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A little too close to the truth: Anxieties of testimony and confession in *Ubu and the truth commission* and *The story I am about to tell*

Stephanie Marlin-Curiel

First weekend in August of 1997: In Johannesburg's Market Theatre, the figure of a woman emerges from the shadow. In a strong voice, overcoming her frail appearance, the nameless figure recounts the story of when the police tried to force her to throw the match that would burn her own son. Two people support her on either side, subtly manipulating her puppet body.

Next door, at the Market Theatre Laboratory, Catherine Mlangeni, sits downstage only a few feet from the audience as she tells of the day her son Bheki received a walkman in the mail. He placed the earphones on and flicked the switch that caused his head to blow apart. This is the testimony she had given before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Now she performed this testimony on stage.

Witness puppets hold their ground against the outrageous, rhyme-slinging, human characters of Ma and Pa Ubu in *Ubu and the Truth Commission* adapted from Alfred Jarry's 1896 farce, *Ubu Roi.* In Jarry's version, Ma and Pa's money-grubbing, power-mongering and scatological language caused no real damage in the absurd world they inhabited.[1] In William Kentridge, Jane Taylor and the Handspring Puppet Company's *Ubu and the Truth Commission,* Ma and Pa's grotesque and perverse sensibilities lose their ironic distance when juxtaposed against the devastating accounts of suffering voiced through the witness puppets. The imported fictional characters of Ma and Pa Ubu invite audiences to recognize, if not identify with, the comic portrayal of outrageousness on display.

In *Ubu* the TRC stories reach the audience in a highly mediated fashion: a script by Taylor crafted in the spirit of Jarry, an animated film backdrop by Kentridge, and the puppets who articulate selected, edited and composite versions of TRC testimonies. In the neighbouring theatre, *The Story I am About to Tell* presented the audience with all-too-real witnesses reciting the unspeakable cruelties they themselves endured. The three witnesses, Catherine Mlangeni, Thandi Shezi, and Duma Khumalo belong to the Khulumani Support group for survivors of gross human rights violations most of whom testified at the TRC. These three Khulumani members combined their efforts with three actors from the Market Theatre Laboratory: Dan Robbertse, Romalao Makhene, and Kenneth Nkosi. Under the leadership of cultural activist Bobby Rodwell

and director Robert Colman, they created what was to be a theatre-for-development piece designed to travel to distant township areas to inform people about the TRC.[2]

The Story I am About to Tell has since performed at international festivals in London, Germany and Sweden, exceeding its original educational intentions and the communities it was designed for. Perhaps international interest in the play is due to the powerful script that was created in workshop, but shaped by one of South Africa's foremost political "rant" poets, Lesego Rampolokeng. Or perhaps it is because of a perceived "authenticity" to the play as representative of a South African historical moment with real witnesses and real stories thus giving audiences a chance to witness the effects of these events on people's lives first hand rather than through the media. It is likely that *Story* received some of its exposure from its concurrent run at the Market Theatre Lab (which usually buses in audiences from the township) with *Ubu and the Truth Commission* performing at the Market Theatre, frequented mostly by white liberals and black elite*. Ubu* has been enjoying international acclaim following its world premier at the German Weimar Festival in 1997 before performing at the South African Grahamstown National Arts Festival and Johannesburg's Market Theatre. From there, *Ubu* embarked on a world tour in 1998 to London's Tricycle Theatre as part of the Lift Festival (where *Story* ran again simultaneously); New York's Public Theatre as part of the Jim Henson Puppet Festival; The Kennedy Center's African Odyssey series; Théâtre National Dijon Bourgogne; Divadlo Archa Theatre in the Czech Republic; and several other venues. It has been and remains the bane of South African performing arts that they are better appreciated abroad than by South Africa's own audiences. As a production in its own right, the same could almost be said of the TRC.

This chapter focuses on the South African performances of these plays and how they constitute interventions into the TRC process, as well as, set ethical guidelines for dramatizing the TRC on stage. Through the reiteration and recontextualisation of testimony and confession, making theatre about the TRC re-presents the complex processes of truth-telling, healing, reconciliation, but also produces patterns of enactment other than those available through the TRC. I focus on the performativity of testimony that produces both intended and unintended effects.[3] For the directors, this performativity creates an anxiety over the mixing of TRC material and the theatrical conventions of plot, narrative and character. The anxiety seems to stem from the potential for these stories 1) to lose their testimonial effect for one that is purely aesthetic, and 2) to reperform their violence on the victims rather than to heal them.

Body, speech, violence

Fiona Ross (1996) among others has commented on the danger of being revictimised when testifying as a victim before the TRC. The TRC hearings have been broadly divided into two parts: the human rights violations hearings, colloquially known as the "victims" hearings, and the amnesty hearings, where "truth" is offered up by "perpetrators".[4] The term, "victim", is part of the lexicon of the TRC in a very specific sense; only those that are legitimised as "victims" of gross human rights violations in the eyes of the TRC will be entitled to reparations.[5] The TRC Commissioners were aware of the problem in their terminology:

> From the outset, the commissioners expressed some discomfort with the use of the word 'victim'. Although the term is commonly enough used when talking about those who suffered under apartheid, it may also be seen to imply a negativity or passivity. Victims are acted upon rather than acting, suffering rather than surviving. The term might therefore be seen as insulting to those who consider that they have survived apartheid or emerged victorious. Unlike the word 'victim', the word `survivor' has a positive connotation, implying an ability to overcome adversity and even to be strengthened by it. This does not, of course, mean that many (if not all) survivors were not still experiencing the effects of the trauma they had suffered. It also does not mean that all survived. There were, indeed, many who did not survive and on whose behalf others approached the Commission (Final Report Vol. 1, Chapt 4, par. 37).

Not only did the term victim not acknowledge the conscious act of resistance and survival, it could even be argued that giving testimony at the TRC reiterated and reinscribed the violence on the victim who had suffered. The Final Report explains its use of the term victim as follows:

> However, when dealing with gross human rights violations committed by perpetrators, the person against whom that violation is committed can only be described as a victim, regardless of whether he or she emerged a survivor. In this sense, the state of mind and survival of the person is irrelevant; it is the intention and action of the perpetrator that creates the condition of being a victim (Final Report Vol. 1, Chapt 4, par. 38).

If the TRC was meant to restore the human and civil dignity of victims, then why was the "state of mind and survival of the person [..] irrelevant?" What was more important to the TRC was the moment when the victim was powerless and silenced, for this moment is the locus of truth. The TRC even decided to call the friends and families of victims "deponents", and then later, "secondary victims" in order to emphasise the loss they suffered in connection with the murder of a loved one who was usually a "breadwinner." Eventually the TRC no longer made a distinction between primary and secondary victims, although the secondary victims had never actually been the direct victims of violence themselves. Theirs are the surrogate bodies on which to read and to reinscribe violence. The body's testimony contains the residue of a truth inscribed by violence. Yet, if the witness had not survived, there would be no story. Testimony is an act of survival, not of victimhood.

In stating that "it is the intention and action of the perpetrator that creates the condition of being a victim," the author of this section of the final report gives substance to Judith Butler's (1997) claim that words have the power to injure by reiterating scenes of oppression or physical violence. Words themselves have the power to injure, because their force derives from previous acts of violence associated with them. Language has agency in and of itself by which she means that the speaker does not originate the speech act (or the violent act), and therefore does not solely determine its meaning or effect. Butler argues that language is "out of control." The body is capable of performing meanings that not only proceed from, but also precede, and exceed beyond speech. Thus, a witnesses' testimony performs victimhood on that witness because the testimony carries with it the "intention and action of the perpetrator."

Butler is careful, of course, to mention that "oppressive language is not a substitute for the experience of violence. It enacts it own kind of violence" (1997:9). Scholars of subaltern studies would agree with the ability of language to perform the violence of silencing, such that the subaltern remains the object and not the subject of speech. But the act of naming may either "paralyze the one it hails" or "run[s] the risk of inaugurating a subject in speech who comes to use language to counter the offensive call" (Butler 1997:2). Preventing injury is possible. Speech acts have the potential to become unhinged from their previous contexts when they are spoken in ways that would have been unauthorised within that context (Butler 1997:160). The TRC solicits testimony to recount violence committed under apartheid, but it becomes possible to stifle the repetition of that violence by having previously unauthorised voices testify in a public forum legitimized by a previously unauthorised state.[6] The ritual frame of the TRC is itself a means of containing testimony within a time span of two years in order to prevent the stories from gradually seeping out through what otherwise might be potentially subversive channels, threatening to mar the image of a peaceful and democratic future. Meanings may yet “escape” the TRC context without being firmly situated into a new context that will facilitate a positive effect.

