulled back her chair and stood in a silent gesture of acknowledgment of the witness. This gesture soon established a pattern. After the next witness spoke, again no one applauded, but about half the audience stood. At the conclusion of the third witness's testimony, everyone in the room was silently standing to honour them in a way that was now established as customary and that continued throughout the meeting. (Niezen 2013, pp. 66–7)

Thus, the voice is at once the final destination for the truth sought in a truth commission, yet it is its site of discoverability. Truth commissions are taken generally as an opportunity for a voice silenced by an oppressive and violent history to vocalize truth. This goes for cases of disappeared or murdered victims, the tortured, and also for the displaced, such as the instance of indigenous peoples assimilated through colonial regimes, who suffer under what Spivak (1996, p. 28) terms as 'the ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern'. And so the question is: *can those whose bodies have been oppressed speak without being mediated by the oppressive regime?* In regards to truth commissions, it appears to be very difficult, since such commissions are formulated by the nation-state that is often thought of as responsible for the oppression that is at issue. Indeed, the very silencing of the voice (whether literal or through ventriloquism) can be read as part of assimilation. In Canada, for instance, First Peoples scholars are quick to point out the contradictions of the assimilation paradigm forwarded by the Canadian government as part of a strategy befitting, as Dale Antony Turner calls it, 'white paper liberalism', which 'privileges the individual as *the* fundamental moral unit of a theory of justice' measuring 'notions of freedom and equality' between those individuals (Turner 2006, p. 13). As vocal assemblages, truth commissions are in a position to *produce* instead of *oppress* the subaltern whose previously silenced voices speak in order to subsist discourse in an incitement to confess and bear witness to testimony. Gaertner (2012, p. 63) argues in his dissertation that '[t]he repression of Aboriginal voice is

not simply an unconscious side-effect of ideology, but rather an implicit part of the machinery of “civilization”. In other words, in keeping with the technologies of civilization, civilization requires the voice of its savage in order to maintain the mirror of its own regime: and so civilization might appear to have been monstrous in the past, but in being willing to accept and move beyond monstrosity, becomes the apologetic figure of the benevolent master. Such a process does not only give narrative to the nation itself in its efforts towards reconstruction and transformation, but by including testimony from the oppressed, incorporates them into the body politic. Part of the governmentality of truth commissions, especially since South Africa, has been to *give voice* to the *ordinary citizen* (Verdoolaege 2009, pp. 303–304). So long as the state and the citizens entered into a co-constructive narrative, we are, at one level then, enticed into thinking of truth commissions as a site of witnessing as an *affective mode of social control*. A voice, in other words, belongs at once inside the individual and to the social group that receives the transmission of that voice, more or less; so such a position requires that we hear voices, to be a voice-hearing community (Blackman 2010). Voice should be, politically speaking, a site of discoverability.

But what might be discoverable is that the voice wishes to speak without being heard. The voice is doubly bound insofar as its words may be traced to subjectivity, but the fact that some actors are explicit in their demands for what happens to their voices suggests that the voice does not belong to any one actor in a truth commission. We might conceive of a voice, as Jacques Derrida did through his concept of *auto-affectation*, as both inside and outside the experience of the body, which is eventually positioned through discourse, and must be taken as something *discoverable* with *unintended outcomes*. What this suggests is that an audience is obliged to listen, especially out of respect to the testifier who does not *want* a witness. The voice as discovery of a truth implies less a subject position than an orientation towards desire for affective distribution; the following traces this process of assimilation into reconciliation and transformation in that voices must be heard, that is: ‘A shared memory is said in TRC logic to be based on the sharing of words, or what may be called the incorporation into oneself of the other’s words’ (Driver 2005, p. 225).

Voices are thus channeled in appropriate directions in order for affects to be registered for the public record. Inasmuch as the voice, then, demarcates something ultimately *discoverable*, this discoverability is indeterminate, resulting from the choices people make on all sides regarding which voices speak, which voices are listened to, and which voices go on public record. We must take into account the educative tendencies of voice and voices, especially regarding the manner in which a multiplicity of repressed voices can, through such an institution as a truth commission, become historicized (in some ways that are dangerous, in other ways potent) as a singular voice. There is something ethical in the voice, if we think of the voice as a zone of potential. Truth commissions, Naomi Angel writes, ‘may be read as an exercise of state power, one that integrates marginalized voices, but not on their terms’ (Angel 2009, p. 9).

