

**“How do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?”**

Confronting Mass Violence with Art and Memory

**Anson Ching**

for Dr. Erin Baines

Directed Readings Course – Memory and Responsibility During and After Mass Violence

POLI 580, University of British Columbia

This paper links more concretely two major ideas that I discussed in a previous paper, titled as “Creative Imagination for Transformation: The Role of the Poetic and Artful in Transitional Justice”. Specifically, the ideas are covered in two non-sequential sections of the paper, ‘The Narrow Path of Truth Seeking’ and ‘New Imaginaries and What Transformation Entails’ and it is in this paper that I bridge them under the question, *what is the role of art and memory making after mass atrocity?* Specifically, I take up the common theme of structural violence in transitional justice literature and argue that, on top of legal avenues, the role of art – storytelling or simply memory-making – is to compensate for the discrepancy between what Kamari Clarke distinguishes as *legal time* and *social time*. I argue that art has the ability to effect *understanding* in people, beyond the simple acknowledgement of facts or historic knowledge, and that with this comes the possibility for the re-imagination of one’s position towards ongoing structures of mass violence or the legacies of such. In addition, I also argue that art can specifically be a call to action – it can point towards alternate realities; invite transformative dialogue; appeal for strong recovery instead of accepting loss in grief; or simply be a direct act of politics, of political defiance and intervention – which is what Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin point to as *aesthetic action*.

### **DISJUNCTION: SOCIAL TIME AND LEGAL PROCESS**

In law, fact-finding is the privileged process of evidence seeking to arrive at objective truth for the sake of conviction. It is the gathering of all things considered as ‘data’ and therefore emphasizes reliability and credibility.<sup>1</sup> For some, factual precision matters because it helps convince others about *what happened*.<sup>2</sup> It serves undeniable proof to undermine deniers and bolsters credibility of survivors. But despite this, Nora Strejilevich emphasizes that memories of

---

<sup>1</sup> Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, “Venues of Storytelling: the Circulation of Testimony in Human Rights Campaigns,” *Life Writing* 1, no. 2 (2004): 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> Karin Orantes, “The Grand Narrative of Life – An Interview with Tlhalo Radithalo,” *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa*, ed. Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga, and Karin Orantes (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 216.

atrocities often resist the “rigidity of truth” since “it is only by first making peace with the impossibility of comprehension that one can ever begin to comprehend at all.”<sup>3</sup> In *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi similarly casts doubts on the potential of firsthand witnesses’ observations as ever being reliable in legal standards of testimony.<sup>4</sup> There is no telling of the potential of the cruelty and extent of it all. Inevitably, this means personal testimonies have to be conformed or standardized; personal and cultural experience must be transliterated by frameworks of law. As narratives of personal knowledge and experience cannot easily be reduced to mere evidence, this leads to a sort of obscuration of reality for Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith.<sup>5</sup> Thus, official narratives like human rights commission reports consist of simple forensic evidence, without emotion, and as removed as possible from actual experiences of suffering and trauma.<sup>6</sup>

This disjunction between law and social reality is problematized further at a larger scale by Kamari Clarke. For Clarke, legal processes are too *narrow* to address mass atrocities and violence as legal practice results in the persecution and therefore focus of commanders. This focus on “command responsibility” is necessarily inadequate when it comes to addressing the “proximate actors” in human rights violations.<sup>7</sup> For Clarke, legal process – both in an international and state-based sense – is grounded on the individual level and is thus ill-equipped in assigning collective guilt, leading to the lack of potential in remedying associated collective structures of violence.<sup>8</sup> This means that criminal courts “cannot situate crimes historically.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, for Clarke, *legal time* is unable to confront the *social time* or the historicity or

---

<sup>3</sup> Nora Strojilevich, “Beyond the Language of Truth,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2006): 704-705.