While a witness's testimony that carries an embodied truth reiterates, without re-enacting, the violence it describes, testimony is also a performative speech act told in a context where its truth-claim can produce a conscious, positive effect. In a court, for example, testimony produces judgment. In a psychiatric setting testimony initiates healing. At the TRC a survivor's testimony rarely produces judgment on an amnesty applicant, but is heard so that the survivor and the country can heal. Since the survivor's healing is not immediately evident to listeners and as a single story does not immediately produce national catharsis, the testimony may cease to have performative value and may degenerate into a graphic story to excite the prurient interest.

Alternatively, the testimony is valued as oral history, which does not project the same urgent call for action.

Divide and rule

To what extent are theatre practitioners able to retain TRC conventions that serve to deflect the effects of violence while recontextualizing those TRC conventions which reinforce the effects of violence? While retaining recognisable elements in creating the scenography of the TRC, theatre must also create sufficient alienation in performing the TRC if it intends "unhinge" the victimhood from the witness. *Ubu and the Truth Commission* and *The Story I am About to Tell*, each in different ways, reproduce and diverge from TRC conventions in an attempt to manage the instability of the testimonial, violent, and even traumatic aspects of narrating personal stories of suffering in public. Retaining TRC conventions in these plays serves to keep testimony from spinning "out of control." In *Ubu* the division between puppets and humans helps to create a boundary between "the TRC" and "not-the-TRC." The two manipulators needed to operate the *bunraku*-style puppets cleverly recall the "comforters" at the TRC. The *Ubu* stage does not display the TRC banners, and the long tables covered in white tablecloths supplied with microphones and glasses of water. However, Ubu's shower-stall, where he attempts to wash himself of the blood he has spilt, doubles as a translation booth for the Truth Commission scenes. The TRC space is unmistakenly recognizable by the emotionally-laden testimony of the puppets spoken in African languages, and the halting, but measured, English translation emanating from the shower stall.

In *The Story I am About to Tell*, the Truth Commission is not literally reproduced but, again, suggested. As one witness remains downstage center one actor plays the Commissioner. Without a comforter or a family member accompanying the witness, the audience feels the witness's sheer exposure in this process**.** By retaining these TRC stagings and postures, the audience is assured of not mistaking these stories for fiction. The TRC context and its conventions are juxtaposed with a theatrical context and its conventions. This juxtaposition produces anxiety negotiated by disallowing the TRC to blend seamlessly into the play. The careful contrivances used in both plays to prevent this would suggest that such a blending would compromise TRC testimony's claim to truth.

The witness puppets also remain "contained" within their own space on stage. Contrasting the scale of the performance styles and the stage space creates a radical separation between Ubu and the puppets. Ubu's archaic scatological language, delivered at high volume and with intense physicality, for example, starkly contrasts the quiet sobriety and considerably smaller scale of the

witness puppets.[7] A palpable tension develops at the boundaries demarcating the perpetrator/ Ubu space and the witness/puppet space. The Truth Commission scenes and Ubu's living room scenes approach each other through juxtaposition, but never merge. The witness puppets become part of Ubu's conscience and growing paranoia. They invade his living room, and his dreams. The lights change and Ubu, if still on stage, is only unconsciously aware of the witnesses who stand poised over his sleeping body or behind the chairs of his living room. Ubu's interaction with the puppets is never direct. Ma and Pa Ubu's dramatic space represent Ubu's actions, while the space inhabited by the witness puppets and the animated film backdrop represents his conscience. Showering in the "translation booth", for example, Ubu seems to cleanse himself of the words of the witnesses, as body parts swirl down the drain on the animated film backdrop. Never are the witness puppets conjured at Ubu's own volition. With the help of the animation, they haunt him as a nightmare.

The animated film backdrop, a combination of line drawings and documentary footage, intermingled with scenes from South Africa's written and unwritten history, augment the impact of the puppet's testimony with disturbing graphic imagery and sound. Scenes of torture roll past a dancing tripod that wears different heads – a camera, a dog, a megaphone, a TV – taunting Ubu at every turn. Eyes follow him everywhere, the line drawing of the eye often replaced by a live eye, lid drawn back, wide with horror. The eyes not only succeed in increasing Ubu's paranoia, but practically command the audience to open their eyes to the truth. It is not only Ubu's conscience but the audience's being awakened.

The illusion of separate spaces is maintained when the puppets' interrupt the flow of action on stage. Their testimonies are not interwoven with the "plotline", but remain narrations rather than dramatizations. As in *Ubu,* performance of testimony in *The Story* is contained within a temporally and spatially defined space in the play. The flow of action that precedes these testimonies is as follows: six people are in a *kombi*[8] taxi on their way to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They chat about various things, having petty arguments until the subject turns to the topic of the Truth Commission. At this point, the only white actor in the group, who plays an ex-conscript, gets in an argument with one of the black actors, who is playing an ex-freedom fighter. The argument is about forgiveness and responsibility. The two step out of the taxi and are about to come to blows when the scene breaks and the testimonies begin. The actors and two out of three witnesses recede to chairs at the back of the stage while one witness remains forward with one actor, who plays the Commissioner.

When the witnesses are through, the argument picks up where it left off only this time, outside of the "TRC" space of the play and instead within "the plot". The ex-conscript tells his story of being forced into the army, not knowing what he had signed up for, and suffering ever since from post-traumatic stress disorder. He confronts his challenger with the question, "What if it had been you? Can you say you would have done any differently?"

This play presents itself as a debate about reconciliation, but it also presents a challenge to the clear demarcations between victim and perpetrator, fiction and reality. By presenting the most challenging moments of the argument only after the TRC testimonies, the writers test the capacity of the TRC to affect the humanitarian sensibilities of the public, a prerequisite for forming a unified, or at least harmonious, society. The TRC testimonies function to create emotional and empathetic flow toward the victims. The debate between the freedom fighter and ex-conscript takes place outside the time/space of the testimonies as does the company's engagement in post-performance discussion with the audience following the performance. The spaces of theatre and everyday life, or theatre and the TRC, are intended to mutually influence and implicate one another, but not to merge.

Containing testimony

If the body is in part responsible for the "loss of control" over speech, then the body's ability (or inability) to "contain" testimony becomes significant. In *Ubu and the Truth Commission* the substitution of puppet bodies for human bodies effectively "contains" speech "out of control." Puppets do not react spontaneously or exhibit emotion in the same way as human flesh. They have no memory.[9] That puppets as solid objects signify the desire to "control" or "contain" evidence is demonstrated in a most literal way by the handbag-puppets who are a combination between props of Ma and Pa Ubu and full characters. Pa Ubu's henchmen are played by a three-headed dog puppet with a briefcase for a body, and Ma Ubu's handbag, a crocodile also with a bag for a body, is a family pet. Each are fed evidence of Pa Ubu's nightly killing and torture sprees.[10] Pa Ubu hopes to frame his henchmen as solely responsible by planting some of the evidence in their briefcase body. The bulk of it he had already fed to Niles the Crocodile.[11] When the puppet crocodile handbag has a stomachache, Ma Ubu decides to investigate what Pa has been feeding it and discovers the evidence intact.

Unlike the handbag-puppets that contain material evidence, the puppet-witnesses carry out the task of "containing" testimony. The choice to use puppets as witnesses was an ethical one according to director, William Kentridge:

> What is our responsibility to the people whose stories we are using as raw fodder for the play? There seemed to be an awkwardness in getting an actor to play the witnesses – the audience being caught halfway between having to believe in the actor for the sake of the story, and also not believing in the actor for the sake of the actual witness who existed out there, but was not the actor. Using a puppet made this contradiction palpable. There is no attempt to make the audience think the wooden puppet or manipulator is the actual witness. The puppet becomes a medium through which the testimony can be heard (Taylor 1998: xi).