Affects of Resistance: Vocal Assemblage

Aboriginal artist K.C. Adams, whose work frequently addresses the racist stereotypes that stigmatize Canadian First Peoples, Métis, and Inuit, has recently completed a public art exhibit of a series of diptychs entitled *Perception* (2015). They capture the affective transformation of voice and vocalizations, inspired by a Facebook post written by the wife of the 2014 mayoral candidate for Winnipeg, Manitoba:

Lorrie Steeves is... really tired of getting harrassed [sic] by the drunken native guys in the skywalks. We need to get these people educated so they can go make their own damn money instead of hanging out and harrassing [sic] the honest people who are grinding away working hard for their money. We all donate enough money to the government to keep thier [sic] sorry assess [sic] on welfare, so shut the f**k up and don't ask me for another handout!

Each diptych from *Perception* (2015) is divided into two facial reactions: one on the left grimacing with the name of a racial slur inscribed on the top of the photograph, and one on the right a face full of fondness, the inscribed words here a series of self-descriptions (on the bottom of the image with the racial slur is the injunction *Look again ...*). While photographing her subjects for the left image, K.C. Adams threw the worst of racial slurs at her subjects, intent on capturing the face as it bore the brunt of her vocalizations. The right image, meanwhile, depicts the same model bearing an opposing expression of joyous-affects, as K.C. Adams asked them to describe themselves. In the case of a diptych bearing the words 'wagon burner' on the left (see Fig. 1), for instance, on the right it reads 'A mother, sister, aunt, artist, publisher, consultant, social activist, pays taxes, and her roller derby name is May Q. Sorry.' *Perception* invites a spatial configuration between indeterminate vocalizations, their emotional resonance, and the possibility for affective transformation. To revisit Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, and to align once again affect, assemblage and the quasi-legality of truth commissions, K.C. Adams' diptychs reproduce components elucidated under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, conserve their organization, and aestheticize their relations into new configurations that emphasize the transformative potentials of the voice and of vocalizations. *Perception* offers an urban imagination to truth commissions, one which combines all at once the voice with the voice's silence.

As opposed to the vocal equivocation of trauma into monetary distribution, K.C. Adams' series centralizes an empowering moment of vocal affective transformation. The diptychs are less visual and inscriptive than auditory and transitory, commanding one to listen as much as, if not more than, to see. That is, as a form of vocal assemblage they bind the facial transformations of the survivor, the accused, the missing, and the public all in the same breath. And if the voice is at all consistent in its self-presence, it is so within the multiple inscriptions of subjectivity on the face. This, for Derrida, is of central importance in the voice: the ideal object, or the form that is given presence in sensation through its idealization, is brought to bear on the present by virtue of its revealing without breaking with the ordering of



Fig. 1 ‘Wagon Burner?’ From the series *Perception* by K.C. Adams (2015)

the visible. More than any other object, the voice is capable of passing into the infinite by its virtue as an object of pure form and presence—this happens with the advent of the *phonē* as the locus of the sonorous that slips through the certainties of meaning. *Phonē* is inseparable from its historical contingency, which requires idealizations in objects that are more or less ‘heard’ insidiously through the accidental vibrations of their movements: i.e. in sound. But the singularity of the Derridean auto-affectation misses its mark in the case of K.C. Adams’ *Perception*. When perceived through the prism of self and subjectivity, the voice perpetuates the mythology of its final destination towards inscription, the ‘absolute proximity’ as the hypothetical condition of auto-affectation. It is not the subject that is the presence of meaning, but the affective materiality of the voice that conditions the possibility for meaning construction in a variegated, multi-faceted, and polyvalent assemblage (Schlichter 2011, pp. 36–7). There is a phenomenological operation in speech that I ‘hear’ myself (*je m’entendre*, I understand and I hear, S/s).

[VOICE as HEARD]		
	<i>Affectio</i> (potential for bodily alteration)	<i>Affectus</i> (non-representational thought)
Singularity (visible)	Bearing witness to testimony <i>The Public</i>	Testimony to bearing witness <i>The Survivor</i>
Multiplicity (invisible)	Testimony as bearing witness <i>The Accused</i>	Bearing witness as testimony <i>The Missing</i>

{VOICE as UNDERSTOOD}

Fig. 2 The truth commission vocal assemblage

If we are to appreciate how the survivor, the accused, the missing and the public come into affective transformation, we must appreciate their distinct roles in the voice and vocalization as they interrelate in a vocal assemblage (see Fig. 2), wherein bodies are knitted together by the interlocking of processes that link the patterns, thresholds and triggers of the behaviour of the component bodies to the patterns, thresholds and triggers of the behaviour of the emergent superordinate (and sometimes transversal) bodies. *Affectio* and *affectus* have already been explained; the former the potential for bodily alteration, the latter non-representational thought.