<sup>4</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Schaffer and Smith, 6, 9-10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Kamari Clarke, “Refiguring the Perpetrator: Culpability, History and International Criminal Law’s Impunity Gap,” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 19, no. 5 (2015): 593.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 594-596.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 600.

compounding effects of being in the wake of an atrocity or injustice, and she concretely paints this in the example of the ethnic violence that broke out in Kenya in 2007: the ethnic violence can be traced back to Kenyan independence and the boiling frustration many ethnic groups felt from the subsequent land redistribution that seemed to reward certain ethnicities that worked closely with colonial authorities at the expense of those who were at the forefront of challenging colonization.<sup>10</sup>

The argument that Clarke makes is one that advocates for transformative justice. As Paul Gready and Simon Robins explain, this kind of thinking departs from the concept of transitional justice in that it widens the focus from just legal praxis to considering the social, the political, and the everyday; it calls for transformation through social praxis.<sup>11</sup> After all, a focus on individual “acts of violence” will mean losing focus of the larger picture of “chronic structural violence and unequal social relations,” which means losing focus of the larger structural causes of such individual acts.<sup>12</sup> This is why, not wanting us to lose focus of the larger picture, Levy illustrates the structural violence behind the mass violence built into the compound of the concentration camp. Levy’s firsthand account of survival in the camps of the Holocaust depicts how it was mostly only the “privileged prisoners” who survived because to survive the system meant lifting oneself “above the norm,” which is to say that to get the extra morsel of nourishment meant privilege “granted or conquered, astute or violent, licit or illicit.”<sup>13</sup> This is why, similar to Gready and Robins and in parallel with Clarke, Bronwyn Leebaw advocates for *extra-legal* responses as traditional means of dealing with injustice are inadequate for dealing

---

<sup>10</sup> Clarke, 597-600; this leads Clarke to finding what she calls an “impunity gap” in international law, referring to the gap where collective and ongoing crimes are trumped by *individualized* conceptions of guilt-assignment.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Gready and Simon Robins, “From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8 (2014): 340.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>13</sup> Levy, 41.

with *systemic* injustice and mass complicity.<sup>14</sup> Erin Baines also argues on a similar line, advocating going beyond the victim-perpetrator binary of legal processes and instead focusing on the "complexity of responsibility" in war time atrocities.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, for Baines, it could be that the narrow focus on victim-perpetrator actually reinforces systemic relations of power imbalances and exclusion that perpetuate mass violence in the first place; non-legal processes could thus be much more effective in confronting the pre-existing power imbalances that condition gender-based atrocities and which continue to haunt survivors even in the aftermath.<sup>16</sup> Leebaw thus also calls for more innovation that would lead away from simply seeing crime and atrocity simply as deviance from common norms and practices and which account for the fact that victim-perpetrator relationships are often caught up in a larger web of systemic forces and structures.<sup>17</sup> For these scholars, if we do not think critically about transformation, we risk losing sight of the real problem behind mass atrocities. By shifting attention away from the grey zone, we lose focus of structures and systems and only bide our time before more violence erupts.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps another example that may bring more clarity to this idea of a disjunction between law and the historicity surrounding mass violence is the idea of what Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman call 'fugitive justice' for the "singular act" of slavery and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.<sup>19</sup> Best and Hartman pivot from seeing mass atrocity as *events* or *periods of time* to seeing it as a singular and totalizing act that transcends time; slavery transcends the initial act of enslavement and in its wake is the reality of devaluation of black lives and the limits of justice available to black lives echoing across generations. Thus, they present the case of, Cuoango, the freed slave writing in 18<sup>th</sup> century England, who reflects that to live free simply means to play

---

<sup>14</sup> Bronwyn Leebaw, *Judging State Sponsored Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>15</sup> Erin Baines, "'Today I want to Speak Out the Truth': Victim Agency, Responsibility, and Transitional Justice," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015): 318.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 319-320, 327.

<sup>17</sup> Leebaw, 14-16.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman, "Fugitive Justice," *Representations* 92, no. 1 (2005): 1-2.

out “a life lived in loss.”<sup>20</sup> Freedom can never simply be *returned*. It is the opportunity of a new condition overturning a previous condition; one cannot insist on being untouched by their previous suffering as a slave. Christina Sharpe similarly captures this idea with her concept of the *wake*: acts like slavery are not things that just happened in the *past* for “the past that is not past reappears, always to rupture the present.”<sup>21</sup> For Sharpe and millions of black Americans, this means the rupture of antiblackness is always a contingent possibility. Thus, Sharpe and Best and Hartman contribute to this understand of social time that Clarke raises as requiring address, but not through legal processes. For Best and Hartman, the “time of slavery” cannot be pinpointed to the distant past but, rather, is *ongoing*, for “the human subject is ‘murdered’ over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise,” from one form of state-sanctioned violence to the next.<sup>22</sup> If we understand slavery as comprehensively as Best and Hartman define it, then we may be able to attribute the elusiveness of justice for the black diaspora in the West to due to the fact of the “incompletion of abolition” as the violence done by slavery continues and persists and is “constitutive of the unfinished project of freedom.”<sup>23</sup> The racism and devaluation of black lives forged out of slavery persists and thus abolition remains incomplete so long as social time is not properly confronted.

