Agonistic Reconciliation: Witnessing and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

by

Darren Bohle

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Department of Political Science
University of Alberta

Abstract

This study examines the concept of *agonistic reconciliation* in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, a commission established to address the settler colonial legacy of residential schools which generations of indigenous children were forced to attend. Agonistic democratic theory asserts that contest, contingency, and plurality are ineradicable features of democracy, and that acknowledging the permanence of deep differences might permit antagonistic conflicts to be transformed into agonistic rivalries. Rejecting the presumption that reconciled democracies require a common history or recuperated unity which is beyond political challenge, agonistic and radical democratic theorists have instead styled reconciliation as an opportunity to disclose the permanency of contest. But reconciliation presents agonistic theory with a difficult case. The prospect of perpetual contest seems endangered both by the antagonistic divisions which truth commissions make public, and by the ultimate harmony which reconciling seems to entail. This difficulty is exacerbated by the possibility that agonistic theory posits public space as a prerequisite for democratic contest. Agonistic theories face a dilemma, to the extent that they suggest contest transpires within public spaces of appearance such as the forums proffered by truth commissions: the apparent precondition of public space for contest begs the question of whether agonistic rivalries also require prior common ground for their instantiation, even as revelations of historical injustices unsettle presumptions of shared normative vocabularies or consensual procedures for dialogue.

This dissertation takes up the problem of the public space required for democratic disagreement by highlighting *disclosure* and *witnessing* as techniques used by the truth commission in Canada to publicly display past injuries and plural histories. Disclosure and witnessing also serve as theoretical devices to explicate the paradoxical proposition that agonistic

reconciliation both presumes and produces the public forum, immanent respect, or shared normative vocabulary required for ongoing contest about the histories and identities of a political community such as Canada. Through the work of Hannah Arendt, Chantal Mouffe, James Tully, Aletta Norval, Andrew Schaap, and Alexander Hirsch, this study explores the argument that truth commissions might transform relationships between divided groups by disclosing the permanence of contest amid plurality as itself a democratic modality. This portrait of agonistic reconciliation is then contrasted with an alternative, where witnessing creates public space for contest - space which paradoxically precedes yet depends upon the exemplary courage of survivors who tell their stories. Together, these accounts advance the prospect of agonistic reconciliation as the twin practices of disclosure and witnessing, each a distinct, interrelated facet of democratic contest *for* and *within* public spaces where civic relationships are continuously performed and interrogated.

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Introduction

Agonistic reconciliation and public space

Theories of agonistic democracy claim truth commissions potentially disclose political contest which is neither animosity in need of redress, nor the achievement of peaceful unity. There have been several excellent analyses of reconciliation from the perspectives offered by agonistic or radical theories of democracy, most notably those by Aletta Norval and Andrew Schaap. My aim is to conduct a sympathetic yet distinctive reading of these accounts of *agonistic reconciliation* in light of the recently concluded Truth and Reconciliation Commission (the TRC) of Canada. The TRC was established to address the legacy of the century-long assimilationist program of residential schools, where indigenous children were taken from their parents and forced to attend government-funded boarding schools operated by various churches. The TRC spent five years listening to the stories told by survivors of these schools, and publishing the largely-ignored history of the disrespect, abuse, and cultural genocide of a program designed "to kill the Indian in the child."[1] As with previous commissions (most notably the post-apartheid South African commission), the TRC was both a public forum where these stories could be told, and a disseminator of them.

The commission's *truth-telling* was thus always an ambiguous *public-making*. The TRC created space for survivors to speak, and propagated new narratives which might yet unsettle the story of residential schools as "a sad chapter in our history" requiring "resolution".[2] Unlike its famous predecessor in South Africa, the TRC did not operate amid intense mass publicity. It did

[1] Canada, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, "Statement of apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools," delivered by the Prime Minister of Canada, The Right Honourable Stephen Harper (Ottawa, Ontario, June 11, 2008), http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649.
[2] Canada, "Statement of apology".

not receive weekly national television coverage; instead, its meetings were webcasted to a more modest viewership. Its public events did not feature galvanizing encounters between victims and perpetrators, nor did the commission receive clashing historical submissions, as occurred in South Africa. And, whereas most previous truth commissions operated in the context of transitional democracy or regime change, the same national party held power throughout its tenure, with little appreciable change to the relationship between governments, settler society and indigenous peoples. By consequence, the TRC's ambiguous public-making included deliberate efforts to cultivate publicity for the anger, hurt, resilience and courage displayed by survivors.

The reading I propose begins by reflecting on one aspect of this space-making, the commission's use of Honorary Witnesses. The commission invited prominent public figures to witness the stories told by survivors and to share them in their own social networks. But this was not only a pragmatic solution to the difficult task of garnering publicity. These witnesses both reported what they saw at TRC events, and by their presence made space for the expressive disclosures of the survivors. The respectful visibility and public reality afforded by this program of witnessing relied only in part on what witnesses did after seeing and hearing survivors speak. By naming and recognizing designated witnesses ahead of time, the commission employed witnessing as an anticipatory gesture of respect which created public spaces oriented specifically to the novelty of stories that had not been heard before by Canadian society.

I want to highlight this space-creating function of witnessing because it grants new insight into a dilemma facing agonistic appraisals of reconciliation. This dilemma concerns whether public space is a prior requirement for expressive and disclosive political contest. Hannah Arendt has suggested public space is an important requirement; her interlocutors have tended to strongly disagree. Most appraisals suggest that if reconciliation is to be agonistic, it must neither presume

unity as its destined achievement nor presume a foundational unity as the condition of possibility for disagreement. Rather, agonistic reconciliation celebrates the contest between different perspectives published by truth commissions. This argument has been directed particularly at theories of deliberative democracy inspired by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. But the insistence that contest cannot be fettered has also been levied against Arendt's conclusion that agonistic freedom is only possible if public and private realms remain sharply distinguished from each other.

To circumvent the difficulty of contest requiring a prior delineation of public space, the best accounts of agonistic reconciliation interpret the public-making efforts of truth commissions as *disclosive*, in two ways. First, disclosure aptly describes both the truth-telling to and by commissions, and the expressiveness of agonism. Second, reconciliation proffers an opportunity to shift our ethical-political stance towards diversity *insofar as* contested narratives displayed by truth commissions reveal the permanence of plurality and concomitant impossibility of reunification or final closure. Instead, the clash of perspectives enabled by truth commissions facilitates a new understanding of politics as permanently contestable. In this sense, the disclosures of truth commissions serve as a catalyst for a new ethical appreciation of difference, a new beginning.

My reading is intended to draw out this emphasis on disclosure as the mechanism of a hoped-for change which reconciliation might inspire. Proponents of agonistic reconciliation present this mechanism variously - as the ontological revelation that plurality is necessarily permanent and political; as the exposure of liberal theory's quixotic quest for consensus; as exemplary claims which commit us to act in the name of an always-deferred democracy; and as the revelation of the worldly in-between which makes reconciliation risky and worthwhile. These

accounts highlight congruencies between the expressive, disclosive action prized as agonistic and the truth-telling of reconciliation. Together, they articulate a theory of reconciliation as an exemplary instance of politics and as a catalyst for the realization that democracy is perpetually open to unexpected narratives. Disclosure is thus the pivotal feature of agonistic reconciliation. The expressive disclosures of survivors not only challenge hegemonic interpretations of community, but the contest about memory and history thus made public facilitates the further realization that plurality and contest are permanent characteristics of politics. With this ontological realization comes an ethical shift - the discovery of a respect immanent to contest between adversaries. Reconciliation ceases to be a quest for closure and a new beginning, and becomes instead the disclosure of an always-already plurality, an immanent respect for difference, and a perpetual openness to further claims made both in the name of and against a community which can never quite be fully reconciled.

But despite this emphasis on disclosure, the dilemma of public space remains. Agonistic theories preoccupied with disclosure tend to occlude the need for the creation of public space prior to these revelations, with disclosure itself privileged as the instrument by which public spaces for contest are brought into being. This refusal to countenance public space as a requirement for agonistic contest extends beyond the question of the spaces created by truth commissions. Rather, it stems from the conviction that politics cannot be bounded or predicated on any condition which is not itself subject to contest. It is rooted in a deep suspicion of reconciliation as a return to an original unity, and in a broader suspicion of beginnings as authoritative foundations.

I will argue that Arendt's notion of public space remains serviceable and necessary for a full account of how reconciliation might disrupt patterns of settler colonialism and cultivate greater respect for plurality, though this cannot entail retaining Arendt's strict separation of public action

from private work and labour. The space-making moments of the TRC of Canada suggest that the hopes invested in reconciliation cannot depend solely on the unsettling truths revealed by survivors. They must also include the efforts to foster public space for these stories to be told. This retention is necessary for the full realization of what Arendt calls natality, the propensity for new and unprecedented stories, actions, and meanings to appear through contingent inter-action. Natality has an affinity with Jacques Derrida's notion of the "perhaps … will come", the order of possibility which exceeds the fixed identity of concepts or communities.[3]

In one sense, natality is an enduring part of the human condition because children - newcomers - are always entering the world, and because the consequences of action are always contingent. But in another sense, our capacity to begin anew is fragile, because the legacies and narratives of the past can over-determine the meaningfulness of our present. The legacy of residential schools, and more broadly of the colonial and assimilationist policies embedded in Canada's national narrative, are of this sort: they have eroded the capacity of settler society to begin anew and to seek to undo their effects. Thus it is not enough to unsettle and dislocate these narratives of nation, sovereignty and unity by exposing their complicity in the cultural genocide attempted by residential schools. There is a further need for public spaces attuned to the unprecedented courage and resilience of survivors, not only instrumentally to make their stories widely known, and not only to facilitate the personal healing of those who have suffered trauma. The further need is for settler society to engage in public-making as a recuperation of the capacity to welcome plurality and novelty into an ongoing contest about the history and identity of Canada as a political community.

[3] Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 28-29.

The priority of public space is a paramount feature of this recuperation of natality. Yet it cannot be an *a priori* condition for expressive and disclosive agonism without grounding disagreement on a prior or transcendent consensus. That is, public space cannot establish criteria for acceptable democratic argumentation, for instance by applying the rule of reciprocity to the narratives established through truth commissions. But the space-making work of witnessing suggests an alternative formulation. Situated within broader practices of respecting and honouring as methods of making survivors visible, the commission's designated witnesses preceded the survivors whom they saw and heard, insofar as witnessing entails a preparation to listen. Yet this precedence does not diminish the importance of survivors' courageous public appearances. This courage remains the condition of possibility for witnessing *as such*, for witnessing to be an openness to the order of the "perhaps … will come." Witnessing implies a paradox where public space necessarily precedes and yet depends upon the agonistic disclosures it enables.

