Truth Commission Discourse and the Aesthetics of Reconciliation

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Abstract
Truth Commissions have come to be regarded as a turning point for post-conflict and post-authoritarian states in transition. In this article, I argue that truth commission testimony, broadly defined to include artistic, cultural, and media productions, must be experienced as forms of affective materiality over discursive inscription. Using as an instrumental case study the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2008–2015), I conceptualize testimony as a necessary re-fictionalization of the past, present, and future of a nation. The truth commission discourse, especially in Canada, works to protect the perpetrators by (1) disallowing their identities from entering into the public record, and (2) creating bystanders out of those perpetrators that allows for an innocent and ineffective witnessing. The push for forgiveness harnesses an imperative for truth commissions to idealize and idolize the emotional moment of testimony. It is imperative to resist the spectacle of confession and testimony. But the witness must not be discarded. The witness must be found in those cultural institutions beyond truth commission events to include the aesthetics of reconciliation.

Keywords
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada; transitional justice; testimony; voice

I. Inarticulate Voice
This research originated in the classroom. It grows from a course in social problems I teach at the University of Lethbridge, traditional land of the Kainai Indian Reserve No. 148 in Alberta, Canada. Halfway through the 2014 winter semester, several of the
students attended the Edmonton Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)\(^1\) to testify and witness as survivors of the Indian Residential School system, which had removed Aboriginal children from their homes between early colonization and 1996 to, in the phrase taken up by critics of the policy, “take the Indian out of the child.”\(^2\) I asked the attendees, by email, whether we could use the next class to discuss their experiences, a discussion for which only a fraction of the rest of the class appeared: the 10 or so who had attended the Edmonton TRC, and a handful of other students interested in the discussion.\(^3\) While the ensuing conversation was productive, and while a space was opened for voices to articulate their concerns, the veritable absence of witnesses to the conversation was palpable.

This article approaches truth commissions and the voices within them as exhibiting a dynamic tension between voice and silence. Instead of thinking through truth commissions as discursive accounts of historical injury, centralized in survivors who take account of themselves, this article proposes the view that decentralizes the self and the nation without losing the importance of collectivity. As *a contemporary form of social control in post-conflict and post-authoritarian societies*, I argue that truth commissions proceed according to the ontological necessity of transforming social relations in the present by *borrowing from the future to change the historical fictions of the past*. The voice plays a central role in this process, especially in regards to testimony and modalities of testimony. If we take testimony as meaning the utterance of witness reports before the public, what I am calling for is an aesthetic intervention that redistributes the affective resistance of the voice.

Affective resistance is aligned with Antjie Krog’s writings on the difficulties of intercultural translation and testimony. Her work on the intertwining of memory, testimony, and post-Apartheid violence stands as amongst the most complex of truth commission scholarship, namely because she lives within the difficulties of translation, listening, and voice in her own inability as an Afrikaans to “speak” on supposed neutral grounds of truth and reconciliation. While *Country of My Skull*\(^4\) generated a fascinating insight into the “politics of the untranslatable,”\(^5\) her subsequent collaborative analysis of the

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1. The commission held major national events from 2010–2014 in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Halifax, Saskatoon, Inuvik, and Montreal. Edmonton’s TRC was the final of the hearings.
3. The absent students had heard a rumor that the discussion was not going to be on the exam, which remained no more than a rumor.
testimony of Notrose Nobomvu Konile fully encapsulated the obstacles of translation, and especially the manner in which intercultural discourse falls through the cracks of official institutions. Konile, mother of one of the Gugulethu Seven, had testified as the last mother of the Seven, her name having virtually disappeared from the South African TRC records after having been misspelled in the context of an incomplete translation. The resolution for Krog was to fictionalize the account in the past-tense by inserting characters who witnessed her testimony in such a manner that is highly mediated and inter-temporally subjective.