Paralleling this, Sherly Lightfoot argues that the work has just begun after a settler-state issues an authentic apology to confront the acts of colonial mass violence against indigenous peoples. As an authentic apology would be akin to a legal act, and thus unable to confront the entire historic legacy or social time of specific acts of colonization, it must be meaningful in that it cannot simply be an end in itself but, rather, “a significant ritual gesture at the beginning, or the end” of a larger process that renegotiates a more just relationship between settler-states and

---

<sup>20</sup> Best and Hartman, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Best and Hartman, 3-4.

indigenous peoples built on mutual respect.<sup>24</sup> It is thus important to see apologies and truth commissions as failing to *transform* the oppressive and dominating relationships between settler-states and indigenous peoples,<sup>25</sup> just as much as legal acts must be seen as *incomplete* in their way of addressing the larger structures that lurk behind any criminality. Thus, in this regard, Jennifer Balint, Julie Evans and Nesam McMillan are in agreement with Lightfoot in that they too for new thinking towards commitment to justice, to transformative or “structural justice.”<sup>26</sup> In a similar understanding to Clarke’s conceptualization of the disjunction between legal time and social time, Balint et al., take issue with transitional justice in that often violent acts are seen by such a framework as ‘exceptional’ rather than seeing that such acts are banal acts sourced to structural arrangements in society.<sup>27</sup> They echo Clarke in arguing that true processes that can lead to just outcomes are those that pay attention to the “legacies of past harms.”<sup>28</sup> And like Lightfoot, they argue that without addressing colonial structures and their persistence into contemporary settler-societies, countries like Canada and Australia remain “colonial formations” tethered to past injustice.<sup>29</sup>

The discourse that I have just mapped out can thus be located in the discussion of moving away from transitional justice towards transformative justice. The scholars discussed argue that it is necessary to confront the ghosts of the past if we are to have a just present. This is what leads Gready and Robins to sum up this attitude as one that seeks to confront “the causes of conflict.”<sup>30</sup> This attitude seeks to ensure that the *structures* behind acts of mass violence do not continue to lurk in the shadows of a new state that is transitioned to but not transformed.

---

<sup>24</sup> Sheryl Lightfoot, “Settler-State Apologies to Indigenous Peoples: A Normative Framework and Comparative Assessment,” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 35.

<sup>25</sup> Lightfoot, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Jennifer Balint, Julie Evans and Nesam McMillan, “Rethinking Transitional Justice, Redressing Indigenous Harm: A New Conceptual Approach,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8 (2014): 195-197.

<sup>27</sup> Balint et al., 199.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2020-206.

<sup>30</sup> Gready and Robins, 340.

## TRANSFORMATION: ART AND MEMORY FOR THE ONGOING

Coming back to Sharpe and her way of seeing anti-blackness in contemporary United States as *living in the wake of slavery*, Sharpe reminds us that we, as agents who act out our lives, must insist on existing and negotiating our existence.<sup>31</sup> Thus, for the singularity of slavery, we must choose in how we confront this question as we live our lives at large: “how do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?”<sup>32</sup> Sharpe reflects how her mother afforded her and her siblings a life of “wakefulness,” which is to say she helped them become aware or conscious of the *wake* that they lived in; she made sure to press and act against the racial barriers and violence that her and her family lived in as part of the conditions of their lives.<sup>33</sup> This is to say, for the seemingly small chance of transformation, one must be *woke*. One must be Socrates’s *gadfly* in relation to the socio-economic structures that we too often take for granted. In Sharpe’s words, her mother made sure that “even as we experienced, recognized, and lived subjection, we did not *simply* or *only* live *in* subjection and *as* the subjected,” for her mother “was attuned not only to our individual circumstances but also to those circumstances as they were an indication of, and related to, the larger antiblack world that structured all of our lives.”<sup>34</sup> Having such an attitude means being fully aware that we, black and non-black peoples alike, live in the wake of certain events that act as *singularities* to influence current social relations, relations that may continue to embody anti-blackness. Similarly, Peter Morin’s performative art piece, “this is what happens when we perform the memory of the land,” embodied this ideal. For it, Morin poetically reflects how he carried the stories of survivors, “I put them on a shelf inside my body / you should too” for to do so is to consider the TRC process along with one’s “own truth and reconciliation.”<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Sharpe, 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Morin, “this is what happens when we perform the memory of the land,” in *Arts of Engagement*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press: 2016), 89.