Insisting on the paradoxical priority of public space does not mean interpreting reconciliation as a new agreement about what constitutes acceptable public expression, or indeed what constitutes 'the public' at all. Reconciliation cannot mean establishing or returning to a prior consensus in order to initiate a new relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Canada, since it is precisely the terms of that relationship which the disclosures of survivors call into question. What the alternative suggested by witnessing shows, I think, is how public-making might be a recuperation of the capacity to begin anew. As a sustained orientation towards the novelty inherent in agonistic politics, witnessing is not a space-making which precedes and makes possible agonistic contest so much as it is itself an agonistic activity.

Three claims

This project advances three claims. Together, these claims depict agonistic reconciliation as the possibility of sustained expressive contest through the dual practices of disclosure and witnessing. First, I claim agonistic theories of reconciliation depict truth-telling as the competing narratives which *disclose* an already extant plurality and the concomitant impossibility of (re)unified community. Second, I claim this emphasis on disclosure fails to account for the space-making work of truth commissions. This is apparent in the differences between the truth commissions of Canada and South Africa, but also in the theoretical difficulties occasioned by Hannah Arendt's argument that an expressive politics requires designated public space - an argument rejected by those accounts of disclosive agonism which I review. But this rejection occasions a quandary, as agonistic reconciliation discloses *itself* as contest. Whether pictured as ontological revelation, exemplary claims-making or the recognition of a common world, this revelation *about* disclosive contest begs the question about its own conditions of possibility: does reconciliation require public space for its disclosure as perpetual contest? Arendt's insistence on a requisite condition of publicity returns to confront interpretations of reconciliation as disclosure. It returns through the question of whether truth commissions facilitate both the *recognition* and *inauguration* of politics as contingent, expressive and celebratory.

My third claim is that witnessing, as a distinctive technique of public-making adopted by the TRC of Canada, offers an alternative exposition of this paradox. The function of honorary witnesses chosen by the TRC was not only to propagate what they saw and heard; witnesses were chosen and identified prior to the testimony of survivors at the commission's national events so that survivors could be assured their experiences would be remembered, respected and made public. This practice of witnessing precedes and makes space for stories about residential schools, while remaining very much dependant on the courageous testimony of survivors for its

meaningfulness *as* an honorary gesture of attentiveness. Witnessing is an ethical and political practice of space-making which does not replicate the problems of *a priori* conditions for agonism. Precisely because honorary witnessing precedes testimony, it imposes no conditions except through its appreciation of natality, understood as unprecedented courage in response to the legacy of settler colonialism. Witnessing *complements* the account of public-making as disclosure which emerges through my reading. As I hope to argue, this aspect of the TRC of Canada attests to the possibility of reconciliation where political relationships are expressively worked out through unsettling revelations about a violent past in concert with a responsiveness to these disclosures which sustains fragile spaces for contest and appearance.

I have organized the argument into three sections, as follows. The first two chapters each pose the question of the priority of public space. Chapter One takes up the specificity of witnessing in the context of the TRC of Canada, while Chapter Two invokes Arendt's concern with public space as necessary for expressive action. The next three chapters examine several convincing portraits of agonistic reconciliation as disclosive. Chapter Three investigates how Chantal Mouffe's ontology of the political provokes a reading of reconciliation as ontological revelation. Chapter Four takes up the work of Aletta Norval and James Tully in considering agonistic disclosure as a normative practice. Chapter Five considers Andrew Schaap's claim that the contests enacted through truth commissions might disclose worldliness as the space for agonism. The remaining three chapters propose an alternate reading of agonistic reconciliation as the twin democratic practices of public-making: witnessing and disclosure. Chapter Six explores the priority of witnessing through Jacques Derrida's treatment of the *preface*. Chapter Seven takes up the possibility that spaces for disclosure are created by the postponement of narrative, through accounts drawn from Alexander Hirsch and Andrew Schaap. The final chapter, Chapter Eight,

appropriates Jacques Rancière's depiction of public-making to consider witnessing as a democratic practice, and concludes by thinking through Paulette Regan's hope that truth commissions can create pedagogical spaces for decolonizing transformations.

Situating myself and my claims

I come from a small settler logging community in northern British Columbia, and have studied predominantly European political theory at Victoria, Ottawa, and Edmonton. I read Hannah Arendt early in my graduate studies, and became interested in her depictions of agonism and remembrance as the launch of a truth and reconciliation commission in Canada became imminent. During the build-up to the commission and during its first abortive attempt, it seemed an open question as to whether the TRC would contribute to a nation-building narrative. Tropes about national unity, turning the page, closing the sad chapter of our history, and moving on from a divided past, all featured prominently among parliamentary voices. Storytelling as a means of political remembrance seemed to offer the possibility of amplifying voices critical of settler colonialism; but equally, it seemed possible for reconciliation to promote a logic of national reunification which could obscure the devastating legacies and present practices of colonialism in Canada, among which residential schools figure prominently.

With these possibilities in mind, a debate between commentators on South Africa's TRC caught my attention. It featured proponents of truth-telling as a form of nation-building, who thought the TRC could "come to frame the national experience" and afford a newly democratic state a national narrative that eclipsed its apartheid past.[4] Other participants in this loosely framed debate, including Andrew Schaap and Aletta Norval, suggested reconciliation might expose the

[4] Molly Andrews, "Grand national narratives and the project of truth commissions: a comparative analysis," Media, Culture & Society 25, no. 1 (2003): 45-65.

error of trying to circumscribe contest by reference to consensus or meta-narrative. Reconciliation, they urged, presents a contest in miniature about how the past ought to be remembered because it broadcasts competing stories about injustices and political identities. By opening the usually tacit question of the unity of the community, this public contest about memory offers a rare opportunity to challenge dominant assumptions of political theory, including especially the assumption that politics must be grounded upon pre-political consent or national identity. Others in the debate suspected that the tendency to construct composite narratives may well be embedded in the institutional design of temporary commissions which conclude by producing a final report and set of recommendations.[5] For example, the South African amnesty process seemed to ensure that perpetrators' testimonies would conform to a historical framework in which their actions could be described as political, rather than personal, violence.[6]

This debate also concerned whether truth-telling should be structured by the liberal principle of reciprocity. The provision requiring perpetrators of violence during the apartheid era to testify in exchange for amnesty opened the commission to interpretation as a trade-off between truth and justice, and prompted concern that renouncing the principles of retributive justice would undermine the foundations of a liberal democracy.[7] One salient response to this concern was the call, voiced by proponents of a deliberative framework for democracy, that the truth-telling facilitated by reconciliation be constrained and structured by a commitment to reciprocity and the

[5] Christine Anthonissen, "Critical discourse analysis as an analytic tool in considering selected, prominent features of TRC testimonies," *Journal of Language and Politics* 5, no. 1 (2006): 71-96.
[6] Claire Moon, *Narrating Political Reconciliation: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2008), 88, 92-93, 103-104.
[7] Christopher Bennett raises this point in an exchange with Andrew Schaap in the journal *Contemporary Political Theory*. See Christopher Bennett, "Is Amnesty A Collective Act of Forgiveness?" *Contemporary Political Theory* 2, no. 1 (2003): 67-76.

(re)establishment of liberal democratic institutions following the wake of social violence.[8] The prospect of a liberal or even post-colonial reconciliation follows from this hope for a respect for plurality within a framework of liberal institutions.[9] But this call runs counter to the injunction that reconciliation not organize the contest about deep differences through the presumption of consensual procedures or liberal institutions.[10] This disagreement represents a microcosm of the theoretical divide between proponents of deliberative arguments akin to those of Rawls or Habermas, and their critics who appeal instead to a language of agonism, dissent and contest.

And yet this debate did not hinge on a dichotomy of plural versus singular truth(s). Claire Moon's portrayal of the historical framework endorsed by South Africa's TRC suggested something of the complexity of the narrative dimension of truth telling. Moon was quite critical of what she described as a particular historical framework's rise to organizational and legitimizing prominence in the commission's work. But what is particularly compelling about her critique is her method of showing this narrative by reference to the exclusions and omissions which return to haunt it.[11] For instance, where the commission portrayed South African history through a language of Human Rights violations, it could have spoken of race or class-based violence. By focusing on specific acts of violence, the commission ignored systemic oppression. The commission spoke in terms of reconciliation and therapy, but could equally have spoken of retribution and

[8] Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, "The Moral Foundations of Truth Commissions," in *Truth v. Justice: The Moral Foundations of Truth Commissions*, eds. Robert Rotberg and Dennis Thompson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 22-44.
[9] For a more thoroughgoing assessment of reconciliation and liberalism as complementary, see Will Kymlicka and Bashir Bashir, eds., *The Politics of Reconciliation in Multicultural Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). For the possibility of post-colonial liberal reconciliation see Duncan Ivison, "Deliberative Democracy and the Politics of Reconciliation," in *Deliberative Democracy in Practice*, eds. David Kahane et al. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 115-137.
[10] See Andrew Schaap, "Political Grounds for Forgiveness," *Contemporary Political Theory* 2, no. 1 (2003): 77-87.
[11] Moon, *Narrating Political Reconciliation*, 6-8, 12, 120. The court-case launched against foreign international businesses for their complicity in upholding the apartheid regime is one such example. I am not so sure Moon succeeds in showing how these roads not taken return to 'haunt' the meta-narrative of apartheid human rights violations and democratic inclusivity. That would require showing how the success of the hegemonic narrative necessarily engenders dissention.

compensation. By describing agents as victims and perpetrators, the commission chose not to use language of survivors, liberators, or oppressors.[12] Moon concluded that providing a forum for many people to speak produced "inevitably" pluralizing effects, and that the choices between alternative frameworks for a meta-narrative return to disturb the settled story.[13]

Through these debates, I discovered an agonistic standpoint set against aspirations that a (liberal) (post-national) post-apartheid identity rooted in plurality might result from truth-telling about state violence. In rejecting both the hopes for national unity or liberal reciprocity as a foundation for reconciling disagreements, an agonistic argument advances what is only implicit in Moon's analysis: a post-division meta-narrative is no desirable outcome of reconciliation. Instead, the contest between multiple perspectives suggests that no recuperation of an authoritative narrative is possible. Rather than establishing a national story or a set of rational procedures for disagreeing, truth-telling publishes the *contest* inherent in our conflicting narratives of community, and in the perpetual project of reconciling them.