Kentridge implies that since the puppet does not add its own living body and memory to the story, it succeeds in communicating without appropriating. The puppet "contains" the testimonial repetition by not fully appropriating the testimony from the memory of the "real" body. The use of the puppet prevents "the body" from "speaking" in ways unintended by the speaker. The use of puppets to play victims could also be seen as an unethical choice since the puppets reduce victims to "small" people with no agency and permanently pathetic expressions on their faces. Puppets speak to us from that "other-space" of death. The indication is that victims, like puppets, are dead to us until they speak. We are focused on that which speaks through them. The puppet animator speaks through the puppet. Suffering speaks through the victim. Nevertheless, this overexaggeration of "victimness" doubling the media images of victims from the TRC hearings may also allow some audience members to imagine the distance traveled between this portrayal of victimhood and the real people who survived these experiences.

The directors of *The Story I am About to Tell* faced similar difficulties in avoiding the reiteration of violence as witnesses performed their own stories. These real witnesses, possessing live bodies and memories, presented high risks of reiterating violence on their own bodies and on those in the audience who might have had similar experiences.

Such a difficult and potentially traumatic task of delving into painful memories on a regular basis did warrant some means of keeping those memories in check to prevent their overcoming the witnesses as they spoke. The testimony needed to be “contained” and, in this case, the script provided the container. Although the witnesses were the “real people” who experienced the stories, they were also first-time actors who had memorized a script.

The script can only attempt to contain verbal speech, but not the body’s speech. The witnesses’ traumatic experiences spoke through their body movements. Focusing on the script may have distracted their minds from returning to the event to retrieve the next line, but the body’s memory still intruded. For Duma Khumalo especially, being an actor in control of his story was difficult. If he sometimes forgot his lines, it is because he had psychologically left the arena of the stage during these moments and actually relived the event (Khumalo 2000). Duma Khumalo wrung his

hands as he told the story of his experience on death row. The audience could see the monotony he described, the daily marchings to the scaffold and the sound of the chains. Thandi Shezi covered her face with her hands inadvertently as she spoke about her rape. The shame she described in her testimony that forced her to keep silent for so long was clearly remembered in her gesture. Catherine Mlangeni rocked back and forth as she relayed the story of her son whose head was blown apart by a walkman he received in the mail.[12] Speaking conjures an embodied memory of violence, from which the body tries to protect or comfort itself. That these survivors are willing to tell their story in public night after night takes an extraordinary strength and is something they find to be healing, but healing does not come without its pain.

Language as puppetry

Language choice also became a means to establish a more comfortable separation between narration and memory. Both at the Truth Commission and in the play, witnesses were permitted to tell their stories in the language of their choice. All three remained consistent with the languages they had chosen for their TRC appearances, but language choice seemed to be motivated by different reasons for each of them. Khumalo had begun his testimony before the Commission in both English and Sesotho. At the TRC the audience wore headphones in order to hear simultaneous translation. Finally, at the urging of the Commissioners to stick to one language so as not to confuse the translators, he chose Sesotho. In the play the "Truth Commissioner" facilitating the testimony also translated testimony into English. For Khumalo, Sesotho better captured the emotional trauma of Khumalo's experience having been returned to life only hours before his scheduled death. Having been wrongly accused of blowing up a government building in Sharpeville during the rent strikes, Khumalo wanted most to clear his name. In recalling his experience on death row at the TRC, Sesotho seemed most natural even if it increased the chance that he might relive the trauma as he told it. In pleading his innocence, however, English seemed more appropriate as he was directing this part of his testimony toward official channels, which were unlikely to speak Sesotho.

Language choice, thus, was not just a defense mechanism, but a political strategy. While it is true that Catherine Mlangeni is more comfortable in Zulu than she is in English, her decision not to use English may have been motivated by her expressed desire to address others who suffered like her and to try to offer comfort (Mlangeni 1997). One of her lines on stage says that she wants to tell her story "because it is also your story." Thandi Shezi, however, belonged to the organised resistance, which may have affected her choice to use English.[13] The purpose of her TRC testimony was to empower other women and to try to effect change:

> …our Government must make a women [sic] centre where women can go and voice their innermost feelings and concern, because it would seem in most cases our government looks after male needs and I think we played a very important role in the struggle and the history (Shezi 1997b).

In talking to Shezi, however, it became clear that her motivations for using English were not only political, but emotional. She had thought carefully about the difficulties of speaking her story in public. Both before the Truth Commission and the play, she chose to tell the story in English because the story was too emotional in Zulu. She said she would not have been able to control her tears. The words were too long in Zulu, she explained – the word for "bitch", for example, and "rape" (Shezi 1997a). In Shezi's case, the use of English was almost as if she used a puppet to relay her story. The English language, like the puppet body, was just a vehicle of narration but it remained separate from her body and her speech where the violence lived.

Imag(in)ing Reconciliation

Both *Ubu* and *Story* were developed in 1996 while the so-called "victims" hearings were in full force, while South African citizens (more blacks than whites)[14] still tuned in each night to watch the tears flow. Amnesty hearings, where "confessions" were to be made, had barely begun once these plays had their premieres.[15] The victims hearings appealed to audiences at the level of their humanity, leaving them with burning questions: How could one human being do this to another? Was reconciliation even a remote possibility? The perpetrator's side of the story remained in an imaginary state while these plays were written and therefore much greater liberties could be taken with these roles. These roles were fictionalized in ways to help answer the question: Was there, could there be anything forgivable in their behavior? Was there a deeper truth?

In addition to playing upon an audience's potential sympathy toward the victim, both *The Story I Am About to Tell* and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* attempt to inspire an identification with the perpetrator, not in the moment of perpetration, but in moments of just being human. Dan Robbertse's character of an ex-conscript in *The Story* was constructed to elicit just such a response. Unlike the testimonies of Catherine Mlangeni, Thandi Shezi and Duma Khumalo in *The Story I am About to Tell*, Robbertse's character of an ex-conscript was purely fictional. Moreover, Robbertse is an actor, so his story was therefore precluded from being told within the same staged space as the other TRC testimonies. The testimonial space is preserved as one of "truth" and "reality". Since Robbertse plays a "perpetrator", and his story is fictional, he tells it outside the space designated for victims' true life testimonies. But in that he tells a personal story about how he was forced into the army, and he also positions himself as part victim. He struggles not only with his past, but with his present. His story, though fictional for him, is true for many others.

In *Ubu and the Truth Commission,* the character of *Ubu* is also fictionalised, borrowed from Jarry's fictional *Ubu Roi.* Superimposed onto the TRC, Jarry's Ubu seems at once to belong and not to belong. As a figure imported from a previous century, he disrupts the "real-time" of the Truth Commission in session during the run of the production. As an "uber" figure of evil – Ubu's farcical character rings true in contemporary South Africa.

In the production, however, the force of evil that is Ubu is humbled and humanised. Ubu is even shown to be a victim of his own Ubu-ness. As part of his creative process, Kentridge stood naked in front of a mirror, trying out Ubuesque postures and emotions on his own body and drawing them in black and white, to look like chalk on a chalkboard. A set of drawings resulted, which formed the basis for the image and characterization of Ubu. In these drawings, Kentridge superimposed his vulnerable, pathetic Ubu self-portraits, sketched from his mirror poses upon Jarry's classic Ubu character, outlined in white chalk against a black background. The Jarry figure is so lumbering and rotund that the Kentridge poses are often able to fit right inside the lines. By his bold and heinous acts, Jarry's Ubu becomes both an externalised and an internalised force victimizing the Kentridge Ubu.[16]

In the play the two Ubu figures from the drawings, Jarry's Ubu and Kentridge's autobiographical Ubu, fuse into one. Instead of an oversized bombastic figure, the Ubu of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* appears to us as a figure of humiliation in white undershirt and underwear, clearly derived from Kentridge's physical and psychological stripping process. The Jarryesque language and character remains, but the physique does not. As with the witness puppets, body and speech operate on separate planes. Jarry's Ubu figure retains visitation rights, however. The Jarry figure appears in the animated backdrop scenes and as Pa Ubu's own "ancestral spirit" who comes to comfort him and offer encouragement before his hearing.

It is significant that Kentridge portrays Ubu as a redeemable character (even more so in his drawings than in the play rescripted by Taylor). It is the handbag puppets, after all, that contain his political and psychological baggage,[17] but as a separate entity from their possessor. It is as if Ubu, once separated from his "baggage", can be free. Once we see Ubu's gloating smile as he rides off in the sunset with Ma, it seems the director has decided not to redeem Ubu after all, just to accept him.