Thus, numerous scholars have taken up the task of theorizing how memories, stories, and art can lead to better leveraging against the continued grip that the past has on the present. Coming back to Strejilevich, herself a survivor of detention and the potential of being *disappeared* during Argentina's State of Terror, Strejilevich sees her testimonial novel, *A Single, Numberless Death* as not for the purpose of transcribing reality, for that would be impossible.<sup>36</sup> The purpose can be better explained if we look at Ajla Demiragić and Edin Hodžić's discussion on Shoshana Felman's idea of bearing literary witness to history. For Demiragić and Hodžić, Felman calls for the embracing of storytelling and narrative as testimony to not simply record but to rethink or to transform history, and that means literature *does action*.<sup>37</sup> This is similar to what Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin argue in their edited collection, *Arts of Engagement*. For Robinson and Martin, art does *aesthetic action*; that is, art has the potential to perform or act in forms of sensory stimuli that can lead to subtle political shifts and social erosions.<sup>38</sup> One astute point their collection presents is the role art has in reconciliation *outside* of official processes like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).<sup>39</sup> This is to acknowledge that simple things, like the details of a conference room or the setting of certain events or panels, that the music and art that accompany proceedings, these things can effect shock, empathy, alienation, connection, or change; that is, aesthetic action shapes' engagement and the corresponding *felt* experience, ultimately leading to "how the issues surrounding the TRC are taken up by both survivors and varied members of the public."<sup>40</sup> This is not particularly bold to claim, but it is astute: aesthetics has always been political for how we choose to represent

---

<sup>36</sup> Strejilevich, 711-712.

<sup>37</sup> Ajla Demiragić and Edin Hodžić, "The Bleak Visions of *Literary Justice* for Survivors of Srebrenica: Examining the Fictional Narratives of Srebrenica Genocide in Light of the Insights from Transitional Justice," in *The Arts of Transitional Justice: Culture, Activism, and Memory after Atrocity*, ed. Peter Rush and Olivera Simić (New York: Springer Publishing, 2014), 136.

<sup>38</sup> Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin, "The body is a Resonant Chamber," in *Arts of Engagement*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

something always has the potential to unsettle, provoke, and cause reconsideration. Michael Jackson makes a similar point for storytelling. For Jackson, storytelling is a “strategy” for “bridging the gap between subjective dispositions and social structures,” which is to say that they can be used to help determine the “narrative and ethical shape” that informs our lived experience.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, creative imagination from stories allows for a re-imagination of what kind of society we want to live in post-atrocity.

One of the many ways that aesthetic mediums can do action is simply the overcoming of *denial*. Laura McLeod show cases how art can be used as a form of activism in interrogating a nation’s relationship with the state’s past involvement in wars and mass atrocity and how if such reflection is not fostered by the state then artists can intervene.<sup>42</sup> Echoing Sharpe, McLeod argues that opening public discourses on mass complicity has important implications for the future of Serbia for “how the past is recalled” dictates the present and future of Serbia.<sup>43</sup> More insightfully, McLeod gives an empirical case study of how activist artwork around Srebrenica was able to circumvent the denial exhibited by the majority of the Serbian public as opposed to NGOs since the aesthetics of artistic interventions can allow for more possibility in forming the kind of spaces that are conducive to non-confrontational public discourse.<sup>44</sup> Suzanne Lacy and Pilar Riaño-Alcalá’s art project, *La Piel del Memoria/The Skin of Memory*, offered a similar space of coming together despite deeply rooted and violent divides in Medellin, Colombia. More importantly, the mobile artistic space allowed those with lost loved ones to “reconstruct memories of loss in a positive way, to find new meanings in the experience and to gain some

---

<sup>41</sup> Michael Jackson, *The politics of storytelling: Variations on a theme by Hannah Arendt* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013), 63.