These debates furnished me with the notion that reconciliation need not pursue a nation-building or even liberal democratic course. However, in imagining how these resources might be mobilized to describe reconciliation in Canada, I came to suspect agonistic appraisals of reconciliation run into one of two difficulties. Either they overestimate the impact of the *realization* that plurality cannot be circumscribed, or they forget the rarity and fragility of agonistic appearance and suggest reconciliation merely exposes an always-already plurality. Agonism seems reducible to neither of these two poles; it is neither contest without condition, nor is it a new era ushered in by the realization that plurality cannot be circumscribed by rational or national consensus. Instead,

[12] Moon, *Narrating Political Reconciliation*, 69-76, 83-85, 132-135.
[13] Moon, *Narrating Political Reconciliation*, 7, 122.

agonistic politics both requires conditions for its fragile appearance, and yet these conditions must depend on political contest itself, and not on pre-political criteria.

Methodology

My reading of agonistic reconciliation follows in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's concluded mandate, its calls to action and its summary reports. But neither the aim nor method of this project is to sum up the commission's work - either critically, by assessing its impact, or descriptively, by affirming or denying whatever claim to *agonism* that could be made of it. Rather, I want to use my own reflections about the careful listening which I saw the TRC commissioners implement to creatively read the problem of listening - or witnessing - into an agonistic theory of democracy. By revisiting portraits of agonistic reconciliation through their incongruities with the public-making efforts of a truth commission operating in a Canadian society willfully unprepared to listen, I hope to clarify how unsettling disclosures paradoxically require and cultivate a badly needed capacity to welcome natality - the possibility of beginning again despite strictures of national narratives and institutional legacies.

This method was prompted by my shift from an initial suspicion that the commission's public-making would be conscripted by a settler colonial nationalism, to a new concern with the necessity and impossibility of public spaces where the urgent experiences of residential school survivors could find purchase as more than private journeys of healing, but could instead cooperatively involve both indigenous and settler listeners without presuming a meta-narrative of reunification. At the beginning of this project, my initial concern had been with whether the logic of reconciliation - as a return to a former unity - lent itself to a nation-building project rather than to an endorsement of democratic contest. I wanted to know whether the TRC of Canada would be a Canadian nation-building instrument, and planned to study how the TRC named and imagined

the audiences to which its findings were addressed. I intended to use the literature on agonism as a theoretical lens through which to study whether the truth commission's discursive construction of its publics presumed a framework and an outcome of reconciliation.

However, as I attended and watched TRC Events, I noticed the effort the TRC commissioners were investing to cultivate a sense of visibility and publicity for these gatherings. I became convinced that I had been making an unwarranted distinction between reconciliation which presumed a singular public, and an agonistic alternative which disclosed the impossibility and danger of such a presumption. Instead, I wondered whether agonistic theory replicated the structure of national or deliberative approaches to some extent, by presuming a public space in which truths could be disclosed. By consequence, I reversed the design of the research project. Instead of treating the TRC of Canada as a case of nation-building or pluralizing reconciliation, I focused on the commission's effort to build a sense of publicity, particularly through its program of honorary witnesses, and tried to mobilize my observations about this effort to pose a question to agonistic theory. The question which I think these observations help to ask is about the relationship between the impossibility of final closure and the public space potentially required for this realization and for ensuing contest. At best, this reversal in method signals my attempt to listen rather than to categorize, and to attend to the particularity of the witnessing deployed by the TRC.

I have chosen to reflect upon the experience with reconciliation in Canada rather than to examine witnessing in the context of previous truth commissions. This research might have been undertaken comparatively, either by comparing the role of witnessing in previous commissions, or by comparing witnessing with other public-making techniques such as commemorating or archiving. The groundwork for such comparative research has been amply supplied.[14] The narrow

[14] See Priscilla B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011); see also Michelle Bonner and Matt James, "The Three R's of Seeking

approach I take to witnessing within the TRC of Canada delimits the possibilities of this study, but also underlines what I take as the very substantial reasons to pursue it. These reasons are suggested by the distinctiveness of the Canadian case and my own positionality as a non-indigenous Canadian settler. Moreover, this emphasis on instructive detail mirrors previous attempts to generate theoretical reflection from detailed cases rather than through comparison. These attempts include Norval's turn to South Africa's TRC for insight into radical democratic theory, Schaap's focus on South Africa and Australia for agonistic theory, and Duncan Ivison's examination of deliberative democracy in connection with Australia's experiences.[15]

The TRC of Canada prompts a reconsideration of agonistic theory through its constellation of distinctive features, including especially its publication of the violence attaching to relationships between settlers and indigenous peoples in a stable, wealthy democracy. Other truth commissions have addressed colonial and settler colonial histories, but the adoption of a truth commission in the absence of regime change or a context of transitional democracy provides further distinction. While the Australian experience parallels the Canadian case, there remain differences in nuance due to the implementation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada. Conversely, truth commissions have been established in wealthy, stable regimes other than Canada, including in Germany and the United States, but the scope and public impact of investigations by these commissions were dissimilar.[16]

But in terms of reconsidering agonistic appraisals of reconciliation, the TRC of Canada proffers distinctive insights because its public-making work was differently situated than the vastly

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Transitional Justice: Reparation, Responsibility, and Reframing in Canada and Argentina," *The International Indigenous Policy Journal* 2, no. 3 (2011).

[15] Aletta Norval, *Aversive Democracy: Inheritance and Originality in the Democratic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation* (London: Routledge, 2005); Duncan Ivison, *Postcolonial Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[16] These include the Greensboro Truth & Reconciliation Commission in the United States and two commissions established in Germany in the 1990s to examine the consequences of communist rule in East Germany.

more visible South African commission on which both Norval and Schaap extensively comment. This media disparity is partly located within the difference between the prominent end of apartheid on the world stage and the continuity of the Canadian state. One reason to focus on the TRC of Canada, then, is because it is a hard case for a portrait of agonistic public space. It is a hard case because, if the celebration of plurality is to foment space where narratives of settler colonial violence can be juxtaposed against narratives of a just society, then in Canada such public-making must also confront the prospect of widespread apathy or even a refusal to listen. Drawing from her pedagogical efforts to (re)tell the stories of First Nations peoples' post-contact experiences, Susan Dion describes this as a "failure to listen" to narratives which disrupt Canadians' "firmly established sense of themselves as defenders of equity, justice, and human rights."[17] Exploring the dynamics of witnessing within the TRC of Canada affords a way to ask how a truth commission might facilitate the possibility, despite dangers of apathy or denial, of listening to stories which interrupt what Dion calls the "self-concept" of Canadians as defenders of justice.[18]

My primary motive for situating this analysis within the context of Canada's residential schools is indicated by my own subject position as a non-indigenous Canadian, ambiguously both a beneficiary of Canada's history of settlement and a critic of its ongoing colonial policies. I have chosen to elaborate on agonistic theory in terms of the case in which I am implicated because I believe the practices of witnessing exemplified by the TRC of Canada explain how public space for unsettling truths can be created, and also because an agonistic portrait of reconciliation generates a hopeful image of what the responsiveness of non-indigenous Canadians to the claims of residential school survivors might look like. As Schaap intimates, one distinct advantage of

[17] Susan Dion, *Braiding Histories: Learning from Aboriginal Peoples' Experiences and Perspectives* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2009), 56, 59.
[18] Dion, *Braiding Histories*, 59.

reconciliation as ongoing negotiation is that it prompts a search for good reasons for wanting to live together, a search which the presumption of unity cuts short.[19] One such reason is supplied by Hannah Arendt's beautiful depiction of politics as the space where natality flourishes through the public appearance and contest of plural narratives. I hope to show how recuperating a capacity to welcome natality - through witnessing - is an enterprise of concern for settler-Canadians, and a substantial motive for our engagement with the work of reconciliation. Dion wonders whether "forgetting serves the supposed needs of the Canadian nation"; my hope is that those needs might be imagined otherwise.[20] Perhaps what is needed is neither the reiteration nor replacement of a Canadian narrative of togetherness, but greater public spaces for responsiveness to unsettling stories by those whom the TRC has invited to be its witnesses.

By focusing this analysis on witnessing as an agonistic form of listening, I have chosen not to re-tell the stories and claims I heard survivors share at the TRC events I watched and attended. This is a decision with ethical implications for how I see myself responding to survivors as an academic able to abstract from, or withdraw from, the painful experiences survivors continue to live with. Hearing survivors has enjoined on me - an "implicated witness", in Commissioner Wilson's phrase - an opportunity for responsibility and responsiveness.[21] However, speaking to an audience comprised of academics, most of whom are not residential school survivors, restricts the sense in which my responsiveness might resemble what Jo-Ann Archibald calls "signals of listening" by the hearer that help "take care of the speaker".[22]

[19] In Schaap's ambiguous wording, "the aspiration to reconcile provides a context in which citizens might struggle to find good reasons to live together." Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 35-36.
[20] Dion, *Braiding Histories*, 3.
[21] I elaborate on this in Chapter One.
[22] Jo-Ann Archibald (Q'um Q'um Xiiem), *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2008), 76.

This occasions a tension between my attempt to witness and my attempt to talk about witnessing which I do not know how to fully resolve. This irresolution surfaces in my hope that the visibility attached to witnessing might express the contestability of reconciliation and call the objectivity and solidarity of witnesses - particularly settler-witnesses such as myself - into question and thus provoke further spaces for hearing and honouring survivors. More tangibly, I have tried to express this tension in my approach by reflecting on agonistic theory differently because of what I saw at TRC events, rather than seeing only through the lens of agonistic theory. I have chosen to respond to survivors in this manner because I believe it is the contribution I am best positioned to make as a political theorist, and because I believe the vocabulary of contest and plurality merits and would benefit from reflection on what witnessing might mean in the context of the claim that reconciliation as a final settlement is impossible. This agonistic claim also seems to impel a certain responsiveness, which perhaps thinking about the spaces created for listening to survivors' testimony might supply. My hope is that despite the stricture accompanying my choice to not re-tell survivors' stories through this project, these reflections nonetheless expresses my commitment to attend to survivors' exemplary willingness to speak about their experiences, and to act within my own circle of influence on what I saw and heard.

I attended several but not all of the TRC's national events. Many of my reflections are drawn from the Vancouver and Edmonton events in 2013 and 2014, which I attended in person. Via webcast, I watched the Iqaluit, Québec, and Ottawa events, along with several regional gatherings. I have also reviewed many video features from TRC events made available through the truth commission's website, along with a host of additional documents and contributions from associated organizations. My observations afford no platform for substantive judgment of the commission's work, and provide at best a fragmentary portrait of what was a massive and complex

undertaking. In the observations I bring to the theoretical literature, I pay particular attention to the remarks of the three TRC commissioners - Justice Murray Sinclair, Chief Wilton Littlechild, and Dr. Marie Wilson, along with the remarks of several Honorary Witnesses. The specificity of this attention follows from my curiosity about how the commission tried to listen to survivors, but it also underlines the sharp limitations on the descriptive or summary potential of this project. Throughout the project, I reference my own observations garnered from attending or viewing TRC events, along with frequent citations of TRC commissioners and witnesses drawn from these field notes. These observations reference my own attempts to listen and witness in the public venues afforded by the TRC. Where appropriate and possible, I supplement them with published material from the commission's many reports.