Both plays find the greater challenge to the broader society, including both victims and sympathetic bystanders, to be the recognition of the perpetrator as human. Societal change will not come about if audiences only stand for empathetic listeners. Audience members readily

identify with victims because they imagine the perpetrator as "not me," but by making the victims' imaginary space impenetrable either by using "unreal" puppets, or overly "real" people, the audience is forced to consider the victim "not me" and the perpetrator "not, not me."[18]

Refusing victimhood

In *Ubu and the Truth Commission* Ma Ubu becomes a pivotal figure directly counteracting the TRC-defined role of "victim" by facing her domestic opponent head on. Ma Ubu is the point of contact between the spaces of the witnesses and that of Pa Ubu; she is the conduit between Ubu's conscience and his actions.

The antagonistic domestic relationship of Ma and Pa Ubu imported from Alfred Jarry here can be read as a metaphor for the South African political struggle, past and present. This reading does not alone arise from the casting of a black actor as Ma Ubu and a white actor as Pa Ubu, but from the unequal power relationship signified by gender in a domestic relationship, and from the subtle alignment of Ma Ubu with the puppet figures.[19] Victims and perpetrators testifying before the TRC about gross human rights violations do not adhere to such a clear racial divide; but the past, defined in the sweeping legal terms of apartheid which governed everyday life, placed all “Blacks” in a subordinate position to all “Whites”. The struggle was *and is* not only about gross human rights violations, but the everyday dehumanization of the majority of South Africa's population.

A multiracial casting in the "new" South African context, exhibits complex, changing relations of power. Under South Africa’s new Constitution, Ma and Pa Ubu are no longer an illegal pair as they would have been under the Immorality Act.[20] In the “new“ democratic South Africa, an African Ma and Afrikaner Pa are "equal" partners dwelling together in the same domain. Instead of signifying inequality through race, past and lingering racial inequality is signified by conventional dictates of gender. As a woman, if not as an African, Ma Ubu is still “servant” to Pa, expected to do all the cooking and cleaning. At the outset of the play, a puppet is stirring a pot of soup in the middle of the stage. Pa Ubu bursts in exclaiming “Pschitt”, just as Pa Ubu does in the opening of the Jarry play, and kicks over the puppet and the soup, spilling it everywhere. Ma Ubu who emerges to play out the scene with Pa is blamed for the mess he “tripped” over and the consequent pain in his foot**.** This is the first association between Ma Ubu and the puppet witnesses. Ma breaks character to travel back and forth between the puppet realm where she functions as a manipulator, or as a translator, and Ubu’s realm where she can be read as the puppet-witnesses' advocate.

The South African Ubu play follows almost a similar trajectory of Jarry's play down to the dinner scene, but superimposed onto the South African context, it takes on new meanings. While in Jarry's play Ma makes dinner for Ubu and his associates, in the South African version it is just an intimate dinner between the two of them. A puppet sets up a *spaza* shop[21] right in the middle of their dining room table. Both Ma and Pa Ubu help themselves from the spaza shop and load up their dinner plates. Instead of food products, however, they choose cleaning products, a subtle reminder of Ubu's shower scene mentioned earlier. In this scene, Ma, like the puppets, signifies the presence of Ubu's own conscience.

> PA UBU: *(Eating, muttering aloud)* First thing tomorrow, we'll remove the evidence and blow up his arse.
> MA UBU: Well, at last! Then you can bury the bones.
> PA UBU: *(Startled, looks up at Ma Ubu)* What?
> MA UBU: I said, you can dig over that patch at the back and clear out the stones.
> PA UBU: Aaaaah, Of course.
>
> *Ma and Pa Ubu begin to help themselves from the Spaza shop, and eat. Ma Ubu examines the price on one item.*
>
> MA UBU: I see that prices are still rising.
> PA UBU: What uprising?
> MA UBU: Today, everything costs an arm and a leg.
> PA UBU: I had nothing to do with it!
> MA UBU: Pass me the salt.
> PA UBU: Who said it was assault? (Taylor 1998:29)

When Pa chooses a box of poison and blames Ma for poisoning his food (instead of the puppet), the puppet as invisible and without agency is reiterated, but Ma becomes their flesh and blood representative. This scene was also inspired by Jarry's Ubu, where Ma Ubu plays with Ubu's conscience on purpose. Having set out on her own separate mission to kill the Tsar of Poland and steal the treasure, she ends up taking shelter in the same cave as Pa Ubu:

> MA UBU: Let's take advantage of the situation and the darkness. Let's pretend to be a supernatural apparition and make him promise to forgive our peculations.
>
> PA UBU: But by St. Anthony, someone's speaking! By God's third left, I'll be hanged if someone isn't speaking.
>
> MA UBU: (*in a great hollow voice*). Yes, Mister Ubu, someone is indeed speaking, and with the tongue of the archangel's trumpet that shall summon the dead from their graves to meet their judgement! Listen to that terrible voice. It is the voice of the archangel, Gabriel who is incapable of giving anything but good advice. (Taylor 1998:49)

After first meeting some difficulty in trying to convince Ubu how virtuous and faithful she is as a wife, she moves on to more pressing matters, only once again, to serve her own needs. Pa Ubu's protests and excuses already sound familiar from some of the TRC's amnesty hearings:

MA UBU: You killed King Wencelas.

PA UBU: That wasn't *my* fault, oh no, it was Ma Ubu who egged me on.

MA UBU: You not only broke your promise to M'Nure, you killed him as well.

PA UBU: I'd rather it was me than him that reigned Lithuania. For the moment it's neither of us. At least you can see it's not me.

MA UBU: There is only one way for you to gain redemption of your sins.

PA UBU: What's that? I wouldn't at all mind becoming a holy man, in fact I'd like to be a bishop and see my name in the calendar.

MA UBU: You must forgive Madam Ubu for having pocketed a little bit of your spare cash.
(Taylor 1998:51)

Ma's defiance, sometimes accompanied by a backdrop of documentary footage of crowds of black freedom fighters *toyi-toyi*-ing[22] towards Pa, constitutes a fluid historical hazing of the eras of "struggle" and "freedom" that the TRC allegedly divides. Ma Ubu's direct confrontations with Pa Ubu as "the oppressor", in struggle discourse, or "the perpetrator", in TRC discourse, restores the continuity between anti-apartheid black resistance and TRC "victims".

Later, when Ma Ubu sells Ubu's secrets to television to secure her old age, the puppets are, in fact, able to move beyond the image that confines them as "victims" of human rights violations and triumph over their oppressor. As in the post-election period when some struggle leaders were branded "gravy-trainers" as they quickly rose to positions of power and wealth (and true to her namesake in Alfred Jarry's play), Ma Ubu's image as a leader of the struggle shatters as she ultimately satisfies her own greed. Discovering Pa's evidence in her Crocodile handbag, she decides to sell his secrets to television and get rich. Pa catches her on television. This is staged by projecting and enlarging Ma's head on the animation screen, Ubu stands dwarfed and cowering before her. Ma Ubu even wears white face and imitates the voice and mannerisms of a white celebrity to signify her power.

SCREEN MA: (To TV Interviewer) When I discovered what he had been doing all these years, you could have knocked me down with a feather.

Pa talks back to the television screen, which is not literally a TV, but a large projection as if it were his own conscience.

PA UBU: What are you talking about?

SCREEN MA: I have maps, and plans, and names, important names.

PA UBU: Madam! Those are official secrets.

SCREEN MA: And cheque books, and films, and tapes , and so many things. He knew everyone.

PA UBU: If I go down you go down with me.

Ma is able to hear Ubu and talk back at him through the TV, again suggesting that this is an argument that each of them has internalised. The reading of Ma as representative of a black resistance leader here and Pa as an apartheid oppressor is signified by the switch into Xhosa and Afrikaans:

SCREEN MA: (*Screaming at Pa Ubu* [in Xhosa]) Why are you belittling me in front of all these people? Do you know my reason for being here is to be interviewed on television? And now you're mocking me in front of all these people. You are a pest, a bloody pest! I wasn't aware you were such a nuisance. You are never going to make a fool of me. That doesn't happen easily. You're so rude. You have inherited this rudeness from your mother.