After the South African TRC centralized the role of the public, it became relatively clear to subsequent commissions that their mandates were to reconcile past atrocities for public witness. However, more cynically minded political theorists labor to confirm that, while truth commissions bring reconciliation to the apex of healing and forgiveness, they, with the best intentions, contribute more to national and historical narratives than they do to communities working towards individual and collective healing (such as the case of the Canadian government dismantling the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, a Non-Governmental Organization responsible for the collective healing of Indigenous Peoples, the details of which are discussed in the conclusion). While the ideal of individual and collective healing is found regularly in truth commission rhetoric, for Claire Moon’s discursive interpretation, healing is arbitrarily on equal footing with national reconcilement, where transposing forms of testimony onto national healing is an exercise that betters the state, and where “Each victim testimonial and every perpetrator confessional constituted a specific site of national healing where every wounded body and every story of the suffering acted as a morality tale.”

When we approach truth commissions as discursive events, when we attend more to the inscribing power of the word than to the transformative power of the voice, we miss the thrust of their metamorphic potential. While truth commissions reconcile the pain of a past injustice into such an orientation that the pain is, ideally at least, transmuted into individual and collective healing, such a transmutation is not solely relegated to the words used to summon the past. However, truth commissions, while they currently proliferate as the go-to global model of reconciliation, appear eager to rush into the power of words instead of the affective qualities of voice, qualities that make themselves present through emotive vocalizations. For example, Australia’s recently inaugurated investigation into


past child sexual abuse is calling for an enormous variety of testimony from survivors who suffered at the hands of officials in a broad range of social institutions: schools, religious organizations, sport clubs, daycare centers, foster homes, and other community organizations. Survivors are encouraged to share their stories by phone, in writing, or face-to-face, and are also encouraged to attend publicly held hearings in the service of redress. This commission has encompassed and found consistency from a broad range of social institutions, expressing hope in understanding the past so as to “stop this problem from happening in the future,” explicitly involving a spatial configuration of actors in order to make temporal changes in the relationships between past, present, and future. The propulsion of transformation is in the orientation towards the past as proffered through the voice. As one testimony from the Australian commission states,

Going public with my story over two years ago, assisting many other victims of child sexual abuse and in some cases their families, and working to protect other children within our community, has been a great part of my healing process. It has given me hope. It has empowered me. It has given me a voice. The decades of living in silence with the shame, guilt and anger have been shattered. Importantly, it has provided me the opportunity to turn a tragedy into a positive – something that has benefited me and, I hope, many others.

Given their means-end goal of reconciliation, truth commissions make provisions for transition by way of their functioning as affective institutions – that is, while they are not insouciant towards the epistemological fortification of discourse and history, they are moreover concerned with establishing an ontological and emotional dimension of voice in testimony, of giving voice to the survivor(s). That Desmond Tutu, in the context of the South African TRC, designated the “wail” as the “defining sound of the TRC” is no
small measure of evidence for the affective labor required of and in truth commissions.\textsuperscript{14} A wail, scream, or sob signifies a pre-rational encounter between a subject and its unrecognizable form, a form which terrifies and induces the subject to vocalize.\textsuperscript{15} This monstrous encounter embodied in the wail works well for the South African TRC, but it is by no means a universal (do we relegate email testimonials written IN ALL CAPS as the domain of the scream or the wail for the Australian Commission?). Discovering one’s voice is a contingency reliant on the historical specificity of each truth commission and is the truth commission’s most common currency. The risk lies within the way in which the TRC would use instances of forgiveness to elevate the discursive importance of reconciliation in the service of national reconciliation.\textsuperscript{16}

II. The Limits of the Truth Commission Discourse

This article avoids the “human rights discourse” identified by Robert Meister,\textsuperscript{17} and urges not to reproduce the oversentimentalized transitional justice genre which Meister identifies as the beneficiary of evil in the semblance of benevolence. Meister’s critique of the “human rights discourse” hinges on the post-1989 turn from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen towards the equalizing model of reconciliatory justice, which he claims reproduces evil as a beneficiary of its own crimes. That is, beneficiaries emerge as a new reconciliatory figure that permits perpetrators to assume the role of witness (or, Meister prefers, “bystander”), who participates openly in a process of “healing.” Meister explains:

Human Rights Discourse does more than promote a more nuanced approach to beneficiaries: it also works to blur the moral distinction between beneficiary and bystander by suggesting that the general exoneration of all nonperpetrators would be more conducive to national “healing” than an inculpation of those whose interests were served.\textsuperscript{18}