I have tried to mobilize these reflections in the service of a question posed to agonistic reconciliation. The question is whether agonistic contest can rely on disclosive action to bring about the spaces for its appearance, or whether it requires complementary practices of public-making such as witnessing. Perhaps this project might reflect a Deleuzian "line of flight" from uncritical assessments of reconciliation as a return to unity, and from depictions of agonistic expressiveness as transformative disclosure without attendant concern with its reception.[23] I want to consider the curious and compelling practice of witnessing as a way to create spaces for disruptive narratives which evoke both the freedom from overdetermined colonial legacies, and the closure sought from great distress. What always threatens to capture this line of flight, then, is the irony of writing about listening. Perhaps to some extent this is staved off by writing about an irony of listening - the irony of how the public appearance of agonistic contest requires the attitude of attentiveness it might provoke.

[23] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *a thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 9.

Chapter One: Public-Making and Truth-Telling

Introduction

The courage required for survivors to tell their stories about residential schools, and the startling revelatory quality attending this public discourse about what they endured as children, are reminiscent of Arendt's evocative description of political action as a contingent striving for remembrance in speech and action which brings new stories into the world.[24] But the discursive constructions of visibility and natality occasioned by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provide new insight into a familiar dilemma when it comes to appropriating Arendt's vision. The dilemma concerns whether to follow Arendt in positing public space as a prior requirement for the politics of expressive disclosure and novelty she envisioned. This dilemma is merely Rousseau's chicken-and-egg paradox of whether democratic action precedes or follows from the founding of a regime, imported to the conversation of the public space in which the testimonies of survivors appear.[25]

In this chapter I want to highlight the space-making techniques employed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. This approach is suggested in large measure by several key differences between the TRC of Canada and the rather more famous TRC of South Africa. By invoking the tantalizing thematic similarities between agonistic interpretations of politics and the powerful stories told by survivors, I hope to suggest the necessity of thinking agonistically about what I term the TRC's ambiguous public-making activity. Agonism is not only the expressive disclosure enabled by truth commissions; it is also the construction of spaces for such public

[24] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 97, 173, 184.
[25] See Bonnie Honig, "Between Decision and Deliberation: Political Paradox in Democratic Theory," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 1 (2007): 1-17.

appearance. Through its emphasis on respect as not only the *outcome* of reconciliation, but as the *tactic* for according visibility to survivors, the TRC's space-making work suggests the need to preface an agonistic portrait of disclosure with an agonistic portrait of public space.

Excess and natality

I would describe one of the chief characteristics of the TRC's National Events as *excess*. The Edmonton National Event was perhaps the apogee of this excess - the rooms filled to bursting, the time-slots filled to bursting with talking circles, sharing panels and presentations all going overtime, with an effusion of anger, grief, sadness and bewilderment in the voices, words and expressions of those who shared something of what they lost in the residential schools. The excesses were not only of tears, but of laughter and singing, celebration and determination. As one Honorary Witness to the events reported, "everywhere I go I see hugs."[26] My own experience with the astonishing excess of the TRC included the support offered to me by a volunteer worker who noticed my distress as I listened to harrowing accounts of abuse at a small sharing circle, the welcome offered by strangers sitting next to me at a massive survivors' birthday party at the Vancouver National Event, and the unimaginable courage I saw survivors exemplify as they poured out joy, grief, anger and much more.

Excess does not mean 'too much'. Rather, the powerful, unsettling stories told by survivors of the schools exceed easy classification: they are political action, deliberative argument, teaching, historical narrative, personal healing, spiritual journeying, and more besides. But the effusive and emotive truths told variously in private, in sharing circles and in broadcasted public hearings are more than complex. To my view they are *unprecedented*, in the sense given by Aletta Norval,

[26] Bill Elliot, Edmonton Event, March 29, 2014. When citing TRC speakers or witnesses from my own observations of the TRC's public events, I adopt the following format: *name*, *event location*, *date*.

because they invoke difficulties for which previous patterns of judgment no longer seem sufficient responses.[27] This unprecedentedness reflects the fact that prior to the TRC, "to the extent that it was told at all," the history of residential schools was told by those "who organized and ran the system."[28] And yet, in the outpouring of personal narrative that shakes the hegemonic story of Canada as a just society and inclusive democracy, unprecedentedness is not only in the newness of information presented to a settler society. Nor is this novelty due to the ignorance of settler society as a blank slate upon which the story of residential schools is freshly inscribed. Indeed as some have argued, this unawareness may well be a discursively mediated ignorance maintained through strategies of emotional distancing, what Susan Dion calls the discourse of "the Perfect Stranger".[29] The injustices recounted by survivors do more than mobilize the norms of Canadian society; they pose a challenge *to* them, and in particular to narratives of responsibility for and distance from indigenous peoples which undergirded the schools themselves.

But in addition to these considerations, the excess of testimony furnished to the TRC is unprecedented in the further sense of attesting to the novelty which occasionally characterizes political action. The stories told by survivors are novel in the meaning intimated by Hannah Arendt's notion of natality. Natality signifies the hopefulness attached to Arendt's inversion of the classic association of life with death, with mortality. In Arendt's schematization of politics, human activity includes the expressive inter-action among plural people that reveals new stories. This newness is at times a product of the contingency of such interaction, where freedom, far from being a product of the sovereign capacity to control, is the two-fold experience of initiating action

[27] Aletta Norval, "A Democratic Politics of Acknowledgment: Political Judgment, Imagination and Exemplarity," *Diacritics* 38, no. 4 (2008): 59-76.
[28] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The Survivors Speak: A Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 1.
[29] Dion, *Braiding Histories*, 178-179.

and yet being unable to completely predict its consequences or meanings. These meanings unfold immanently through the expressiveness of word and action, often to the surprise even of the actors involved. It is thus not that the stories told by residential school survivors are new, but that the processes of disclosing and honouring them bear hallmarks of the political action Arendt describes. Dion has a wonderful way of expressing how this novelty relates to both the stories and their reception: "It is only when a story is approached as being unfamiliar that details have the potential to surprise, unsettle, and astonish, and thus to work as disruption, calling what we know and how we know into question."[30]

Natality is also expressive of the sheer fact that new people come into the world. This aspect of novelty is also an unusually salient theme of the truth commission because the residential school program was about children - removing indigenous children from their families to try to 'kill the Indian in the child'. It should come as no surprise that much of the truth commission's work might be described as reclaiming the lost natality of children. Such work includes recovering the history of the children who died at the schools, teaching children and youth about the schools, and most of all, visibly linking the discourses of survivor and child. As one Honorary Witness remarked, children were accorded thematic saliency through the triumphant message to the designers of residential schools: "You have failed…. The project of reconciliation will be undertaken by the children."[31] Similarly, such natality was manifest in the commission's term 'intergenerational survivor' for the families and descendants of those who attended the schools. Further discursive visibility was enabled by the trenchant juxtaposition of elders and adults sharing the memories of hurt and injustice seen through their childhood eyes, often many decades ago. I

[30] Dion, *Braiding Histories*, 51-52.
[31] Wab Kinew, Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014. See also The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, vol. 6, *Reconciliation* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 209-210.

vividly recall standing at a sharing circle listening to one survivor respond to another, telling them he could hear the child speaking out of the adult - a sentiment I heard echoed several times. I looked around and realized that the circle was composed entirely of elders and adults, except for one small toddler distractedly waving one of the little Canadian flags the federal government's booth had been distributing in the exhibition hall.[32] The discursive visibility accorded to children seems emblematic of both the excess and the space-making work characteristic of the TRC.

Three features of the TRC

Three key differences between the TRC of Canada and its more famous South African predecessor highlight the distinctiveness of these space-making efforts and contribute to the theoretical provocations they afford. First, unlike many other truth commissions, the TRC of Canada has not been accompanied by regime change or the transition from civil war to democratic peace. To the contrary, this truth commission - one of only a handful of similar commissions to operate in wealthy, stable western democracies - has run its course amid no regime change, no alteration of governing party at the federal level until nearing the end of their mandate, no breakthroughs in land-claim negotiations, no changes to colonial legal instruments regulating indigenous relationships to government (ie *The Indian Act*), limited prosecution of those responsible for abuses in residential schools, and no overall shift to the colonial structure of Canada as a sovereign settler-state.[33] In short, to the extent that the work of the truth commission draws attention to the problem of creating space for a new beginning to respectful relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians, it does so amid the context of an otherwise pervasive

[32] Personal observations, Edmonton Event, March 29, 2014.
[33] The national Conservative party was replaced by the Liberal party at the very end of the TRC's mandate, in 2015.

status quo.[34] As Matt James points out, while the TRC may not have faced the same elite-drive "preemtive focus on regime legitimization and national unity" accompanying transitional justice initiatives elsewhere, regime stability and widespread apathy have occasioned their own problems. "Official obstinacy, self-interested majoritarian complacency and a sharply delimited investigative mandate," James writes, "make it difficult for the Commission to uncover … the individual and institutional acts of Canadian decision making responsible for the innumerable injustices associated with the schools."[35]

The second difference is connected. Although the TRC of Canada was, by standards of previous TRCs, a large and well-funded commission with both an extensive historical period under review and a multi-year mandate, it never received mass publicity on the scale of the South African commission, whose televised hearings were pervasive at times.[36] Perhaps as a result of the difficulty of generating widespread media attention, the TRC of Canada has tended to transparently cultivate a sense of publicity at its major meetings, constantly referring to its media presence and emphasizing the international scope of its internet broadcasts. In an era of self-referential live tweeting as a staple of public events, this deliberate cultivation of a sense of publicity is by no means unique to the TRC, nor was the Canadian commission the most obscure of its kind. And yet the considerable difference between the international media frenzy of the South African commission, and the creation of a more modest public forum in Canada, merits consideration. The deliberate public-making activity of creating a forum for participants to *feel* heard, seen and respected was one of the salient features of the TRC's operation.

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[34] Rosemary Nagy, "Truth, Reconciliation and Settler Denial: Specifying the Canada - South Africa Analogy," *Human Rights Review* 13, no. 3 (2012): 349-367.
[35] Matt James, "A Carnival of Truth? Knowledge, Ignorance and the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 2 (2012): 2-3.
[36] See Antjie Krog, *Country of my Skull: guilt, sorrow, and the limits of forgiveness in the new South Africa* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000).