PA UBU: (*Screaming at Ma Ubu* [in Afrikaans]) You stupid thing – what the fuck are you doing? You've killed us – don't you know what is going on? Who the hell do you think I am? I'm going to throw you against the wall so hard your teeth will fall out. You bloody piece of biltong.[23] Come on—I'll show you who's a man! Come on! Your mother's arse…!

Ubu struggles to retain his manhood by threatening to beat the woman into place as Jarry's character was also a wife beater. Having crossed the barriers from the private domestic realm over to the public TV screen, Ma reenters the domestic realm in her newly fashioned position of power.[24]

MA UBU: Oh! Ahhh – ummm, Good Day, Pa.

PA UBU: She Greets Me! The two-face sow greets me! (*Murderously under his breath*) Curse you, Madam, for your betrayal. A wife is such a nuisance that we resolve never to marry. Only now it's too late, because we are already married, and thus you have made a liar of us and we are entitled to bash you.

MA UBU: What are you going on about you great bladder?

PA UBU: You've stolen our best defence, which was the record of our offence. We have nothing left to bargain with. (Taylor 1998:65)

Ma's betrayal simultaneously makes reference to the Jarry play as well as Dirk Coetzee, the Vlaakplas commander who exposed his successor Eugene de Kock and the whole Vlakplaas operation in 1989. De Kock had plans to kill Coetzee in return, but ultimately was unable to carry out the plan.

MA UBU: But Pa, I did it for us.

In the context of South Africa, Ma could be saying that it is better to come forward than to wait to be caught since he would have a chance at amnesty. There may also be a veiled reference to reconciliation here and the new South Africa, where victims and oppressors continue to live in the same country.

> PA UBU: Do you think we were born yesterday? You did it for yourself. My father always said never trust a woman unless you can fill her purse.
>
> MA UBU: He wasn't talking about money, Pa! But what do you know of a woman's needs? (Taylor 1998:67)

She has just insulted his masculinity.

> PA UBU: We know they need to be beaten and then scrambled.
>
> MA UBU: No, stinkpot, not any more. I won't take it. No more threats I have too much on you. (Taylor 1998:67)

The truth is her weapon. She may not get justice, but she will bring him down. He will be forced to apply for amnesty to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

When Pa receives amnesty and Ma and Pa Ubu ride off into the sunset together at the end, we are not sure who has won. As his accomplice, Ma has won a chance to live happily ever after with her husband. As the victims' representative, she has won the struggle, dismantled the apartheid power structure, beat the National Party in democratic elections and inherited a peaceful South Africa with a possible future reconciliation to come.

To understand how the witnesses in *The Story I am About to Tell* resist victimhood, it is important to recognize how the "real" witnesses used testimony as a strategy of resistance on the "real" stage of the TRC. When Shezi testified before the TRC, while attending Khulumani Support Group and workshopping *Story*, she expressed her keen awareness that repetition constitutes meaning, and that her existence was therefore constituted and defined by her participation in both the TRC and in the play.

> I do want people to empathize with me and share the pain with me, but I do not want them to reduce me to an object and see me as just nothing. I realize that in many times that when an actor is – when an actor is acting in The Story they tend to identify that character as the actor's doing. People associate that person with that story. But I also think that I will fall into that role of being identified with that kind of character, you sort of seen The Story where people identify with the particular character (Shezi 1997b).

The theatre, as Shezi describes it, is one that conditions future repetitions of her name to signify "that person who played herself in *The Story I am About to Tell* where she repeated her own testimony before the TRC about her rape…".

Shezi's testimony at the TRC is already ritualised as it follows a prescribed structure, and bears repetition with its special status as a "moment of truth." The ritualised aspect of the Commission and the play may fix her identity as a rape victim, yet another meaning or "moment" of that ritual is found in Shezi's adding her own self-reflection to her story, and thus exceeding the prescriptions of the TRC. Following Butler's argument that if repetition has the ability to break language free from a previous context and redirect meaning, then Shezi's opportunity in the play is to further demonstrate that she has transformed her story from the source of her victimhood, to a source of strength.

The special hearings for women in July of 1997 were conducted in response to critiques that the TRC was not sufficiently addressing gender differences, and that witnesses, particularly women, were being written into history only as victims.[25] The style of the women's hearings resembled the struggle rallies of the anti-apartheid movement. The hearing opened with songs and poems by celebrated storyteller Gcina Mhlophe. She sang songs about women, about storytelling, and performed poetry about struggle. During the struggle, oral poetry was very common at political rallies as a way of gaining the audience's attention and stirring the spirit of unity amongst "the people". Shezi's testimony at the women's hearings on July 27 1997, was preceded by two sung poems and then a spoken poem by Mhlophe. These two poems also formed part of a "storytelling" performance Mhlophe gave at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival in July 1998 in which she told the "ancestral" tales of "The Crocodile Spirit" and "The Queen of Imbira". Mhlophe often combines celebratory poems with political poems, which presumably is what makes them appropriate for both contexts. The stage is never too far from the real in South Africa, nor the real far from the stage. The first was a sung poem:

> Where do they come from, Tell me, tell me, where do they come from. Tales so brave, tales so strong, Tell me, where do they come from, Tales so brave, tales so strong. Some are so funny, so crazy, unbelievable, some are so funny, so crazy, unbelievable. They come from the bones of memory. Watch my eyes, hear my voice, I tell you true. These tales are from the bones of memory. These tales are from the bones of memory, of memory, of memory, of memory, from the bones of memory, from the bones of memory, from the bones of memory, from the bones of memory. (http://www.truth.org.za/special/women/shezi.htm)

"The Crocodile Spirit" is actually a political story about forced removals and so these preliminary poems remind leaders on the eve of the second democratic elections not to forget the struggle.

Mhlophe also recited "Leader Remember" at both the women's hearings and the Grahamstown performance. Here is just an excerpt:

> Leader Remember the time you spent fighting for your freedom and that of your people. The time you played hide and go seek with your oppressor men
> Till they caught you at last
> Put you in chains and lead irons
> Threw you in jail
> Believing in his heart, that you'll never again see the light of day
> Leader Remember how strongly you fought your freedom-loving spirit kicking hard and refusing to die. Your vision for a better day, giving you power and endurance immeasurable.
> (http://www.truth.org.za/special/women/shezi.htm)

Building on a previous context of resistance, the structure of these hearings may have been designed to help shape both the delivery and reception of women's testimony as that of fighters and survivors, while also providing the comfort and strength that can be derived from poetry.

As a play, the *The Story I am About to Tell* was specifically directed at communities who lie beyond the reach of the Truth Commission's publicity efforts. By performing the play, witnesses empowered themselves to inform people about the TRC and to come forward to tell their own stories. Their mission carried hopes of improving their lives through reparations, unburdening themselves of the suffering they carry, and rewriting history for the benefit of future generations. By traveling to far-reaching townships and rural areas, *The Story I am About to Tell* let other people suffering in silence know that they were not alone, while also offering a model of how to survive. While allegedly a play about encouraging people to go to the TRC, it also embodied a critique of the TRC by performing outside the TRC's institutional framework. For the Khulumani members who elected to participate in *The Story,* this exercise in repetition successfully reversed any perceptions of their victimhood. Repeating their stories in public meant taking an active role in their own healing and helping to heal others.

Healing, confession, closure, conclusion

Participation in Khulumani demonstrated that healing could not occur only by testifying before the TRC. Through their experiences in counseling sessions, where they told their stories before empathetic listeners rather than through media cameras at a faceless mass audience, these witnesses, who participated and performed in *The Story,* learned about the potential healing effects of telling their stories. Where the script may have been inadequate in itself as a controlling device, their access to counseling throughout the period of their testimony before the

TRC and participation in the play helped them to deal with any trauma these experiences may have caused, as well as the resurfacing of previous trauma.

Healing, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub repeatedly illustrate in their book, *Testimony*, requires an active listener, one who participates in the testimonial process. Laub writes:

> To a certain extent, the interviewer-listener takes on the responsibility for bearing witness that previously the narrator felt he bore alone, and therefore, would not carry out. It is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener, which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing. This joint responsibility is the source of the reemerging truth (Laub 1992:85).

In other words, for healing to result from the performative act of testimony, there must be a listener who actively receives the testimony and to the extent it is possible, the listener shares in the experience being described, as well as in the experience of describing it.