<sup>42</sup> Laura McLeod, “Artistic Activism, Public Debate and Temporal Complexities: Fighting for Transitional Justice in Serbia,” in *The Arts of Transitional Justice: Culture, Activism, and Memory after Atrocity*, ed. Peter Rush and Olivera Simić (New York: Springer Publishing, 2014), 26.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

control over it."<sup>45</sup> Erika Diettes's *Sudarios*, a collection of portraits of women at the most dramatic moment of their retelling of witnessing the murders of their loved ones, similarly builds understanding across the divide of violent conflict by showcasing humaneness through grief and having that humaneness haunt those who pass through the religious spaces that acted as the gallery space for the project. In a way, her project exhibits Judith Butler's idea that mourning allows for the potential of the "transformative effect of loss" and thus being focusing points for reminding all – even those fueled by dehumanizing hatred to continue on in situations of mass violence – of human corporeal vulnerability.<sup>46</sup> Butler argues that sharing in grief after moments of mass violence reminds us that violence can be done unto bodies, which we easily forget is *shared* by all, and that this leads to a possible moment of human solidarity for "mindfulness of this vulnerability" can lead to the acceptance of nonviolent political solutions that do not seek to regain a sense of "mastery" over one's corporeal vulnerability against another's.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, it can be argued that aesthetic mediums have the potential of reminding people of a common humanity in a *weak* sense, and thus, chipping away at the denial at the end of many moments of mass violence and complicity. Judith Shklar, similar to Butler in the sense of looking at the potential of solidarity through grief, argues that "liberalism's deepest grounding" for toleration of others has always been "born in horror" and progressively this "political liberalism of fear [of cruelty] arose and continues."<sup>48</sup> Thus, Lynn Hunt, makes the case that it is *imagined empathy* that allowed for human rights to gain purchase in public imagination. Human rights had to be imagined, not in the sense of fabrication but in the sense of "imagining that someone else is like you," which is to say, for the prescriptions of liberalism to become as self-evident as they grew to become in the West, ordinary people had to gain understandings that

---

<sup>45</sup> Suzanne Lacy and Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, "Medellín, Colombia: Reinhabiting Memory," *Art Journal* 65, no. 4 (2006): 98.

<sup>46</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso Books, 2004), 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>48</sup> Judith Shklar, "Liberalism of Fear," *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 21.

came from *feeling*; she attributes this to new mediums, like the *novel*, that made real personal experiences of *cruelty* comprehensible to any reader.<sup>49</sup>

Another potential for aesthetic action is teaching viewers and listeners *how* to do so, and moreover, *how to make sense* of the story. As Jackson suggests, this may be one of the only ways for the marginalized or stigmatized peoples to confront power imbalances and correct perception injustices.<sup>50</sup> Erin Baines and Beth Stewart describe how an Acholi woman, Ajok, who survived war abduction and rape, encouraged others to see her *as* she does, rather than simply *what* they see.<sup>51</sup> Her storytelling “instructs her listeners on how to relate to her” experience.<sup>52</sup> Baines and Stewart thus show how survivors must generate themselves as subjects anew by reconfiguring the violence of their past lives and “mediating stories of social repair” in order to return to the normalcy of everyday living amongst society.<sup>53</sup> Instead of letting her war experience bring her stigma, instead of letting her past dictate her present relationships and status, Ajok enacts her moral agency and resists against a range of actors and power relations in her community, asking how she can be judged for something not of her choosing and pragmatically makes her case through storytelling in order to regain her denied position as a legitimate Acholi woman in the community.<sup>54</sup> In a similar manner, in her memoir about being forced into a life as the wife of the leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army, Joseph Kony, Evelyn Amony remarks, “Everything that I do, people say that I am Kony’s wife ... Why do they talk so much about me?”<sup>55</sup> She, like all survivors, must live their lives – it’s not that they must get to live their lives *now* that their victimhood has ended, but that they must continue to trudge forward and keep on living – and

---

<sup>49</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 32-34.

<sup>50</sup> Jackson, 36.