The public, televised confrontations between asylum-seeking perpetrators and victims of violence was simultaneously a driver and highlight of the South African experience with public truth-telling. These confrontations included more than the moments of actual dialogue between victims and perpetrators; rather, significant portions of the TRC were structured by the divisions between perspectives on apartheid past and the democratic future.[37] These included differences manifest through the submissions to the commission made by the various parties to it, which offered wildly clashing interpretations of the past.[38] Referring to such confrontations, Catherine Cole has noted, "The dissonance, gaps, and fissures between interpretations are central to the story of the TRC as a performed enactment of transition."[39]

But by contrast, the Canadian experience featured no public naming of perpetrators, few clashes between survivors and teachers, administrators or policy-makers associated with residential schools, and at least a token similarity between the regret and apology expressed by governments and churches and the narratives told to and by the truth commission. This does not mean the commission lacked conflict - that would be palpably untrue. But creating "a space for respectful dialogue" between survivors and former residential school staff presented a challenge to the TRC.[40] For example, one such exchange took place at the Victoria Regional Event, as Brother Tom Cavanaugh's account of residential schools from his perspective as a former district

[37] One of the most iconic of victim/perpetrator encounters was that between Jeffrey Benzien and those he had tortured. See Mark Sanders, "Renegotiating Responsibility After Apartheid: Listening to Perpetrator Testimony," *Journal of Gender, Social Policy & The Law* 10, no. 3 (2002): 587-595.
[38] For examples of the disparity between historical submissions to South Africa's TRC, see African National Congress, "Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, August 1996," *The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development*, accessed July 02, 2016, http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/anctruth.htm; and "Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by Mr F W De Klerk, Leader of the National Party," *The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development*, accessed July 02, 2016, http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/submit/np_truth.htm.
[39] Catherine Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 160.
[40] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 9.

superior clashed with recollections of those in the audience. The TRC's report describes the exchange thus:

> Survivors and family members who were present in the audience spoke out, saying, "Truth, tell the truth." Brother Cavanaugh replied, "If you give me a chance, I will tell you the truth." When TRC Chair Justice Murray Sinclair intervened to ask the audience to allow Brother Cavanaugh to finish his statement, he was able to do so without further interruption. Visibly shaken, Cavanaugh then went on to acknowledge that children had also been abused in the schools, and he condemned such actions, expressing his sorrow and regret for this breach of trust.[41]

Others who spoke that same day offered a completely different portrait of the schools, presenting the TRC with "two, seemingly irreconcilable, truths" of those events. But this public visibility of conflict was the exception, not the norm, for the meetings held by the TRC. Perhaps, as the same report suggests, "The fact that there were few direct exchanges at trc events between Survivors and former school staff indicates that for many, the time for reconciliation had not yet arrived. Indeed, for some, it may never arrive."[42]

From the perspective of agonistic theory, this difference between the South African and Canadian experiences is significant. The interpretation of reconciliation as agonistic seems to depend heavily on the plurality of memories which truth commissions have amplified and made public. The insistence of some that reconciliation should foment a national narrative or democratic unity has been countered by critics who maintain that the experience of contest and plurality itself, and not its resolution, is what demonstrates the value of reconciliation. Since the TRC of Canada has not had the legal power to name perpetrators, and in the absence of significant public prosecutions, its public-making activities suggest a different possibility for agonistic thought than

[41] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 10. This story is also recounted in The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future; Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 14-15.
[42] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 11.

the disclosure of plurality as an ineradicable feature of politics. This difference can of course be overstated. Reconciliation remains contested.[43] This is evident in the TRC's ongoing disputes with governments over the scope of its mandate and the release of government documentation.[44]

And yet, the difference between the very public confrontations in South Africa and the difficulty of carving out public space in the face of widespread apathy and disinterest is great enough for the Canadian experience to suggest a significant nuance in how to envisage agonistic reconciliation. What is needed, I believe, is a portrait of agonistic public-making which emphasizes both the disruptive potential of truths told about state violence, and the practices necessary to cultivate space for their publicity and reception. With this in mind, I turn to a brief overview of the public-making work of the TRC.

Creating public spaces

In the main hall at one of the National Events, a large screen read "This is a public place and event," and advised the audience they might be recorded.[45] But of course, making decades of state violence and resistances to it visible requires more than just hanging a sign. The sense in which the truth commission 'made public' the history of residential schools, the memories of survivors and the calls for reconciliation is understandably multifaceted. This sense is by no means exhausted by the media attention garnered, the proliferation of reports, nor indeed the 'official' recognition granted by the commission's court-ordered mandate. All these aspects of 'making known' depend also on new spaces for visibility - disruptive spaces of protests, commemorative,

[43] Both the South African and Canadian truth commissions received their initial impetus through contest - through negotiations leading to the interim constitution in South Africa, through class action lawsuit and settlement leading to the creation of the TRC in Canada.
[44] See The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,* vol. 5, *The Legacy* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 215-218.
[45] Personal observations, Vancouver Event, September 21, 2013.

ceremonial, and archival spaces, and forums where survivors could tell their stories and be heard. I want to highlight two aspects of these spaces for listening and speaking, two techniques of public-making central to their construction. These include first, the cultivation of reflective visibility as a sensibility attached to the awareness of being seen and heard; and second, honouring as an instrument in fostering this reflective visibility, including especially the technique of honouring through witnessing.

But these techniques must first be situated in the context of a curious feature of the public spaces of reconciliation: the temporary nature of the physical places for appearance associated with the commission. Many of the spaces of reconciliation, ranging from marches and rallies to official ceremonies and national events, were temporary. The physical spaces opened up by the regional and national events were in community halls, streets, hotels, convention centers, a hockey arena, and the surrounding lawns and outdoor spaces of these venues, scattered and patterned across the national space of Canada. This temporary nature of the physical spaces of truth commissions is a common and seemingly intentional aspect of such commissions as instruments of transitional justice. There is more than a passing resemblance between rented spaces and transitional commissions. The extra-ordinariness of both spaces and commissions depends in part upon their transience, as though both reconciliation and its physical spaces are necessarily fleeting. Perhaps temporary spaces imply a trajectory of transition towards permanence as a condition of their legitimacy.[46] The common expectation of *ad hoc* commissions of inquiry is that their transitional spaces and multiple voices will culminate in a permanent report and singular

[46] In place of this association of legitimacy with the teleological end of truth commissions in restored democratic communities, extraordinary commissions might alternately be situated within a story of emerging forms of legitimacy disenchanted with representations of the general will, and associated rather with immersion in attentiveness to plurality as particularity. See Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 6.

narrative.[47] Alternately, temporary spaces might mark the inherent weaknesses of a process destined to produce reports for dusty shelves, depending on the political will of the governments in power at its conclusion.[48] Both possibilities assign the greater weight to *permanent* democratic institutional spaces, either as successors to transitional spaces or as the spaces in which recommendations are implemented.

A third possibility diverges from both the optimism attaching to transitional justice, and from the pessimism associated with the real danger that governments will ignore the process. Transitional spaces need not unambiguously reinforce the permanence of 'normal' democratic institutions. Rather, spaces of resistance can spring up at the intersections of permanent and temporary, calling both into question through their own ambiguous characteristics. One example of an ambiguous space would be the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Australia, which began as a simple tent set up on the lawn of Australia's Parliament House in 1972, in protest of Australia's colonial assertions of sovereignty.[49] Fortuitously sustained by a legal loophole permitting Aboriginals to camp on crown land, and brought to greater publicity by police efforts to dismantle it, forty years of occupation have made the tent embassy an ambiguously permanent/temporary space of resistance. These characteristics hold a mirror to the adjacent and seemingly opposite Australian government buildings - a (permanent) tent embassy juxtaposed with a (temporary?) stone and brick institution. Similar eruptive and ambiguous spaces have accompanied or paralleled

[47] The permanent archival space at the University of Manitoba represents a major exception. This space is charged with the mandate to "preserve the memory of Canada's Residential School system and legacy. Not just for a few years, but forever." See "Our Mandate," University of Manitoba National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, accessed July 08, 2016, http://umanitoba.ca/centres/nctr/mandate.html.

[48] Such commissions cannot be judged only by the responsiveness of governments to their recommendations, but in many ways their success or failure is taken up in terms of how the conclusion of their mandates were negotiated. This is certainly true of the TRC's most relevant predecessor, the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. For an account of the finality and continuity of RCAP's processes, see Jula Hughes, "Instructive Past: Lessons from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples for the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 27, no. 1 (2012): 101-127.

[49] Gary Foley, Andrew Schaap and Edwina Howell, eds., *The Aboriginal Tent Embassy: Sovereignty, Black Power, Land Rights and the State* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

the reconciliation process in Canada, including especially the many protests connected with the Idle No More movement.[50] It is worth asking whether the spaces constructed for hearing survivors' testimony, less obviously spaces of eruptive dissent, feature a similar ambiguity between permanency and transition. In what follows, I hope to raise the possibility that honorary witnessing parallels this ambiguity, as its transitory preparation for testimony is succeeded by witnessing as reiteration, even as it calls into question this pattern of transition.

Reflective visibility

Unlike the documentary and archival results which might be seen as the culmination or end-point of the publicity generated by the TRC, its role as a *public forum* for the reception of survivors' testimony is, like those eruptive spaces of dissent referenced above, necessarily a temporary space. These temporary spaces were focal points for traditional media attention of varying degrees, though never to the extent experienced in South Africa. But what is particularly fascinating about this matrix of place and media attention is not the role of temporary spaces to facilitate print, online and television coverage. Instead, what I noticed most about this intersection was the way TRC staff and commissioners leveraged media coverage to cultivate a reflective sense of visibility *of* and *for* the participants at these events themselves. Media coverage functioned not only as linear *output* to wider audiences, but also in a reflective fostering of a sense of publicity among participants and those physically attending events by reference to the larger audiences not present. This strategic reflectivity extended even further through acknowledgement of audiences viewing TRC events via webcast.

[50] The All Nations Canoe Gathering held in Vancouver prior to the beginning of the TRC's Vancouver Event in 2013 was one example. By staging a scenario of welcome on the margins of sea and land, the gathering emphasized indigenous protocols, laws, and dignity. By featuring an *arrival* - itself an ambiguously temporary and permanent event - the gathering was rife with symbolic challenge to the permanency of colonial assertions of land ownership and settlement. See Reconciliation Canada, "All Nations Canoe Gathering," September 18, 2013, http://reconciliationcanada.ca/staging/all-nations-canoe-gathering/.