Whether the intent of the testimony is healing, truth-telling or both, it is carried out by testimony's status as a performative speech act. J.L. Austin (1962:5) describes a performative speech act as one which "does something" through its very utterance. There are certain conditions that must be met, however. In many instances, certain thoughts and feelings must accompany the act or reciprocal actions must be performed. A bet must be accepted, for example. A gift must be received (ibid:8-9). If these conditions are not met, the performative is "unhappy"; in other words, the utterance fails to "perform" whatever function it was meant to have (ibid:14). Testimony is such a speech act. If healing is to result, then reciprocal action must accompany the testimony. The same can be said of confession. If reconciliation, as in forgiveness, is to take place between survivors and perpetrators, then confessions, too, can only achieve closure through the participation of a listener-absolver.

At the TRC, verifying truth is the job of the Truth Commissioners exclusively. The Commissioners have also been empowered with the job of participant-listener and of listener-absolver. Yet, there often remains a doubt as to whether amnesty applicants have spoken the truth. Even the testimony of witnesses who are still experiencing trauma becomes suspect. The original event is no longer accessible through memory. The listener becomes increasingly aware of what is missing in the story. Testimony and confession, threaten to spin out of control, repeating themselves ceaselessly in an impossible quest for truth. As J. M. Coetzee (1992:273) observes, confession always leaves the listener with the feeling that they have seen a deeper truth than the speaker, which therefore perpetuates the cycle of confession. Also, if, as Cathy Caruth (1995:8) asserts, trauma is experienced only through forgetting, that is, through the

return of what has been repressed, then the repetition of the stories through acts of theatre and literature may be looked at as a sign of trauma, because they are born at the moment of forgetting, a sense that there is a missing piece, a sense of having been there, but somehow missed the experience. Testimony can retrieve only the last repetition in an endless series of repetitions. The difficulty is that in the interest of expedient closure, the citizens' potential role as participant-listener and the citizen-survivors' role as potential absolver have been usurped by the Commissioners, and, therefore, outside in the public sphere, the testimonial speech act may have no meaning. Testimony is meaningful only in as much as it speaks the truth. Citizens must be able to accept the truth of the testimony before the speech act can fulfill its intention, whether that be healing or judgment.

The structure and legislative rhetoric of the TRC suggests that truth, not remorse, effectively constitutes a confession. No remorse is required for amnesty. This represents a point of view Paul de Man might condone. For de Man, contrition is not required for confession as that would make the confession unverifiable. Only facts are verifiable whereas remorse relies on word alone. Confession, in de Man's view, can only be a statement of fact. Probably trying to justify his own silence about his antisemitic writing World War II, de Man says that to try to excuse oneself for an action is already to belie that truth and undermine the confession. In his critique of Rousseau's Confessions[26]. The difficulty with confession is its simultaneous attempt to convey the truth and to excuse the speaker-doer. De Man thus specifies a distinction between confession delivered to reveal truth and one delivered as an "excuse", where the former makes reference to a verifiable object or event, and the latter is self-contained within language where we have to take the speaker's word for it (1979:280). Without speaking the truth, the speaker cannot be excused, but speaking the truth becomes impossible because the aspiration to be absolved outweighs the aspiration to tell the truth. Any attempt to make the act look excusable, such as citing the strong social pressure on young Afrikaner men to join the army, therefore showing that their actions once in the army were "forced" on them, or what might have been the pressure that de Man felt from German officials to write the columns that he did, would displace the blame to an outside influence.

In the introduction to the published script, Jane Taylor refers to the character of Ubu as an "aspect, a tendency, an excuse" (1997:iv). One wonders if she did not consciously or unconsciously have in mind de Man's use of the word. Taylor's slur would point not so much to a philosophical assertion on the nature of empirical versus unempirical truth, but as a comment specifically on the TRC's inability to extract the truth from the "confessants", here acting under the name, "perpetrators". Ubu excuses himself, "We were only doing our job" (p.55), he says.

According to de Man, with this excuse, he precludes the possibility of telling the truth. Accepting culpability, without expressing remorse, is the truth in confession.

But I would maintain that showing remorse should not be treated with the same disdain as making an excuse. For de Man, an excuse is inserted, it is because the truth alone is not excusable, not the least of which because it may be unverifiable in motive if not in fact (p.283). Many are finding the same difficulty with the TRC. Truth is not enough. Forgiveness seems only within the realm of possibility if the perpetrators show remorse. An excuse in the form of an explanation, often still does not suffice. The problem with excuses that constitute an explanation rather than an apology is that they do not require a reciprocal action of forgiveness. In several African languages spoken in South Africa, reconciliation is a two-way process. If someone says, "I forgive you," it means that you expect an apology. The speech act, in this case, works in reverse. The apologee can initiates forgiveness before receiving an apology, but the speech act is only completed when the guilty person apologizes (Ernest 2000). If the guilty party has not confessed, in the sense of accepting culpability, then there is nothing to forgive. Remorse is an expression proper to confession because it means that the confession does not end until the confessant is forgiven. To confess is to relinquish control of the result and to offer the listener a chance to reach beyond the logic of law.

Remorse is a demonstration of what J.M. Coetzee (1985:260) sees as the moment of self-knowledge, when one sees and learns what one is capable of and feels shame. Without this conversion, which leaves the acting self, the one who committed the act, behind and separate from the narrating self, then how can we expect the violence to end? How will the conversion to human rights culture take place?

We could say, following Coetzee that at the TRC the problem is that the secular and the religious functions of confession are confused.[27] Coetzee says that in a religious confession, there is a “confessor”, someone to absolve the sinner. At the TRC, the Commissioners, or Archbishop Tutu when and where available, would act as such a confessor, although the Commissioners were not the victims, and the victims have not expressly given them that power to absolve. In the secular confession there is no one empowered to absolve the sinner. With only a false absolution, the confession is bound to repeat itself in search for a greater truth that will be forgiven (Coetzee 1985:253). A secular confession perennially has this problem and thus, the ending seems arbitrary and somehow dissatisfying.

In the quest for closure, testimony may be reperformed in another context, such as the theatre, in order to rehearse the desired result. The two plays discussed in this chapter function as performative repetitions of the TRC. Rather than refer to the TRC, these plays *perform* the TRC. The condition of performance potentially casts the audience in a role of active listener, rather than passive spectator[28] by virtue of the fact that there is no Commissioner or other absolver-by-proxy on stage.

Audiences of *Ubu* were visibly uncomfortable with the ending. It seemed quick, surprising. It is possible that the playwrights themselves had difficulty with this ending. If the object was to leave the audience with a distinct feeling of disgust for the amnesty hearings and for Ubu, then it was successful. But tacked on and sudden, it unnerved people. Such a jarring and abrupt ending potentially provokes the audience to actively disagree with it while also suggesting that they need to come to terms with the fact that perpetrators by and large will escape punishment and become reintegrated into the fabric of society. The play would seem to demand that the audience condemn and forgive at the same time.

In *The Story I am About to Tell,* the director confessed, they also had trouble with finding a conclusion. They were still not finished with the play when they opened, and more than a year later, the script has yet to be finalised. The difficulty was not only how to end the story but when. If the show was to have a healing effect, then like the TRC, it must have a time limit. As Sarah Nuttall (1998:80) observes, any story of "victimhood" hopes to conclude by achieving recovery. Post-1994 South African autobiographers are under similar pressure to free themselves from the past and have been resorting to "traditional" narrative forms that could lead to resolution through closure, since modernist or postmodernist forms could not (p.82). The TRC also has difficulty with closure. It cannot stage recovery because the stories just open more wounds and more South Africans want their stories told.[29] While it is doubtful that South Africa will ever be "free" of its past, a certain kind of closure is needed – one by which the performative acts of testimony and confession can "succeed" through reciprocal actions of empathetic listening, absolution, and finally, of transformation. The theatre presents opportunities to perform these actions, to some extent foreclosed by the TRC.

The subject matter in *Ubu* and *Story* presents too much that is at stake for all South Africans to operate as secular confessions, ones that have literary value alone. Even as the public listens to Thandi Shezi's story or Duma Khumalo's story, the TRC as a public ritual implies that these are everyone's stories – a history that everyone must share. The anxiety surrounding the containment of TRC testimony is related to the desire never to repeat the violent act that

authored the testimony. Embedded in the TRC is a conversion narrative where South Africa allegedly transitions from an apartheid past to a culture of human rights and democracy.