The vertical axis, singularity/multiplicity, accounts for the manner in which affect expresses the multiple through the variegated positions of the singular, and respects the fact that bodies are more affectively open than physiologically closed (Blackman 2012, p. 2). It simultaneously respects the fact that, in Canada at least, the accused are unaccounted for, and the missing are equally multiplied:

- The public bears witness to testimony through the face's singular and visible registration of the voice, the apex of enunciation that makes subjectivity a singular event.
- The survivor testifies to bearing witness through their singular self-naming (i.e. 'May Q. Sorry'), where the past is reconfigured by using resources of the future to speak to a new presence.
- The accused testifies as bearing witness through the ubiquity of the racial slur, the racializing agent that stands as a social fact against the de-humanization of the subject.
- The missing bears witness as testimony insofar as their witnessing is impossible to incorporate directly into the present, unable to cross the threshold of multiplicity into singularity, but gives us the injunction of a 'Look again ...' in the diptych.

The purpose of a vocal assemblage is to lodge within certain orientational/ontological coordinates the possibilities for affective transformation. My discussion of the components of a truth commission as a vocal assemblage is followed by an explication of its variegated orientations. Truth commissions are vocal assemblages according to five particularities: (1) they affect and are affected by bodies in a complex topological relation; (2) they are driven by an apology, which itself proffers a non-human body of transformation; (3) they potentiate reconciliation through spontaneous vocalizations; (4) they are ontogenetic openings that reassemble national pasts, presents, and futures; and (5) they are temporally experiential predecessors to political action.

1. They affect and are affected by bodies in a complex topological relation

Truth commissions are less spaces within which affect is disseminated than movement and gesture coagulated into bodies of motion and bodies of rest. They are vocal assemblages insofar as they are affected by the occupation of bodies in a social space that elucidates affective utterances in pursuit of social justice, and are not delegated to any singular embodiment of the survivor, accused or public; a vocal assemblage is a topological site. In contradistinction to theories that account for the

body as a site of resistance to docility (such as the genealogical Foucault), or a site of alienation from the specular image (such as the psychoanalytic idealist Lacan), truth commissions tell us that the political body is best approached as a *medium* of consciousness which performs the role of an opening indeterminacy and connectivity. As long as the public remains bound to symbolic determinants such as the truth commission, it is from within such restraints (indeed, prior to them) that practical faculties of creativity and openness emerge. As we saw with truth commissions, although we might entertain them as spaces of governmentality, they are ultimately sites of discoverability: they are, in other words, less negativistic than affirmative. Therefore, though a truth commission may determine consciousness of the nation state, it is a consciousness that is itself indeterminate because of the multi-sensory and navigational limitlessness of the bodies that are embodied within it. Consciousness and the body, or affect and discourse, are as adhered to one another as marrow is to bone.

2. They are driven by an apology, which itself proffers a non-human body of transformation

Truth commissions are vocal assemblages insofar as the actual bodies inhabiting them and the virtual bodies circulating between them are driven by their interconnected relationship to the apology, which itself acts as an opening not a closure. If the truth commission is the site of a nation's newly emerging consciousness, and consciousness must be conscious of something, then the 'sense-experience' of the victim answering to apology from the past is the indeterminate fiction that belongs to the nation in its experience of itself. Apology uses narration and voice; past, present, and future cooperative participants that *perceive* the emergence of Truth. Perception of the survivor, thus, is never objective, never subjective, never neutral. Perception is an engaged and living relationship with a thing (a victim with the past), such as historical trauma, as much attributable to the thing's inherent truth for the survivor as it is attributable to the fiction played out within the coordinates of sensation. A survivor discloses their existence in relative autonomy to its context, but not in isolation from it, for in its discretion a survivor confesses the secrets of its immediate surroundings, so the closure of its immediate surroundings becomes the world within which Truth becomes discoverable. Because the connection between the victim and the community in truth commissions is as deeply intertwined as it is, interconnectivity is crucial for the Perception of Truth to be fostered. The boundaries between speaking and listening, between apology and truth, are things so inherently connected with one another that their connections are not inherently logical but rather relationally expressive.