<sup>51</sup> Erin Baines and Beth Stewart, “‘I cannot accept what I have not done’: Storytelling, Gender and Transitional Justice,” *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 3, no. 3 (2011): 259.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>53</sup> Erin Baines and Beth Stewart, “‘I cannot accept what I have not done’: Storytelling, Gender and Transitional Justice,” *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 3, no. 3 (2011): 258.

<sup>54</sup> 259.

<sup>55</sup> Evelyn Amony, *I am Evelyn Amony: Reclaiming my Life from the Lord’s Resistance Army* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 124.

their lives ought not to be confined to simply the status of who they were during the atrocity. Their lives are certainly shaped by the event, but they choose how they will forge ahead. Similarly, Morin's decision to start his performance art piece thirty minutes *before* the proposed start time embodies a similar objective; Morin's goal was precisely for the audience to come in while he and his collaborators were in the midst of performance.<sup>56</sup> He attributes this to being an ode to the testimony givers at official TRC events across the country, all of whom had to give their stories on stages while the audience continued to be in a constant flux of people coming in and leaving, people looking confused and people finding their seats.<sup>57</sup> I read this as a way of helping the wider Canadian public better understand *just how* they should be involved in the process of reconciliation. Immigrants and new generations of settlers enter *mid-act* as perpetrators and as witnesses of the ongoing colonial relations in Canada, and they must see that it does not matter if they were not there in the beginning, only that there are people asking for them to join them in a long process of transformation.

Beyond combating denial and teaching others how to listen, aesthetic action can also lead to much more transformative impact. For Robinson and Martin, a story told as testimony at the TRC does not simply mark the closing of indigenous survivors' grievances against the state but, rather, should be reciprocated by listeners, by the audience, by the wider public, for their stories invite action striving for transformative justice.<sup>58</sup> While some forms of aesthetics only invite the crude consumption of images of suffering, others can demand one to act politically immediately.<sup>59</sup> One example of this is the Anishinaabe signage put up by the group Ogimaa Mikina in urban public spaces, asking the city dwellers how they relate to Anishinaabe

---

<sup>56</sup> Morin, 77.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Robinson and Martin, 7-8.

<sup>59</sup> Dylan Robinson, "Intergenerational Sense, Intergenerational Responsibility," in *Arts of Engagement*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 57-58.

sovereignty while being part of those places.<sup>60</sup> In aesthetic interventions such as these, Robinson argues that there is the momentary potential for “intergenerational responsibility,” where settler descendants of original generators of colonial perpetrators can choose to not carry on the “intergenerational perpetration” of colonial relations with indigenous peoples.<sup>61</sup> They may choose to not continue the path previous generations cleared, which is to say that they can renegotiate with the legacy of that past. For Sharpe, this is the moment where one chooses choose how to remember the past by being awake while living in *the wake* of that past, by being *woke* in the present. Similarly, theatre artist Lisa Ravensbergen argues that theatre demands audience members to *choose* where they *align* – whether they will “align with newness and change or to align with what is familiar and stick with what has always been” – and thus revelations done on the theatrical stage demand “action, rooted in choice.”<sup>62</sup>

For Jodi Halpern and Harvey Weinstein, film can perform similarly. They look to the film “No Man’s Land” as manifesting a logic that holds that transformation must be done at the “ecological scale.”<sup>63</sup> The film shows an alternative world where the structures of violence for the Bosnian War are not present: in the trenches where *no one lives*, a Bosniak and a Bosnian Serb find the ability to begin to care for one another for only then could they not feel social threats from their respective group for empathizing with their group’s perceived *other*.<sup>64</sup> The tragic end of the film is even more astute as it depicts how social forces and structures outside of individuals’ control conspire against solidarity – the situation spirals out of control when the world arrives to ‘save’ the men trapped in the trench.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the film is more than just a story as it also functions as political *judgement*, drawing attention to what needs to be changed or

---

<sup>60</sup> Robinson, 61-62.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63.

<sup>62</sup> Dylan Robinson, “Acts of Defiance in Indigenous Theatre: A conversation with Lisa C. Ravensbergen,” in *Arts of Engagement*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016), 191.