If healing is to take place, traumatic memories articulated in the public scene of testimony must be reinternalised at both an individual and a collective level. The memory must first be reunited with the survivor so that he or she can recall it at will. As Dori Laub (1992:78) writes:

> There is in each survivor an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life.

More than an individual process, however, the TRC emphasises healing as a collective process. According to South African Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar (1996):

> …we need to heal our country if we are to build a nation which will guarantee peace and stability. A critical question, which involves all of us, is how do South Africans come to terms with the past…There is a commitment to break from the past, to heal the wounds of the past, to forgive, but not to forget and to build a future based on respect for human right. ... we must now embark upon a journey from the past, through our transition and into a new future. …it must be stressed that a commission is a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation.

Repeating and internalising TRC testimony become a means to move through the past into the present. At what point does this process return to an individuated one for the citizens who did not participate directly in the TRC?

South Africa's transition from legalised oppression to a democracy founded upon human rights, redistributes the emphasis on ideologised collective identities to individual identities. The new constitution guarantees the rights of individuals, not of collectives (Baines 1998). A corollary to individual rights is individual accountability. Political motivation, in the TRC's language allows for someone to say I belonged to such and such political party and was acting under orders; in other words, I was acting within the force of the collective. If the TRC's process is going to use a basis of past identity constructions as a method of determining amnesty, then it leaves out an essential requirement that the perpetrator must take responsibility for his or her own actions and renounce affiliation with any group that would sanction the violation of human rights. If a sufficient split between the subject who acted and the subject who narrates has not manifested itself, then the perpetrators are free to gloat with pride during their testimony, as so many have done, re-exerting power over their victims all over again. It is up to alternate endeavors, like literature or theatre, to repeat the scene in order to break the testimony from its previous violent contexts and create a space for change.

Notes

1. The performance history of *Ubu* Roi (1898) began ten years earlier with Le *Pere Ubu* (1888) written by Alfred Jarry at the age of fifteen. *Le Pere Ubu* itself was adapted from *Les Polonais*, a play written by two classmates satirising their physics teacher who they portrayed as an imaginary king of Poland performing insufferable, inhuman antics. *Ubu Roi* was first performed by marionettes, so setting human actors against puppets in the South African version is in keeping with the reversal of intention in the South African version from a theatre of the absurd to a theatre of reality.
2. Theatre-for-development or TFD is a movement in African theatre in which a cultural worker, usually someone trained and educated in theatre, goes into a community to work with people to make theatre around a specific development issue, such as agriculture, sanitation, housing. What defines TFD for writer and practitioner Zakes Mda, is that the people are empowered to create their own solution to the problem which gets worked into the play, rather than having a pre-written script which people memorize and act out. For a definitive work on TFD see Zakes Mda's *When People Play People* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1993). The play is also "workshopped", a technique inherited from the anti-apartheid theatre of Athol Fugard, Barney Simon, Robert Kavanagh among others and the workers theatre movement where a script is written collaboratively by the cast and through improvisational workshops and then shaped into a script by a "scribe". For a discussion of the workshop technique of Athol Fugard, see Crow 1996. For information on workshop techniques of the workers theatre movement, see von Kotze 1984, and for more general discussions, see Holloway 1993 and Fleischman 1990.
3. I am drawing on Derrida's critique of Austin's view that the intention of the speaker and the operation of convention determines the total effect of the performative. Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Limited, Inc*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988 [1972])
4. There have also been special hearings held to investigate the role of institutions, such as business, the media, the judiciary and the health sector, in carrying out the injustices of apartheid. In terms of the amnesty hearings, applicants must also demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Commissioners that their acts were politically motivated or that they were acting under orders of a superior in order to receive amnesty. See Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, http://www.truth.org.za/legal/act9534.htm.
5. In 1999, reparations to individual victims were been rescinded in favor of "symbolic" reparations in the form of community enhancements such as monuments and refurbishment of facilities. It is a highly contested issue.
6. Repetition in the form of oversaturation through the media, however, may desensitize people and cause them to dissociate themselves from the entire process of learning not just what happened, but how and why it happened. Raising awareness of the causes and rationale behind past human rights violations are important for achieving societal reform. Live performance presents the possibility of direct engagement with an audience and in moments convened by mutual agreement, all of which heighten active participation in the events on and beyond the stage.
7. Kentridge and Taylor comment, however, that the more outrageous they made Ubu, the more realistic he became. (Post performance discussion, Public Theatre, New York, 12 September 1998).
8. A *kombi* taxi is a little minivan that proceeds along a given route like a bus, and picks up and drops off people along the way.
9. Butler does not sufficiently theorise the relationship between body and memory although her argument would imply a theory similar to Allen Feldman's in *Formations of Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), and others who have studied violence, in which the violence inscribes its memory on the body. The body's memory can be distinguished from memory articulated through speech.
10. These bags each have autobiographical history. Crocodile's body is a bag that Handspring puppeteer Basil Jones' father carried through the Western Desert as an army officer. The briefcase that forms the body of Ubu's three-headed canine henchman, Brutus, is the very same bag that communist lawyer Bram Fisher gave to William Kentridge's father, Sydney Kentridge, also a famous lawyer, during the Rivonia Treason Trial. Kentridge and the puppeteers claim that the use of these bags came about quite by accident and that there was no deliberate intention to insert autobiographical references into the play (Post performance discussion, Public Theatre, New York, 12 September 1998). Whether or not these references were intentional, they may still provide additional readings for the audience as they did for me.

11. The Handspring puppeteers claim that the crocodile was chosen because of its resemblance to a paper shredder rather than to P.W. Botha's nickname appellation, "the Crocodile", which would also make reference to the evidence that the National Party destroyed regarding security police activities. See Adrienne Sichel, "The Making of 'Ubu' Offers Fragments of Creative Madness." *UBU: ± 101* (exhibition catalogue) edited by Rory Doepel (Johannesburg: The French Institute of South Africa and the Art Galleries of the University of the Witwatersrand, 1997): 27.
12. All observations in this paragraph refer to the performance I saw on August 23, 1997 in Sharpeville, South Africa.
13. During the struggle, the widespread influence of the Black Consciousness Movement encouraged the use of English as a way of appropriating the oppressor's language and creating a unique subject position within it. Using English also counteracted the apartheid "ethnic homelands" policy, which divided people according to language, relegating speakers of the various "Bantu" languages to outer rural areas where resources were scarce, with infertile land that was impossible to farm. The Black Consciousness Movement also emphasized creating unity among the oppressed and using English was one way to overcome language barriers.
14. According to the South African Broadcasting Corporation, the percentage rate of those tuned in to the nightly TRC Special Report (according to apartheid racial classification) corresponds to the hierarchy of suffering that apartheid established. In 1996, 13% of all Africans or 1,16 million, were watching the nightly program, vs. 10% or .17 million Indians, 8,1% or .09 million Coloureds, and 7% or 0,24 million whites. See Gunner Thiessen, "Common Past, Divided Truth: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South African Public Opinion," paper read at *The TRC: Commissioning the Past,* 11-14 June, at University of the Witwatersrand.
15. Eugene de Kock's 20-month trial, before he applied for amnesty before the TRC, had provided enough material to start with.
16. Rory Doepel notes that Kentridge believes that "there is a little Ubu in all of us", and in the program notes to the exhibition, Rory Doepel writes that each of these drawings "forces the viewer to confront his own Ubu-self." See Rory Doepel, "William Kentridge: Ubu Tells the Truth", *UBU: ± 101* edited by Rory Doepel (Johannesburg: The French Institute of South Africa and the Art Galleries of the University of the Witwatersrand, 1997): 10, 12.
17. Sichel makes the same observation in "The Making of 'Ubu' Offers Fragments of Creative Madness." *UBU: ± 101* edited by Rory Doepel (Johannesburg: The French Institute of South Africa and the Art Galleries of the University of the Witwatersrand, 1997): 27.
18. Richard Schechner describes play, ritual, and performance as transitional behavior where the lines between reality and fantasy are blurred. If I am the player, I am "not me" when I am playing, but I am also "not, not me" (1985:110). But as Schechner also points out, in performance, not only does the performer become "not me", but elements that began as" not me", become "me" (1985:111) Here I am using the terms to express the audience's experience as part of the performance. The audience knows that nothing on stage is "me". It is all "not me." But if this is not a Brechtian performance and allows for audience identification with the fantasy on stage, elements on stage that are "not me" will become "me" for the audience, only the "me" will more accurately be expressed as a double negative, "not, not me." Depending on the identification processes at work, the audience member will distinguish at various times, between "not me" and "not, not me."
19. Jane Taylor has said that the double casting of Busi Zokufa as Ma Ubu and puppet manipulator/translator was due to the circumstance of having a small company to work with, but admits that this casting has resulted in a multi-layered resonance given South Africa' political history. (Personal conversation following post-performance discussion, Public Theatre, New York, 12 September 1998).
20. The Immorality Act or Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 forbade interracial marriages and eventually interracial intimacies of any kind.
21. A *spaza* shop is a small convenience shop common to township areas and squatter camps that is usually run out of a home and which sells any essentials not requiring refrigeration.
22. The *toyi-toyi* is a rhythmic protest march/dance accompanied by chanting that has become an emblem of the struggle.
23. Biltong is Afrikaans signifying a snack food of dried meat.
24. This scene also speaks to the pervasive presence and power of the media, a repetition that tends to "recontextualize" testimony with detrimental consequences. Although Pa Ubu's failure to "contain" the evidence within the puppet bodies sends a strong warning that "the truth will out", Ma Ubu's