Meister thus approaches states of transitional justice as a “social melodrama” comprised of bystanders who revoke their responsibility for crimes by becoming actors in the drama; they are perpetrator-bystander-witnesses who share a similar witness space as the acknowledgement of emotions is far more politically effective. Pupavac argues that emotions have become a central organizing strategy for international politics operating under a new “therapeutic security paradigm” (152), which pathologizes otherwise normal reactions victims express in the face of brutal exploitation.

survivor-witnesses. This genre, as he refers to it, is one that neutralizes the responsibilities of the perpetrator, because their new position is one of collective understanding, but understanding social change in such a manner that doesn’t pose the same consequence as distributive and/or retributive justice. Simply, the survivors, because they are airing their concerns to a commission, even if they are face-to-face with their perpetrators, are not in a space that poses any risk to the perpetrator. The witness stands in the way of itself, occupied by multiple concretions at once, with sordid, spotted, and terrible pasts; pain is readable and discursively produced as being in “the past.”

Since the South African TRC popularized the “human rights discourse” of truth commissions (that is, generalizing witness), it has been relatively clear that such a commission’s mandate is in regards to public reconciliation of the past and protecting citizens in the future from repeated violence; in spite of facing the past, recent political theoretical work demonstrates that these venues, at the best of times, do better for national and historical narratives than they do for clearing the air for the marginalized and brutalized, on both individual and collective levels – most importantly, in many cases they have been typified as orchestrating a historical turning point hinging on forgiveness without contribution from the perpetrator-bystander-witness. Truth commissions thus face a kind of achromatic deadlock with post-conflict resolution because they are obliged to being purely contingent and open to a reconstruction determined by the state responsible for the violence in the first place. To extend on Meister, truth commissions are the “style” of discourse to the “genre” of transitional justice, in that they are more fleeting and undetermined than the latter. As Alexander Keller Hirsch explains, “reconciliation would be conceived as something which actually takes place, albeit fleetingly, bursting onto the scene only to vanish at the moment it is sublimated into an institutionalized form.”

A sociological perspective on truth commissions, especially the emotional dimensions of their testimony and witness, draws our attention to the affective power of testimony when its prerogative is to enter into the public record. I contend that this transition from the silence of the past violence into the presence of the public record marks an attempt to channel what Agamben calls the zone of irresponsibility into socially acceptable testimony; the mobilization is not put into motion by the content of testimony as much as it is by the emotional frameworks through which testimony is delivered. A truth commission hinges on the emotional validity of testimony and its role of involving the public, whose involvement has been a central constitutive character since the South African TRC.

Public knowledge did not necessarily equate a robust public debate, deliberation, or discourse – the point was that the information was made available to the public, that the public constituted a capacity of the South African TRC that offered a “renewed sense of responsible public life.” That is, in the context of “developing nations,” truth commissions...
commissions have become a technology to make it remotely possible to move on from a past and constitute a public record. Ultimately, a nation in healing, a potential drawn from the public venues, is that in the future it should narrow down into individual healing, which is what makes ensuing policy so central in specific nations and cultures. Generating a fascination with the public record of transitional justice, mainly through the testimonies of victims and of the accused, the South African TRC thus contributed to a rise in theorizations about the relation between individual testimony and the narratives of the nation-state, mainly by way of making the testimonials so publicly accessible. Yet, such accessibility simultaneously opened it to charges of running a spectacle and an emotional exploitation that had less bearing on actual healing than it did on the nation reconstructing itself.