<sup>63</sup> Jodi Halpern and Harvey Weinstein, “Rehumanizing the Other: Empathy and Reconciliation,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2004): 564.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 581.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 575-577.

transformed, and thus inviting action. Thus, though some stories can divide, dehumanize, or disenfranchise, Jackson is astute to argue that the same medium can also bridge, humanize, and empower; and more importantly, it can activate.<sup>66</sup> The politics to storytelling comes from the fact that while “folktales are fictions, they contain real moral truths” that can be debated and enacted upon to build newly negotiated social structures.<sup>67</sup>

Lastly, aesthetic action can mean specific prescriptions for transformative change. In his work on Northern Ireland, Eugene McNamee looks at the way cultural shifts conditioned the possibility for political change, challenging the assumption that political processes take shape as the lead or primary mechanism for conflict transformation.<sup>68</sup> For McNamee, artists pave the way for imagining alternate ways of being together. He takes seriously the role of artists “as central to the creation of a public consciousness” and discusses how the *Field Day* theatre project for cultural intervention in Northern Ireland was very much a continuation of the tradition of Irish “culture-as-politics.”<sup>69</sup> The message of the play is a proposed resolution; it suggests building “a new home in the new language” – English – that would mean taking up the “need to adapt and adjust to the vagaries of history.”<sup>70</sup> This kind of proposition is likely to meet strong divisions in any community undergoing or overcoming colonial or cultural domination in the world. What is important to note, however, is that plays like *Field Day*, even if met with literary criticism, fuel the debate on just what is that ‘fifth province of Ireland’ – or the imaginary sense or homeland for any context.<sup>71</sup> Different interpretations of whether the play was representative or inclusive enough in its treatment of the divides and problems of the context all contribute to fuelling the notion that more negotiation in imagination is necessary.

---

<sup>66</sup> Jackson, 27-28.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>68</sup> Eugene McNamee, “Fields of Opportunity: Cultural Invention and ‘The New Northern Ireland’,” in *The Arts of Transitional Justice: Culture, Activism, and Memory after Atrocity*, ed. Peter Rush and Olivera Simić (Springer-Verlag: New York, 2014), 2.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Likewise, Naomi Angel and Pauline Wakeham bring up a point of *ethical memory* in the TRC context of Canada by discussing Petah Inukpuk's point of view in relation to the famous photograph of his grandfather, Qumanguq. Angel and Wakeham argue that for Inukpuk, his grandfather's photograph ought not be simply used as a piece for grieving – which may contradict previous works covered, such as Erika Diette's – but, instead, should be seen as “a spur to memory,” or as a spur to amassing “ethical memory,” which is to say it ought to function as a “catalyst for *doing*, or taking action by re-engaging” in previously interrupted cultural practices.<sup>72</sup> Inukpuk's view is that simply grieving does nothing to reverse the effect of colonization, and he denies the near-impossibility of cultural recovery. His view is that recovery can be accomplished and that one does not recover by simply lingering on pain or expelling the pain; rather, recovery comes from *regaining* what was lost for righting a wrong requires transforming the current destitution with restitution, retribution, or just the right to recover what was lost in culture and identity.

## CONCLUSION

As poet Juliane Okot Bitek remarks, institutionalized reconciliation is simply not enough, for such processes simply “photographs well” but, also, “wants me to wipe my tears / to wipe the slate clean / it wants me to forget my first born daughter / the one I could not bury.”<sup>73</sup> And so, to lie by spinning fiction, as related by Albert Camus through Jackson, is to speak beyond truth and value the yearning of the human heart, to express one's sentiments.<sup>74</sup> This is why art and narrative and imaginaries and great poetry and fiction and magical realism are all so powerful, and this also means that their *deeming* quality depends on how they are used.

---

<sup>72</sup> Naomi Angel and Pauline Wakeham “Witnessing *In Camera*: Photographic Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation” in *Arts of Engagement*, ed. Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (Wilfried Laurier University Press: Waterloo, 2016), 114-115.

<sup>73</sup> Juliane Okot Bitek, “Day 87,” *100 Days* (Edmonton: Alberta Press, 2016), 14.

<sup>74</sup> Jackson, 28.