Over a series of regional and national events, the remarks by the commissioners' and event MCs evinced a concerted effort to give program participants and audiences the impression of *being in public*, the sense that many people were avidly interested in listening to and watching these events. There are several interrelated aspects to this reflective inculcation of the *sense* of being in public as opposed to merely the attempt to widely publicize a message. These include: remarks by commissioners and MCs about the viewership of events; various in-the-room interactions designed to encourage active listening; ceremonies of honour and respect; and witnessing as a core activity of the TRC. I first noticed this technique while viewing a regional event through the online live streaming service provided by the commission. In their concluding remarks, one of the commissioners announced the number of live streams watching the event, and announced the number of different countries represented. This caught my ear because I was one of these online viewers. Then, to my surprise, given the tight time constraints generally in evidence during the concluding remarks of sessions which often went to the full duration of their schedules, the commissioner proceeded to slowly name every country from which someone had viewed that meeting, some 50 or 60 in total.[51]

This identical process was followed by MCs and all three commissioners at other national events, multiple times during each event.[52] Sometimes it consisted of brief acknowledgements of thousands of online viewers from many countries, while at other times the commissioners would again read off every country in the list, as Marie Wilson did in the closing remarks of the

[51] I first noticed this pattern while watching the TRC's meeting in Whitehorse via webcast, and noted its repetition at all subsequent major TRC events.
[52] Examples include the following: Mike McCarthy (Master of Ceremonies) read this list twice during the Vancouver Event, September 18, 2013; MC Stan Wesley and Wilton Littlechild mentioned the number of countries watching the Edmonton Event, March 27, 2014; Marie Wilson specifically welcomed online viewers to the Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014; Wilton Littlechild, Québec Event, April 25, 2013.

Vancouver National Event.[53] A second, closely related set of remarks was delivered by Wilton Littlechild at the concluding session of one day of the Edmonton Event, where he not only counted the online viewership (13 444 in 44 countries) but counted the number of likes the TRC had received on Facebook (10 000), the number of media stories generated that day (125), and the increase in online viewership of the Edmonton Journal in response to their stories about the event (from 90 000 to 500 000). In reference to what he called "a huge amount of media attention", Littlechild added: "I remember an Elder who came to us from an isolated community, who said 'I want the world to hear my story'. Hopefully he's watching today, or better yet, hopefully he's here." He concluded his remarks by saying: "For all of you watching around the world, thank you for listening to the tears."[54]

Very similar speeches counting media stories, online viewership and thanking those watching were delivered by commissioners the following two days. As part of these remarks Murray Sinclair thanked "the media for paying attention to us," mentioned that each web stream may represent more than one person, listed every country where someone streamed the proceedings, and said of these viewers, "they have been an important part of our success in communicating our message."[55] He also noted that nearly every panel at the Edmonton event was completely full. The consistency with which commissioners and MCs made positive, celebratory comments about the online viewership and media exposure generated by the TRC events represents more than the circular publicity occasioned by social media (although there were also some good examples of this, including one MC joking about how the co-MC's mom posted on

[53] Marie Wilson read the list of countries live-streaming the event during the closing remarks of the Vancouver Event, September 21, 2013. These evidences of publicity were frequently greeted with cheers and applause from those attending.
[54] Wilton Littlechild, Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014. Littlechild also highlighted the number of children (2800) who had attended the designated Education Day activities the previous day. Littlechild also used this story at the Québec and Ottawa Events. Wilton Littlechild, Ottawa Event, June 01, 2015, Québec Event, April 25, 2013.
[55] Murray Sinclair, Edmonton Event, March 30, 2014.

Facebook that she was watching him, or the commissioners reading tweets put out by TRC staff to publicize the events).[56] Rather, comments of this sort were directed towards increasing the sense of connection and participation for online audiences, and especially, towards asserting the relevance and widespread visibility of TRC proceedings.[57]

By portraying these comments about the presence of unseen internet audiences and the interest of mainstream media as attempts to generate a sense of visibility among participants at TRC events, I do not mean to gloss over the other discursive consequences attendant on these portrayals. Listing all the multiple countries of the internet viewers, for instance, not only depicts the audience as large, but as international. This depiction of an international audience assumes increased importance in light of the TRC's adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a central basis for their report and recommendations.[58] In other moments, the speakers at TRC events addressed Canada, indigenous peoples or non-indigenous peoples as the primary audiences. This notion of the discursive depiction of audiences could be taken further, but my primary point in reviewing the attention paid to audiences concerns the deliberately inculcated *visibility* afforded by such rhetoric. There is a subtle distinction to be made, I think, between the dimensions of publicity as broadcasting and as reflective attention to being seen.

Celebrating Survivors

The TRC commissioners have consistently called for greater respect, noting: "To the Commission, 'reconciliation' is about establishing a mutually respectful relationship between

[56] This exchange occurred between the two co-MCs on March 28, 2014; Wilton Littlechild referenced TRC staff's tweets the same day.
[57] By contrast, there were also several moments where the expression "in this room" was used to denote solidarity or emotional intimacy. In the first of these two contexts the phrase was echoed by successive youth speakers at a panel devoted to involving youth in reconciliation; the second context was suggested by an MC expressing gratitude for being present rather than watching on a screen, and by Marie Wilson who, after discussing the health workers available and the chance to cry, said "there is no shame in this room". Edmonton Event, March 27-28, 2014.
[58] This was clear by the time the TRC issued their Interim Report in 2012, and features in their final reports. See The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 20.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country…. We are not there yet."[59] I want to show how respect figures not only as an aim of reconciliation, but as a method of producing greater visibility for the voices and stories of marginalized indigenous peoples. This indicates respect as an action rather than (only) an attitude, perhaps specified by the word 'honouring', itself a central rhetorical device of the commission's public-making efforts. In short, the process of making survivors visible was also the process of honouring them, and honouring them *as survivors*. An interesting insight drawn from political geography is applicable here: public-making proceeds through forms of *address*, in the dual sense of naming and assigning a specified location within a system.[60] Honouring survivors is thus simultaneously a means of naming and locating them within systems of public discourse.

The TRC commissioners have repeatedly emphasized their desire to make residential school survivors the focal point of the commission's efforts.[61] The settlement agreement which led to the creation of the TRC was largely produced through the efforts of residential school survivors to push forward litigation against the government and churches; the structure and subsequent work of the commission itself was profoundly shaped by a small Survivors' Committee. As part of these efforts, the term survivor was put into public discourse. Not only does this discourse emerge in the proceedings of these national events, but it emerges *as* a form of visibility. In other words, it is through the *visibility* accorded to survivors and indigenous families that these discourses are made public. This cultivation of visibility was less a matter of propagating discursive terms than of publicly honouring and listening to survivors and their families. Desmond

[59] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 3.
[60] Lynn Staeheli, "Political geography: democracy and the disorderly public," *Progress in Human Geography* 34, no. 1 (2010): 67-78.
[61] Murray Sinclair described it this way: "mostly it [the commission] was about listening…. Survivors were invited to share what they had to share, no more, no less, and at the end of the day they were acknowledged." Murray Sinclair, Ottawa Event, June 02, 2015.

Tutu's remark applies here: "Being heard into healing was the experience of many victims of torture or their surviving family members at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings."[62]

The introduction of this term 'survivor,' was not so much a matter of making those who attended the schools known as it was of honouring and celebrating them. This involved a discursive construction of those who attended the schools and the audiences who watched the TRC proceedings. Thus, both the objects of attention (survivors) and *attentive subjects* (the audience) were discursively constituted by acts of witnessing, honouring and according visibility. In the TRC meetings, MCs and other speakers frequently asked survivors in the audience to stand and be recognized by applause; the children and grandchildren of survivors were likewise recognized.[63] One Honorary Witness remarked that the most profound thing he heard as a witness was the plea: "don't forget the survivors."[64] The honour songs, dances, and gift-giving attendant on TRC meetings must also be construed in light of the visibility accorded survivors through practices of honouring that jointly constituted audience and survivors. This construction of public space resembles Paulette Regan's notion of pedagogical space, places which simultaneously introduce information and the possibility of action, in this case, the action of honouring.[65]

Matt James has argued the TRC of Canada was a victim-centered truth commission, both in terms of the prominence of those who have suffered in the commission's structure and focus, and the relative absence of perpetrators from the process.[66] Yet the term 'survivor' replaces the

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[62] Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness: and Why This Makes All the Difference* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 147.

[63] For example, at the official media release of the commission's findings, Murray Sinclair invited all the survivors present to stand up, and explained that although the commission also heard from people who worked in the schools, "mostly we want to acknowledge the survivors." Murray Sinclair, Ottawa Event, June 02, 2015.

[64] Wab Kinew, quoting Barney Williams, a member of the TRC's Survivors' Committee. TRC Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014.

[65] As one example of "critical pedagogical space", Regan describes the Ottawa War Museum, which featured placards asking "What will I do?" to connect remembering with action. See Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation In Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 144-145.

[66] Matt James, "A Carnival of Truth?" 1-4.

victim/perpetrator binary with a singularity, since survivor has no obvious correlate except to the notion of attempted genocide, which does not in itself imply individualized perpetrators. This survivor-centered approach lends nominal credence to the argument that South Africa's TRC featured public contestation in a way not replicated in Canada. The pairing of victim/perpetrator draws attention to the conflict between them, especially given the amnesty provisions which facilitated the appearance of both before South Africa's commission. By contrast, attention in Canada has been squarely centered on survivors. Terms for those designated as responsible for the operation of the schools have included churches, governments, abusers, teachers, Canada, and settler-society, depending on context. Neither naming perpetrators nor compelling testimony from those who worked within residential schools lay within the commission's mandate, and of course the dynamic of the South African TRC in this regard was set by the ability to grant immunity from prosecution to perpetrators in exchange for public testimony. The absence of any comparable power in the Canadian TRC and even, the absence of any comparable drive to publicize the individuals responsible for the residential school system, indicates a very different use of publicity as a tool of reconciliation in Canada.