The push for forgiveness might oversatiate victims who are not ready to forgive (the UN specifically states that rushing to reconciliation does damage to survivors and victims). The standing criticism, then, is that truth commissions, in their nationalist dimensions, become out of touch with local contexts, in that members of smaller regions repeatedly, in some cases, express desire for “vengeance and responsibility” over “reconciliation and forgiveness.” In the context of a truth commission, forgiveness can only be achieved once a truth commission has established that bodies (those under state regulation and those previously or currently under a state of exception) occupy affective positions that permit confessional and testimonials, even if in those circumstances those who testify ultimately do not forgive. This does not mean that “forgiveness” needs to be a universal. In fact, during the Greensboro Truth Commission, many were resistant to acts of forgiveness but were receptive to reconciliation, which were terms not necessarily interchangeable with one another. Yet in Ghana and in Rwanda, because victims and perpetrators were literally neighbors, respective truth commissions operated in the best interest at regional and national levels to hasten reconstruction. Forgiveness, like punishment, has a context-dependent function: that is, to put limitations upon that which could likely unfold infinitely; like a feeling for vengeance is potentially subsumed under a negative sanction, a feeling for truth could be quelled by forgiveness. That is, the past must at once

be recognized and forgotten;\textsuperscript{30} the present must be taken as a zone of transition in which the law of the past cannot be applied;\textsuperscript{31} the future must be reworked over so that what is forgotten is never remembered, and what is remembered can never happen again.

\section*{III. The Ongoing Annihilation of Aboriginals in Canada}

Aboriginals in Canada face the achromatic deadlock common to survivors under truth and reconciliation; namely, \textit{is a survivor obliged to forgive the unforgiveable}? Canada’s proverbial apology in 2008 for the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) was the latest in a series of state-administered amendments for past exploitation, yet, in a separate but equally well-known statement, the government boasted as to having “no history of colonialism.”\textsuperscript{32} This further complicates the stated question: \textit{is a survivor obliged to forgive the unforgivable, especially on the heels of an apology without contrition}? That is, while the apology exposed the once-hidden IRS, it did little to frame the schools as a symptom of systemic annihilation. Canada’s subsequent denial of colonialism, delivered to an international assembly of state leaders, signified to critics that the preceding apology was without shame – that is, the apology did little to ensure that any continuing abuses associated with a colonialist legacy would cease.

The IRS operated less in the interest of educating its students than, as referenced above, to “take the Indian out of the child.” Indeed, Duncan Campbell-Scott, the engineer of the policy for IRS, wrote: “Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question and no Indian Department … I want to get rid of the Indian problem.”\textsuperscript{33} Critics surmised on the heels of the apology that such pleas for forgiveness amounted to no more than denying what the system’s purpose was, which was to, \textit{ipso facto}, devour Aboriginal culture. The systematic destruction of Aboriginal life was also implied in the restructuring of their communities, ones which were, suddenly, absent of the sounds of children, a silence palpable to survivor memoirs and embedded in their testimony. Fred Robbins testified at the Vancouver TRC:

\begin{quote}
Hearing all the kids crying … there were a lot of kids in there … 125 there, once one starts sniffling, and starts moaning then all of a sudden you got a hundred and twenty five kids crying. You know, some of them are saying, asking for their mum “I want my mom” / “I want my
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30} Priscilla B. Hayner, \textit{Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions} (Taylor & Francis, 2010).


\textsuperscript{32} Aaron Wherry, “What he was talking about when he talked about colonialism,” \textit{Maclean’s}, October 1 (2009), www2.macleans.ca. Last visited on February 14, 2009. This statement is from the 2009 G20 Summit in Pittsburgh. The broader context of the quote is as follows: “We are one of the most stable regimes in history. There are very few countries that can say for nearly 150 years they’ve had the same political system without any social breakdown, political upheaval or invasion. We are unique in that regard. We also have no history of colonialism.”

Removing children from their homes is not a past practice but is invariably common today. For instance, 48.1 percent of children under 14 years of age placed in foster homes are Aboriginals. In fact, Canadian Aboriginal communities still feel the statistical pinch of systematic annihilation. Other continuing abuses include:

- First Nations in Canada are ten times more likely to be incarcerated in a penitentiary than non-Aboriginal adults
- The proportion of First Nations who reported heavy drinking on a weekly basis (16 percent) is double of those in the general Canadian population
- Nearly half of the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada jurisdictions (i.e. Native Reserves) have no or deficient fire services, which places these sites at risk for injury or death due to fire
- First Nations are more likely to live in unsanitary overly-crowded situations and the water quality on reserves is more likely to be contaminated throughout a given year
- Many Aboriginals (18 percent) live in homes that are in need of major repairs, compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians (8 percent) whose homes are in need of repair.