**WORKS CITED**

- Angel, Naomi and Pauline Wakeham. "Witnessing *In Camera*: Photographic Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation." *Arts of Engagement*. Edited by Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin. Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2016. Print.
- Amony, Evelyn. *I am Evelyn Amony: Reclaiming my Life from the Lord's Resistance Army*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015, Print.
- Baines, Erin. "'Today I want to Speak Out the Truth': Victim Agency, Responsibility, and Transitional Justice." *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 4 (2015): 316-332. Web.
- Baines, Erin and Beth Stewart. "'I cannot accept what I have not done': Storytelling, Gender and Transitional Justice." *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 3, no. 3 (2011): 245-263. Web.
- Balint, Jennifer, Julie Evans, and Nesam McMillan. "Rethinking Transitional Justice, Redressing Indigenous Harm: A New Conceptual Approach." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8 (2014): 194-216. Web.
- Best, Stephen and Saidiya Hartman. "Fugitive Justice." *Representations* 92, no. 1 (2005): 1-15. Web.
- Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence* London: Verso Books, 2004. Web.
- Clarke, Kamari. "Refiguring the Perpetrator: Culpability, History and International Criminal Law's Impunity Gap." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 19, no. 5 (2015): 592-614. Web.
- Demiragić, Ajla, and Edin Hodžić. "The Bleak Visions of *Literary Justice* for Survivors of Srebrenica: Examining the Fictional Narratives of Srebrenica Genocide in Light of the Insights from Transitional Justice." *The Arts of Transitional Justice: Culture, Activism, and Memory after Atrocity*. Edited by Peter Rush and Olivera Simić. New York: Springer Publishing, 2014. Web.
- Gready, Paul and Simon Robins. "From Transitional to Transformative Justice: A New Agenda for Practice." *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8 (2014): 339-361. Web.
- Hunt, Lynn. *Inventing Human Rights*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007. Print.
- Jackson, Michael. *The politics of storytelling: Variations on a theme by Hannah Arendt*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013. Web.

- Lacy, Suzanne and Pilar Riaño-Alcalá. "Medellín, Colombia: Reinhabiting Memory." *Art Journal* 65, no. 4 (2006): 96-112.
- Leebaw, Bronwyn. *Judging State Sponsored Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Print.
- Levy, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.
- Lightfoot, Sheryl. "Settler-State Apologies to Indigenous Peoples: A Normative Framework and Comparative Assessment." *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 15-39. Web.
- McLeod, Laura. "Artistic Activism, Public Debate and Temporal Complexities: Fighting for Transitional Justice in Serbia." *The Arts of Transitional Justice: Culture, Activism, and Memory after Atrocity*. Edited by Peter Rush and Olivera Simić. New York: Springer Publishing, 2014. Web.
- McNamee, Eugene. "Fields of Opportunity: Cultural Invention and 'The New Northern Ireland'," *The Arts of Transitional Justice: Culture, Activism, and Memory after Atrocity*. Edited by Peter Rush and Olivera Simić. New York: Springer Publishing, 2014. Web.
- Morin, Peter. "this is what happens when we perform the memory of the land." *Arts of Engagement*. Edited by Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin. Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2016. Print.
- Okot Bitek, Juliane. *100 Days*. Edmonton: Alberta Press, 2016. Print.
- Orantes, Karin. Interview with Tlhalo Raditlhalo. "The Grand Narrative of Life – An Interview with Tlhalo Raditlhalo." *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in South Africa*. Edited by Ewald Mengel, Michela Borzaga, and Karin Orantes. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. Web.
- Schaffer, Kay and Sidonie Smith. "Venues of Storytelling: the Circulation of Testimony in Human Rights Campaigns." *Life Writing* 1, no. 2 (2004): 3-26. Web.
- Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. London: Duke University Press, 2016. Print.
- Shklar, Judith. "Liberalism of Fear." *Liberalism and the Moral Life*. Edited by Nancy Rosenblum. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. Print.
- Strejilevich, Nora. "Beyond the Language of Truth." *Human Rights Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2006): 701-713. Web.

Robinson, Dylan. "Acts of Defiance in Indigenous Theatre: A conversation with Lisa C. Ravensbergen." *Arts of Engagement*. Edited by Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin. Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2016. Print.

Robinson, Dylan. "Intergenerational Sense, Intergenerational Responsibility." *Arts of Engagement*. Edited by Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin. Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2016. Print.

Robinson, Dylan and Keavy Martin. "The body is a Resonant Chamber." *Arts of Engagement*. Edited by Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin. Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2016. Print.