Chief Robert Joseph, whom one commissioner referred to as "an architect and poet of the settlement agreement" for his role in the negotiations leading to the creation of the TRC, was asked during the Edmonton event why a truth commission came to be seen as preferable to other forms of reconciliation.[67] He responded that survivors were looking for a "safe place to tell their stories", and added that, following several years of unsuccessful demands for a public inquiry into residential schools, he and others realized the need for a response which could be tailored to survivors' needs. Moreover, he concluded, indigenous elders from across the country spoke about

[67] Marie Wilson, Vancouver Event, September 18, 2013.

how the idea of reconciliation was in all their traditions and ancient knowledge.[68] Not only does this account demonstrate the early centrality of the discourse of survivors in the establishment of the TRC, but it also indicates how this term is not simply a face-lift for the word 'victim' in the absence of the word 'perpetrator'. Instead it represents an attempt to foster a kind of visibility quite distinct from the perpetrator/victim binary of other TRCs. Curiously, the main rival to the term 'survivor' was the term 'former student', which federal government representatives continued to insist upon. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for instance, continued to use the term 'former students' even at the TRC's concluding national event.[69]

The term survivor connotes resilience and resistance, an achievement to be honoured and also celebrated. A subtle difference inheres in the visibility granted to victims through ritualistic inversion of their exclusion, and the visibility granted to survivors for their vivacity, their *presence*. As Michael Humphrey argues, the difficulty with victimhood as a form of visibility is that the predicate for making victims 'morally visible' (an idea borrowed from William Connolly) remains tied to state power. Humphrey notes that the criteria of "selection for exclusion (to be terrorized with impunity) and for inclusion (to be emphatically recognized and embraced) are both expressions of state power, but with a different valency."[70] Humphrey interprets the visibility and voice of victims as a ritual "to undo the original spectacle of violence" exercised by states.[71] But perhaps a more pressing comparison would be between the TRC's celebration of survivors and what Jennifer Henderson calls the "transformation of settler-colonial guilt into nostalgia" through

[68] Bobbi Joseph, Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014.
[69] Bernard Valcourt, Ottawa Event, June 02, 2015. At this same event, Valcourt's refusal to stand during an ovation given to the TRC's recommendation earned him media attention for an "appalling lack of respect". See Samantha Power, "Words are not enough for Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *Vue Weekly*, June 10, 2015, http://www.vueweekly.com.
[70] Michael Humphrey, "From Victim to Victimhood: Truth Commissions and Trials as Rituals of Political Transition and Individual Healing," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (2003): 174.
[71] Humphrey, "From Victim to Victimhood," 173.

the visual representation of "vanishing" indigenous families.[72] Unlike the dramaturgical visibility of victimhood as the restoration of moral status, 'survivors' implies celebration of visibility as a sign of survival. The discursive term 'survivor' is intimately intertwined with its manifestation.

During one national event, Murray Sinclair addressed some criticism he had received about the term. He said he had thought about alternatives to use, joking that he liked the word "thrivers" but rejected it because "thrival" wasn't a real word. Then, injecting a more serious tone, he went on to say: "When we talk about survivors, we're actually using the word in [the sense] of 'people who have prevailed', 'people who have won', 'people who are victors'. So let's have no more contention about the word survivor."[73] In the opening remarks of the TRC report *The Survivors Speak*, the commissioners note how they worried the term "survivor" might carry a pejorative intonation, but came to see it more positively:

> A Survivor is not just someone who "made it through" the schools, or "got by" or was "making do." A Survivor is a person who persevered against and overcame adversity. The word came to mean someone who emerged victorious, though not unscathed, whose head was "bloody but unbowed." It referred to someone who had taken all that could be thrown at them and remained standing at the end. It came to mean someone who could legitimately say "I am still here!" For that achievement, Survivors deserve our highest respect.[74]

The exclamation "I am still here!" is worthy of respect not as an inversion (and repetition) of state power, but as a victorious visibility.[75] The triumphant presence of survivors despite the attempt through residential schools to efface indigenous cultures and families deserves respect. Put otherwise, it is this defiant endurance which organizes the discourse of Survivors as objects of the honouring and respect which thereby attests to their enduring visibility. The discourse of

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[72] Jennifer Henderson, "Transparency, Spectatorship, Accountability: Indigenous Families in Settler-State 'Postdemocracies'," *ESC* 38, no. 3-4 (September/December 2012): 300.
[73] Murray Sinclair, Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014.
[74] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The Survivors Speak*, xiii.
[75] One Honorary Witness, Sandy Whitehawk, suggested "spiritual warriors" as a better name than either victims or survivors. Sandy Whitehawk, Québec Event, April 25, 2013.

survival is also a discourse of publicity, and it is through the method of honouring that spaces for survivors to appear and tell their stories are secured, however temporarily.

The Birthday Parties for survivors held at TRC national events offer perhaps the most convincing illustration of honouring as a technique of public-making. These celebrations of the "I am still here!" were, in a way, both public-making method and *substance* of the survivor discourse. I attended two of these, in Vancouver and Edmonton. Each began with a remark by Commissioner Littlechild that in residential schools, students' names were replaced with numbers, their languages were forbidden, and their birthdays passed uncelebrated.[76] This meant, he said, that there were a lot of birthday parties to catch up on. These birthday parties were thus much more than lighthearted relief from the sadness, grief and anger of the sharing circles and stories told by survivors, though they were that. They were simultaneously and symbolically celebrations of endurance, of visibility. These were celebrations of survivorship as endurance of life and joy despite the traumatic deprivation of the schools. This was even more apparent as participants (some pre-selected, some spontaneously) sang happy birthday in as many indigenous languages as were available in the room. The endurance of survivors and the endurance of indigenous languages and cultures share this similar discursive space as not only resurgent, but enduring and only belatedly and partially recognized as such by the state.

Honorary witnessing

Witnessing was a central plank in the pragmatic work of widely propagating the history of residential schools. Its salience in my approach is due to the insights it offers into the dilemma of whether the disclosures urged by proponents of agonistic political theory require public space, and

[76] For examples, see The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, vol. 2, *The Inuit and Northern Experience* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 92, 107; The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Interim Report* (Winnipeg: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012), 20.

how such public space might itself be agonistic. The insights garnered from the program of witnessing employed by the TRC would not be replicated by a focus on dialogue or even listening, although these concepts too were integral to the insistence that "at its heart, reconciliation is about forming respectful relationships."[77] In most literature on truth commissions, the word 'witness' is used synonymously with victim or testifier, and generally designates those who speak before the commission and bear witness to the injustices they have experienced. The TRC of Canada tends to use the word 'survivor' to denote those who testify of their experiences, and the word 'witness' for those who watch and listen to them. Perhaps this is a nominal difference of nomenclature, but the reversal thus effectuated is at least as striking as the substitution of 'survivor' for 'victim'.

The list of Honorary Witnesses invited by the commission includes long-time advocates of indigenous rights, former prime ministers and ministers responsible for Aboriginal Affairs, Canadian and international human rights advocates, and many authors, actors, athletes, broadcasters, and other prominent figures.[78] At least one international witness was chosen for each national event; institutional witnesses were also designated.[79] The program of witnesses was identified "early on" as a way for the commissioners to request the help of many in their work.[80] At TRC events, newly inducted witnesses were invited on stage with the commissioners and given a gift and pin. Later in the proceedings, the witnesses spoke both about what they had seen and heard, and about their experiences with reconciliation from their respective fields. The choice of witnesses was not without contention. Speaking at the Edmonton National Event, Murray Sinclair acknowledged how some felt that "the people brought up here to give expressions of reconciliation

[77] Murray Sinclair, Ottawa Event, June 02, 2015.
[78] See "Honorary Witness," The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, accessed July 08, 2016, http://www.trc.ca/websites/reconciliation/index.php?p=331#Honorary Witnesses.
[79] Marie Wilson, Edmonton Event, March 27, 2014.
[80] Marie Wilson, Vancouver Event, September 21, 2013.

… or as honorary witnesses" did not deserve to be there. He replied that they had been selected "because of their support for the commission and an indication of the significant change we want to see," noting "some still see it differently, and I respect that."[81] His comments highlight the ambivalence between witnessing as an expression of solidarity, and witnessing as a technique of public-making.

The program of inducting Honorary Witnesses was not merely pragmatic, however. It was built into the negotiated mandate accorded to the commission following the conclusion of the class-action lawsuit launched by survivors of the schools. That mandate required the commission to "witness, support, promote and facilitate truth and reconciliation events," specifying that the term *witness* "refers to the Aboriginal principle of 'witnessing'."[82] One TRC report connects this principle of witnessing to the recognition of indigenous oral history, and offers the following explanation:

> The term *witness* is in reference to the Aboriginal principle of witnessing, which varies among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Generally speaking, witnesses are called to be the keepers of history when an event of historic significance occurs. Through witnessing, the event or work that is undertaken is validated and provided legitimacy. The work could not take place without honoured and respected guests to witness it. Witnesses are asked to store and care for the history they witness and to share it with their own people when they return home. For Aboriginal peoples, the act of witnessing these events comes with a great responsibility to remember all the details and be able to recount them accurately as the foundation of oral histories.[83]

Three features stand out from this description. The first is the importance of remembering, in connection with the significance of witnessing as an integral part of history-keeping. The second is the importance of sharing, of re-telling what was witnessed. The third feature is perhaps the

[81] Murray Sinclair, Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014.
[82] *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, Schedule N, 4(d), 1(c), 1(c)n1*.
[83] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation* (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 192. This description is also available at "Honorary Witness," The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, accessed July 08, 2016, http://www.trc.ca/websites/reconciliation/index.php?p=331#Honorary Witnesses.

most subtle and intriguing. It is the importance of witnessing as a *preparation*, as not only the remembering and sharing which occur afterwards, but the prior preparation to witness. Its importance is suggested by the thought that the work (of disclosure, of storytelling) could not take place without witnessing being *in place*, being ready. This portrait differs from what might be termed a juridical model of witnessing, where one becomes a witness only *after* the fact, and bearing witness consists primarily of representing the truthfulness of what was seen and heard. Other forms of witnessing - witnesses to marriages or other ceremonies, for instance - share something of the priority of witnessing, a guarantee of the reality and significance of an event prepared prior to and as a condition for the event itself.[84] The preparatory aspects of witnessing include the invitation extended by the TRC to respected and honoured guests.

Thus, the validating and legitimizing aspects of witnessing are not encapsulated by remembrance and proliferation alone. The stories told by survivors are made legitimate on account of their being spoken in front of witnesses, and specifically, in front of respected witnesses invited to the task. Arendt advances a similar formulation for the sense of *reality* accorded by speaking and hearing in front of others. One difference between her account and this description is that Arendt highlights the importance of *plurality*, rather than respect, in securing this reality, as demonstrably different perspectives are brought to bear on common objects.[85]

But for the TRC's program of honorary witnesses, this preparatory characteristic is intrinsically tied to respect. This is evident both in the stipulation that witnesses be honoured and respected guests, and in their preparation as itself a modality of honouring. Along with the

[84] Shelagh Rogers also uses this example: "When we have significant events in our lives such as marriage or graduation, we invite people to come and bear witness. These national gatherings of the TRC are significant events." Shelagh Rogers, "Reflections on being an honorary witness for the TRC," *CBC News*, March 29, 2014, http://www.cbc.ca.
[85] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, *Thinking* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977 [1971]), 19.

commissioners' efforts to cultivate reflective publicity, witnessing creates spaces where survivors are made visible through the respect accorded their stories and voices. At the introduction of one sharing panel, Marie Wilson welcomed those watching via the internet, characterized the sharing panel as public, and added, "It's my honour to be here with you, to witness with you." Noting how each survivor is "coming forward as our teacher and expert," she continued by inviting the audience to show respect, to witness, and to share.[86] These comments were characteristic of an extension of the pattern of honorary witnessing to the audience generally, whom Wilson called "implicated witnesses."[87] On a different occasion, prior to asking several Honorary Witnesses to stand and be recognized, Commissioner Wilson remarked: "Who will our helpers be? We have asked all those who have gathered with us to be witnesses. But we have also asked a number of special witnesses…. These are our honorary witnesses, but you are all our honorable witnesses, and we need the help of all of you."[88]