While the distinct probability distributions of these statistics make it difficult to comment on them together, they collectively allude to the struggle over whether or not the IRS was and remains a form of genocide. Christopher Powell, for instance, assigns Canadian Aboriginals as survivors of genocide, writing that genocide exceeds mass
killings to include “dispossession, enslavement, forced migration, the prohibition of traditional religious and cultural practices, the destruction of cultural monuments, the suppression of Indigenous languages, confinement to marginal living conditions, and the large-scale abduction of children.” Genocide, for Aboriginal scholars, artists, and activists, is representative of the beginning of modernity (as opposed to the oft-cited maxim, slavery as the beginning of modernity), because Orientalism and exploration are the actions that led to the myth of the European civilized modern whose conquests over savagery were crucial for modern global development; such a disposition erases the foundational genocide, eclipsed by the imported (and equally traumatic) global slave trade. Such focuses consequently reduce the pain suffered by victims who are required to live through the traumas of the past in the present; Ronald Niezen notes that, according to some social workers, reconciliation has led to a rise in drug and alcohol usage, as victims who are first compelled to relive the past through testimony are distributed compensation that goes directly to the substances that helped them bury their pain in the first place. Testimony by Verna Wallace, a survivor speaking at the TRC national event in Vancouver, speaks to this problem:

Going to the TRC event … I see lawyers ready to pounce at any moment. When my husband [exhales], Ron and I [inhales], were talking to some people … they did just fine without lawyers [exhales]. By the way some of us got cheated out of our compensation, so I hope there’s going to be something done about what’s been happening [exhales]. Lots of my friends, especially up in Port Hardy committed suicide because of this [constricted] … all that money just killed them. [pause, long exhale] [non-constricted] The compensation some of us received was very insulting. My compensation, for example, I got one hundred and eighty five for [constricted] three people raping me, and the Indian Day School a hundred and twenty five. So you see, the government is [further constriction] still controlling us. Because they said we needed lawyers [highest constriction] for the hearings. I don’t know what the government thought we were, stupid? We don’t know how to do things? [exhales] …

Wallace’s voice constricts on the subject of friends lost to suicide, the memory of a sexual assault, the feeling of being controlled by the government, and the pressure to seek unnecessary and expensive legal counsel. However, her voice opens when she protests the insulting compensation and demands action regarding unnecessary legal counsel. Thus, accounting for words alone would do a disservice to the emotional and political nuances of testimony; testimony requires we pay attention to voice, as it constricts at discomfort, and opens at a call for action. For Anja Kanngieser, such a listening would constitute a critical intervention that


42. Powell, Barbaric Civilization, p. 1.
demands the orientation of the listener, who, in such a manner as Michel Foucault’s receptor of the confession, holds power. But Kanngieser’s listener is less intent on disciplining their subject. How we speak and hear, and what we speak and hear with, is political, embodied, and embedded. Different relations are occupied in the present, which is a distilling feature of the voice in how it occupies multiple dimensions at once: it is past/present/future, and is in proximity to distance, truth and/in fiction. More concerned with invention than critique, the ethical dimension of the voice is configured around attention to affective materialities of utterances: in Kanngieser’s account, pace, accent, intonation, pitch, volume, and refusal. It is this last, refusal, as in the refusal to accept an apology, that resonates most strongly in Canada.