3. They potentiate reconciliation through spontaneous vocalizations

Insofar as truth commissions are vocal assemblages, as the primary mediator for the (virtual and actual) bodies through which the truth commission interacts with itself, it is the site of potential for a creative regeneration of the accused; this means that as much as truth commissions are discursively bound, narrowcast and nationalist, they

are sites wherein the creative moment (the spontaneous improvisation) is the most highly valued and memorable one—where the accused is excused instead of reprimanded. The accused body that occupies truth commissions is an opening to transitional justice, not a closure to retributive justice. As much as we *may* think of truth commissions as state-sanctioned sites of social control that apologize without contrition, the new knowledge regarding alternative justices gained from their facilitation cannot be separated from the fact that they happened. So it is within the topological framework of the truth commission that the accused resides, taking its cues from the bodies in their proximity to their victims.

4. They are ontogenetic openings that reassemble national pasts, presents and futures

Insofar as truth commissions are vocal assemblages, any notion of incompleteness is insufficient to understanding the creation of a truth commission, and no matter the stage of a truth commission, even in its official closure and submitted reports, it is always onto-genetic—that is, as long as we attend to the manner in which the virtual is embodied in vocalizations, we are likely to discover new openings. A truth commission does not determine truth as though they were engaged in cause and effect—a truth commission opens the possibility to discovering realms of historical injustice that were previously *undiscoverable*. Rather, the role of the Commission is to act as an encasement of the discoverability and malleability of truth. The voice is a discoverable in this regard, and is always being recovered.

5. They are temporally experiential predecessors to political action.

Insofar as the truth commission is a vocal assemblage, it is the site for the potential for action which has immediate political implications—its consciousness has a permanent fixture in experience, but the experience is itself temporal. It is a topology which does not leave the truth it generates. Witnesses inhabit multiple bodies at once, always-already aware of the position of the body in a flux of pre-possessive knowing. Thus, my final point that bodies are not objects. They are only objects inasmuch as they are the location of affect. They register themselves feeling, but doubly entwined, sheathed in a mobile encasement of experience.

These principles combined provide us with the possibility of orientating towards those voices that are silent, an ontological position that facilitates the possibility of encroaching upon the voice's discoverability. There is an apparent weakness in the notion of subjectivity regarding the accountability of turning towards some matter in order to constitute one's stability, and turning away from other matter out of fear and intimidation; adhering to such a notion of subjectivity would indeed perpetuate the nihilistic view that truth commissions are state-governed bio-political injunctions that serve the interests of the nation state. Whereas giving witness to testimony that strengthens the nation is the inscription site of social norms, giving witness to testimony that disturbs and distresses gives truth commissions a status of outside (that is, it is outside of law, outside of jurisprudence, yet has an enormous implication in law, in transformation).

The voices of affective resistance do not preclude auto-affection, but rather, through a discovery of their own singular multiplicity, pose a more nuanced figuration of auto-affection as a communicative possibility towards the (re)presentation and (re)invention of the (survivor) self. Such an image as the diptychs in *Perception* gather up and distribute the impossibilities of auto-affection by aligning past/present/future together, a turning back of time against itself towards a new assemblage that places the sovereign into a newly devised temporality. Voices open towards a zone wherein auto-affection becomes a possibility of the impossible by virtue of those voices bearing witness to themselves, of arising from the contradictions of history in a calculable formula that allows for the further examination of and solutions towards those very contradictions. The contradictions of history in turn demand transformation for the conflicts that preclude political recognition, of the voices that shame others from above and the voices that name themselves from below. But they are also eternally entwined between a past contingency (the assimilation of First Peoples) and future possibility (anti-assimilative forms of self-determination), since all temporal dimensions belong to the blind spot of the future.

But the question inevitably arises: to whom is testimony directed? To testify is to witness, but testimony must simultaneously be its own witness and must proffer its own encounters. The voice is relational, it responds and it (re)produces, it does not confirm identity of the one who speaks; the voice does not speak emotions because the voice is immediately affective, transforming as it is registered; the voice registers, instead, as an intensity manifest in an affective resistance (Young 2014, p. 32). Such a moment constitutes the horizon of the discoverable. And such a horizon, in turn, is thus taken as the end of possibility, the end of life, the end of a pattern to establish a new pattern; but it also constitutes a type of pressure zone where listening is at its most strained and must release. It turns towards itself. It is, thus, only as a vocal assemblage that the truth commission facilitates the affective transformation of social bodies into embodiments of social values.

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