capitalistic aspirations, and the entertainment value of the perpetrator's "character" have the potential to transform heinous crimes into "good drama".

25. See Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes, "South African Women Demand the Truth" in *What Women do in Wartime: Gender and Conflict in Africa*, edited by Meredith Turshen and Clothide Twagiramariya. (London and New York: Zed Books, 1998).
26. This critique was also an autobiographical critique of himself. De Man was a journalist who used anti-Jewish rhetoric in his columns during the Second World War, claiming that it was just the discourse of the times. See Shoshana Felman, "After the Apocalypse: Paul de Man and the Fall to Silence" in Felman and Laub, *Testimony,* 141-153.
27. I don't only refer, here, to the courtroom atmosphere of the amnesty hearings versus the church-like atmosphere of the "victims" hearings.
28. This is not to say that spectatorship is necessarily passive any more than listenership is necessarily active. Antonin Artaud (1958), Richard Schechner (1973) and August Boal (1979) have all articulated theories of active spectatorship in the context of theatre, and as has Diana Taylor (1997), analyzing political violence and public spectacle in Argentina.
29. Examples are the stories of the Khoisan soldiers for example, who were forced to fight at the border in Angola, see Cheryl Uys, "TRC to probe San war atrocities", *Mail and Guardian,* July 3, 1998, and the story of Wetsho-Otsile Seremane who lost his brother in the ANC Quatro camps, see Wetscho-Otsile Seremane, "Slap in the face from the TRC", *Mail and Guardian,* July 24, 1998.

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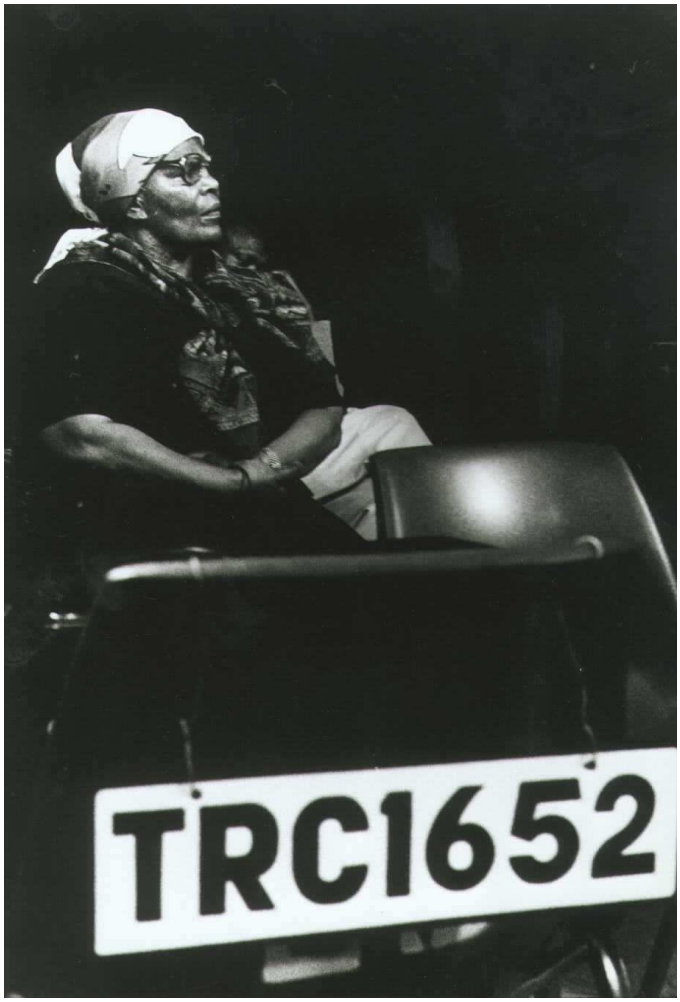
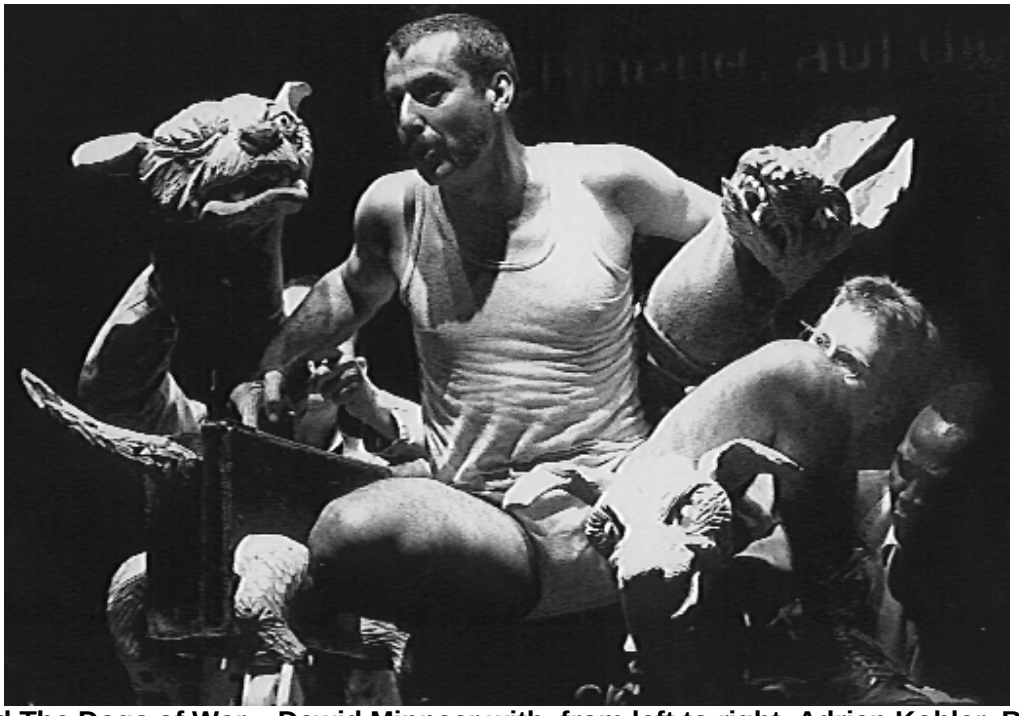
The Story I am About to Tell



Right: Catherine Mlangeni, mother of human rights lawyer, Bheki Mlangeni, whose assasination she tells of in the play. (Photo: Tsheko Kabasia)

Below: Professional actors, Kenneth Nkhosi and Ramolao, with Catherine Mlangeni in the background. They are all members of the Khulumani Support Group, who tell their own stories. (Photo: Tsheko Kabasia)

Ma Ubu Finds out about Pa – Busi Zokufa and Dawid Minnaar (Photo: Ruphin Coudyzer)



Ubu and The Dogs of War – Dawid Minnaar with, from left to right, Adrian Kohler, Basil Jones and Louis Seboko. (Photo: Ruphyn Coudyzer)

The Ubu's – Busi Zokufa and Dawid Minnaar (Photo: T. Lepera)