IV. Ghouls and Monsters: Fictionalizing the Indian Residential Schools

Set in 1976 Red Crow Mi’g Maq reservation, Jeff Barnaby’s 2013 film, Rhymes for Young Ghouls, sublimates refusal in the form of a revenge genre. It hinges on the intertwining presence of St. Dymphna’s Indian Residential School, three teenagers who earn an income selling marijuana to pot smokers on the reserve, and Popper, the sadistic federal Native Agent collecting a truancy tax from Anna, one of the three teenagers who exchanges pay for staying out of the school. The central theme of the film is Anna’s survival amidst the accidental death of her younger brother, her mother’s subsequent suicide, and her father’s incarceration, though the tenor of the film is its intertemporal irony. That is, the historical narrative is also set in a decidedly Western genre as a revenge film, established by the silent “ghost boy” character who escapes St. Dymphna’s nightly to become, in the director’s words, “the avenging angel for all the kids that came before him” and who eventually revenge-kills Popper with a shotgun blast to the head at point blank range. Rhymes for Young Ghouls proffers the violence of silence of Aboriginality that, not without controversy, depicts members disaffected by their loss of culture, language, land, and pride, unified by their loss through the consumption of narcotics and alcohol. The film appropriates several conventions of the revenge genre that speak to (1) a politicization of revenge over forgiveness, and (2) an expression of the inter- and intra-temporality at several distinct and identifiable levels: the past of the Indian Residential School, the presence of aesthetic reconciliation, the future of Aboriginal suffering, and the silence of the thousands of children who died in Indian Residential Schools, as it was revealed in the TRC of Canada. Thus, another way of giving meaning to the film is to imply that the territory requisite of decolonization is more than spatial: it espouses an inter-temporal dimension as well, and not only the past, but the past in all its manifestations with actors who collectively experience time out of joint with one another.

The disjunctions of Rhymes for Young Ghouls simultaneously reveals and conceals the lines of past/present/future, ambivalently so: the simultaneity of historical forces are more important than their order of occurrence – it is thus of importance to cultural products not to “reveal a truth” so much as it is to further encroach upon the truth by creating

alternative fictionalizations of the past. The film’s “angel,” for instance, the young boy who resembles Anna’s long-deceased brother (the victim of a drunk driver, his own mother), has no voice to speak any temporal dimension into presence, functions as a thread of the presence of children missing from the community. The boy’s body summons a silent presence, not an absence, that splits its articulation at once in an indexical direction as well as alluding to the reality of its own negation; refusing to speak thus contains a political dimension.

The dead and the missing (which are here not mutually exclusive) pose the greatest threat in transitional societies, yet they are the actors that are the nation’s only hope for survival – a palpable victim to make amends to. In Agamben’s terms, the corpse is at once proof of past atrocity yet incapable of offering forgiveness, and may speak only through the voices of the living; though, it is only the dead who have survived the punishment for having been born into brutality, so they are racialized and subjectified into subject positions by association, by their families, their loved ones, who speak without grounding from within an unmarked grave. As a consequence, the missing and the dead have a seat at the table of the nation in contrition, their crystallization a requisite to the nation’s newborn domination. These are not necessarily issues that can be played outside of the cultural domain.

Survivors speak to a creative power through geo- and temporal-political interruptions of the nation; just as Rhymes for Young Ghouls re-articulates the relations between nation, accused, survivor, past, present, and future (along with many others), cultural production generally feeds a special need provided by the truth commission: to speak to the temporal and spatial dynamics in terms undetermined by the state. Analyzing the relationship between the survivor and the accused illustrates the ways in which survivors respond to social and authoritarian conflict between film to poetry to music to beyond. While truth commissions propound to uncover the truth of the past to prevent atrocity from happening in the future, aesthetic reconfigurations of temporal dimensions require borrowing from the future in order to change the past. This is what it means to think of the truth commission as the border, the horizon of difference that considers the edge of difference, where the empirical must delve into the domain of the possible. Survivors borrow less from the past than from the future. To hear survivors requires a creative form of attending to the voice, of hearing the voice in such a way that Ashok Mathur describes as the resistance to the monovocality of the historical: “we must be creative in our approach if we are not to be overwritten by our pasts,” if the colonizer and the colonized are to enter into a newly configured conversation that forces the settler psyche out of self-denial. Reconciliation does not occur, therefore, when a perpetrator admits the act of a wrongdoing, but when a perpetrator confesses to the very fact of their identity as a settler who harvests off a system

47. Agamben, Remnants of Auschwitz.
50. Malissa Phung, “Are People of Colour Settlers Too?” in Mathur, Dewar, and DeGagné (eds), Cultivating Canada, p. 296.
reproduced in the image of its beneficiaries. Dennis Saddleman’s spoken poem *Monster* is a call to the settler to re-orient themselves in just such a manner. An exploration of his memories at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, Saddleman explores the problematic notion of borrowing from the future to change the past. The text is distinctive for its use of the vision of the Indian Residential School as a monster:

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I HATE YOU RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL
I HATE YOU
YOU’RE A MONSTER
A HUGE HUNGRY MONSTER
BUILT WITH STEEL BONES
BUILT WITH CEMENT FLESH
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What’s of particular interest, first, is that the poem was read aloud from within the school where the abuse took place; Saddleman’s voice took up the space wherein which the silent sob of children is historically lodged. The poem reveals the intertwining dimension of the Indian Residential School, for Canada a symbol of colonization, of civilization, of discipline, and the monster that in turn frames the subjective memory of the Indian Residential School: the school is given an appearance of “huge watery mouth, mouth of double doors,” eyes that “glared from grimy windows,” a face “grooved of red bricks,” yet a school which has a set of actions: a belly that rumbles, throat muscles that “forced me down to your stomach, squeezed my happiness, squeezed my dreams,” veins and blood “poisoned with loneliness,” bitter tastebuds, and teeth that “chewed the Indian out of me.” There are some comments that need to be made on the monstration of the monster. What’s first important to note about *Monster* is its multivalent etymology: monster means disfigurement, but it also has pedagogical implications. Its root in the French is *monstration* which means to show or to reveal, which in German is *zeigen* (in English this also translates into teaching). The poem is profound, but on more levels than its monstrosity. The form of those things that act are ultimately what give form to monstrosity; that is, it is a requisite of the poem to monstrate the Indian Residential School’s historical connection to a “benevolent domination” in order to reveal how Canadian aboriginals were exterminated through cultural genocide. In a sense, every school teaches, gives signs towards, orders its pupils in manners that exceed their bureaucratic administration (all schools give memories, emotions, socializations); yet, as Derrida writes on monstration, it is a form that “shows in order to warn or put on guard” inasmuch that the words to a poem or the diagram of a musical composition would be placed in front of a student. Though monstration also shows the coordinates of the plain-fact of how institutions are formed and run, that state-run IRS are not products of a colonialism,

51. Dennis Saddleman, “Monster,” *Divergent/Convergent: Journal of the University 102 Students*, Spring (2014), 16–20. The printed version of the poem is originally in caps. It should be noted, however, that only the first section of the poem was read on CBC Radio Canada. The remainder of the poem moves through tropes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

but manifestations of hate. In monstration the subject that “draws towards” the Indian Residential School does so in such a manner that forces it to withdraw into its own obscene other, or the “subterranean values” of the Canadian nation.

Monstration at once de-monstrates and is a demon-strait (proffers a strait for a demon), revealing while concealing, reorganizing the monstrous in the historical functions of the nation and of memory and history. Monsters are those atrocities in embryonic forms that unfold into unrecognizable versions of themselves. The past, memory, and history in this sense do not play out in dialectics, but in internal resonances of contradiction. Monster exposes the “horror of submersion in an alien otherness”\(^53\) of Canadian history as the excessive byproduct of its own policy. And so the way we are compelled to look at Canadian history, Monster tells us, is less by way of understanding Canada’s accident as unintended. Deleuze and Guattari write on the subject of the monster, for instance, that “The state apparatus needs, as its summit as oat its base, pre disabled people, preexisting amputees, the still-born, the congenitally infirm, the one-eyed and one-armed.” Monstrous is a category that allows us to rationalize the place of the Other … but here we have a double other: the Other to Canadian history embodied in its own monstrous Other of Canadian history. A doubly othered context of enunciation therefore requires the repositioning of the survivor and the state where we get a glimpse of what it possibly means to be monstered.

V. Conclusion

Truth commission testimony does not couple seamlessly with the aesthetic and affective ruptures of vengeance and monstration. However, my purpose in this article has been to contribute to an inaugural discussion that brings them together. There is no clean separation between pre- and post-TRC, though now that we are officially in a “post-TRC” Canada, there is pressure to reify the events of the past few short years. Even so, it seems obvious that testimony exceeds beyond the confines of state-sanctioned events; every vocalization is at once its own testimony and witness, in hip hop and rap music, in film, television, public installations, performance art, radio documentaries, or online comments sections. As discussed above, the aesthetic alternatives to state-sanctioned “Human Rights Discourse” provides the opportunity to re-theorize the role of affect and aesthetics in testimony. Support, in the form of an organization, for disruptive forms of testimony is thus a requisite for a nation in repair. In Canada there was such an organization: the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF).

Founded in 2002 on the cusp of the largest lawsuit ever filed against the Government of Canada for abuses at IRS, the AHF was intended as a collective group of artists, scholars, musicians, and cultural activists who engaged with the sensoria of social change: that is, the manner in which social change could be ushered in by art, culture, and critical scholarship. Seeking to introduce an enduring venue for artists, it sought to radically challenge the otherwise dominant modality of Canadian history, whose programmatic had ensured the erasure of its first peoples through genocidal institutions.

The AHF sought to bring together a variety of culturally dispossessed artistic productions and to disseminate them online in direct confrontation with Canada’s colonial history; its organization was essentially a plea for an extension of witness and testimony (1) beyond the confines of state administered outreach, and (2) beyond the Aboriginal communities in Canada to include immigrants, sexually marginalized, settlers, and many others.

In 2010, funding for the AHF was reallocated to programs run by Health Canada. Effectively, this took power away from those in the AHF who were more attuned to community-oriented and traditional healing practices. The AHF had cultivated a new future by interrogating the notions of forgiveness and historical atrocity, of redress and the cultural politics of the land; they opened cultural perspectives to those positions both within and outside of the Aboriginal communities that were otherwise the most directly impacted by the histories of the IRS; they sustained the conversation regarding inter-generational trauma and ongoing self-abuse by way of encouraging community support in addressing, in creative ways, the legacies of the IRS. Persistent themes throughout their publications and exhibitions included a ternary conversation between the dominating political, the social actors, and the ideals that ideally grow from the interaction between the two as well as their revisions. The AHF proposed that cultural healing is an activity reserved for the bodies of the afflicted, but one that requires the participation of all who were involved in the acts of state violence: they suggest this be done by conceptualizing all subjectivities as intimately related to the land across multiple subjectivities towards transgression and transformation. In their practice, the AHF stated three norms associated with cultural healing: state institutionalization, renewed community relations, and aesthetic sensory redistribution. Each dealt with reconfiguring relations between the past, the present, and the future.

It is imperative that we listen to truth commissions beyond their state-determined institutions. Truth commissions, if we are to access their efficacy, move beyond the boundaries of their events into, in the words of Michael J. Shapiro, “alternative loci of enunciation,” including but not limited to: aesthetic reconciliation in South African post-apartheid literature, photography and film in relation to international truth commissions, cultural activism and transitional justice, extensions of transitional justice beyond outreach programs, performance and creative transformations, the convergence of transitional

justice and art, and reconciliation representations. Other examples include: Afghanistan’s new film industry, activist art in Argentina, Northern Ireland’s installation art, the handicraft workshops of Chile, the photographic captures of victims in Guatemala, Graffiti art in Libya, dramatic productions in Peru, and the Pan African Dance Festival in Rwanda. The arts have come to play a central role in moving reconciliation beyond the boundaries of truth commissions and criminal tribunals: cultural activity produces new political subjectivities in new relations to one another. Art and culture transform the isolated scream of the subject into a new political collectivity, whereby the phonē (which humans and non-humans share) is incorporated into a communicable discourse, logos. If phonē transmits pain, through cultural production the pain is registered in new modes of understanding that the pain is unjust; this is how the voice becomes a political expression. Thus, the route to discovering voice is multivalent, unpredictable, and contingent, dependent upon the historical arrangement of every truth commission and their subsequent cultural expressions. What I discuss above is the prevalence of silence as a means of vocal expression in the TRC. But this is why art and culture remain the domain of the vocal discovery, especially, in this case, the witness of silence.

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68. Joan Mazimhaka, The Potential Impact of Domestic Tourism on Rwanda’s Tourism Economy, Dissertation, School of Humanities (University of the Witwatersrand, 2006).