Conclusion

During the induction of several new witnesses in Vancouver, which I have been referencing, Commissioner Wilson described the TRC's space-making work: "We have tried to create a space here. We have already seen that it is filled with brokenness, but also great love."[89] Such a space - what one witness described as "this safe place where we may all speak" - was constructed through the discourse of survival, the careful listening efforts of the TRC commissioners, and the cultivation of reflective visibility through the attention drawn to the public

[86] Marie Wilson, Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014.
[87] Marie Wilson, Edmonton Event, March 27, 2014.
[88] Marie Wilson, Vancouver Event, September 18, 2013.
[89] Marie Wilson, Vancouver Event, September 18, 2013.

aspects of the TRC events.[90] Witnessing played a central role in this space-making function of the TRC, and moreover, a role *unlike* and yet complementary to disclosure itself. Something like this is suggested by one elder's explanation of "silence" in Mi'kmaq law as it relates to reconciliation. The account runs as follows:

> Elder Augustine suggested that there is both a place for talking about reconciliation and a need for quiet reflection. Reconciliation cannot occur without listening, contemplation, meditation, and deeper internal deliberation. Silence in the face of residential school harms is an appropriate response for many Indigenous peoples. We must enlarge the space for respectful silence in journeying towards reconciliation, particularly for Survivors who regard this as key to healing.[91]

The TRC Report in which this anecdote appears concludes: "This profound insight is an Indigenous law that could be applied more generally." Perhaps one such application concerns the role of space-making as a complement to disclosure.

My purpose in reviewing what I take as the distinctive public-making work of the TRC of Canada is to pose a question to agonistic theory: how can public space be created for disruptive narratives and expressive contest without presuming to limit the boundaries of such contest? The reflective public space constructed for survivors and through the discourse of Survivors suggests two tentative conclusions for agonistic appraisals of reconciliation. The first is that these public spaces depart from the South African model in that they do not primarily highlight contestation. Instead, they embed respect into the process of making the endurance of survivors public; in other words, the respect accorded to survivors at TRC events was itself a primary way of creating spaces for them to tell their stories. This included not only making these spaces *safe* for the hard task of recounting an often traumatic past, but also making these spaces *public* as a triumph over the

[90] Shelagh Rogers, Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014.
[91] Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 122.

privacy and privation of residential schools. What I am calling a modality of *honouring* could be broken down further into techniques of respecting, celebrating, honouring and witnessing.

The particular conclusion for agonistic thought is simply that building public spaces matters for what a truth commission might achieve. The stories told by survivors, and the implicit contest between clashing memories of the past (which retains its prominence despite the absence of perpetrator/victim encounters) are not sufficient to explain what the truth-telling of a TRC is about. The second conclusion is more tentative. It is that the public spaces thus created are connected to an openness to natality which is deeply agonistic. This connection is signaled by the excess and unprecedentedness of the stories told by survivors, and it is implicit in the connections drawn between survivors and children, between the children speaking out of the survivors and the children who face the multi-generational damage caused by the schools. But to my mind, it is the pattern of witnessing which demonstrates how public space is linked to natality. The next chapter will take up this question through an appraisal of Arendt's insistence on locating agonistic activity within a distinctive public sphere.

Chapter Two: The Dilemma of Public Space

Introduction

Describing the truth-telling of transitional justice as a form of *public*-making helps clarify a particular problem attaching to the possibility of an *agonistic* reconciliation. Such reconciliation would not bring closure to discordant memories or reify a common history. It would seek the reverse: to publish multiple narratives so as to attest to the impossibility of closure as such, and to celebrate the inherent value of plurality to political disagreement. But as agonism describes an expressive, disclosive struggle between contestants who may challenge both the terms and the goals of their civic associations, a dilemma arises. Either truth-telling presents an opportunity to overcome lasting animosities and inequalities and so prepare the terrain for the expressive struggle thus described, or it is itself an instance and perhaps model of perpetual political contest.

Put this way, neither answer satisfies, and the dichotomy rings false. For even if truth-telling was not precursory to political contest but was emblematic of it, as a *model* of agonism it would preserve a relationship of priority which would tend to remove it from the list of things which could be contested. To the extent that reconciliation presumes to present a model of political contest, either as a model for the space-making work which precedes democratic politics or as an example of such politics, it would inure itself against challenges which differ from the format of contest thus modeled. More pressingly, if the public-making work facilitated by truth commissions is itself a *form* of civic association to be taken up and replicated, the project would reject ahead of time the possibility that reconciliation is neither the only, nor best, response to state violence.

But speaking of an *ambiguous* public-making, which hesitates between *instance of* and *prior condition for* agonism, opens two particular formulations of this dilemma which expose how

agonistic reconciliation might differentiate itself from procedural or national theories of transitional justice. The first is the question of whether public-making *discloses* politics as expressive struggle, or whether it *creates* the space required for a political modality of disclosure. The second formulation asks how the creation of such space could precede disclosure and yet be agonistic itself. In either case, a dilemma remains. It is not sufficient to imagine a reversal - contest in place of harmony, politics prior to community - because to do so begs the question of how such a reversal could be made public without being an *a priori* requirement beyond challenge.

Agonism denotes more than contest; it describes an expressive performance in which participants disclose memories, perspectives and actions not reducible to representations of conflicting norms or interests. It would thus seem to require a forum where contest could be seen, heard and *acted out*. This, at least, is the conclusion at which Hannah Arendt arrives - that a distinct public sphere ranks high among the conditions required for politics as meaningful and memorable contest between free, plural actors. I want to suggest that Arendt's account of public space vividly illustrates the dilemma facing any attempt to formulate a theory of reconciliation as agonistic. In subsequent chapters, I will suggest how an emphasis on *disclosure* attempts to evade this dilemma of whether democratic contest requires a prior delineation of public space, such as reconciliation might supply through public truth-telling as a new foundation for inclusive democracy.

First, however, I will illustrate the dilemma as it appears in Arendt's lexicon of freedom and action, and the criticism directed at Arendt's insistence on public space as a necessary condition for agonistic struggle. Through such treatment, I hope to highlight the potential divergence between public-making understood as disclosive contest, and public-making as the cultivation of spaces of appearance demonstrated by the program of witnessing employed by the TRC of Canada. The contribution of this chapter will be to illustrate how these two dilemmas

appear in Arendt's writings and the responses of her critics: the dilemma of public space as a requirement for agonism, and the dilemma of its necessary priority.

Two moments of agonism

Agonistic appraisals of reconciliation face the dilemma of whether truth-telling requires public space: whether we interpret the listening and re-telling work of truth commissions as an instance of expressive disclosure or as the creation of a forum for it. For Arendt, public space denotes two distinct aspects. It first indicates the 'space of appearance' which accompanies the experience of speaking and acting together, predates constitution-making, and disappears whenever speech and action - what Arendt calls 'power' - cease.[92] But it also means the authoritative delineation of a public realm, the inauguration of which is always a type of beginning, or foundation.[93] In its former moment, public space is brought about by the disclosive potentialities of action in concert. It accompanies disclosive action and departs whenever it ceases:

> Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities. Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence.[94]

But in its latter aspect, the public realm includes the reminder that action depends on pre-political conditions, including especially the demarcation of public from private spaces:

> The fences inclosing private property and insuring the limitations of each household, the territorial boundaries which protect and make possible the physical identity of a people, and the laws which protect and make possible its political existence, are of such great importance to the stability of human affairs precisely because no such

[92] Power, Arendt notes, "corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert." Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 44. See also Arendt, *On Violence*, 52.
[93] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199-200.
[94] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 200.

> limiting and protecting principles rise out of the activities going on in the realm of human affairs itself.[95]

If the realm of action both requires public space and yet gives rise to no such demarcation itself, the consequence seems to be that political contest requires prior boundaries.[96] But Arendt juxtaposes this pre-politically demarcated public space with the impossibility of its priority. On one hand, the *polis* is "physically secured by the wall around the city and physiognomically guaranteed by its laws."[97] But conversely, "the political realm rises directly out of acting together, the 'sharing of words and deeds' which are the "activity which constitutes it."[98] The relationship between this realm and its boundaries is thus not one of simple priority - creating walls and laws so as to make a public realm possible. Rather, she concludes, "It is as though the wall of the *polis* and the boundaries of the law were drawn around an already existing public space which, however, without such stabilizing protection could not endure, could not survive the moment of action and speech itself."[99]

As agonistic theorists have pointed out, this hesitation between the priority of walls and the expressive communities they permit is not to be evaded by appeal to the possibility that the rule of law and popular sovereignty are co-original or co-constitutive. This proposition would merely condense the paradox of "the sovereign subject that founds the law and the law that delimits a space for politics within which the sovereign will can be expressed."[100]

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[95] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 191.
[96] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 63-64. Arendt says much the same in an endnote to *On Revolution*: "The fact is that lawmaking did not belong among the rights and duties of a Greek citizen; the act of laying down the law was considered to be pre-political." Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 312.
[97] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.
[98] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.
[99] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.
[100] See Andrew Schaap's treatment of this problem through a contrast between Chantal Mouffe and Jürgen Habermas, in Andrew Schaap, "Aboriginal Sovereignty and the Democratic Paradox," in *The Politics of Radical Democracy*, eds. Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 55.

Addressed to the issue of reconciliation, Arendt's contrasting depictions of public space - requiring prior boundaries yet occasioned by expressive interaction - raise two questions. First, they raise the question of whether public space is a prior condition of contest; and second, they pose the more vexing question of whether reconciliation is or ought to be a new beginning. Although reconciliation features a logic of closure, the plural accounts of the past which it makes public tend to call into question whether there ever was a singular community to put back together.[101] Agonistic reconciliation is a belated recognition of what has always been true of politics - that the terms of governance of a community are contestable and actually contested. In this way it is unlike an inauguration of a new era of respect, the triumph of a new narrative of inclusion. However, as an ontological revelation about the permanence of difference, agonistic reconciliation incites a reconsidered ethical commitment to plurality. In this way it bears more than a passing resemblance to a new beginning, or rather, to the problem of beginning, the problem "of an unconnected, new event breaking into the continuous sequence of historical time."[102] But this second moment tends to be occluded by the lasting suspicion of beginnings as origin stories which provide the unity of community. Reconciliation, it seems, both must and must not be a new beginning.

It is somewhat of a truism that reconciliation remembers the past, and looks forward to a new future. There are actually two truisms at work here: the truism that reconciliation must look back in order to look forward, and the truism Arendt borrows from Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen):

[101] Desmond Tutu suggests this harmony can be imagined. "The word itself, re-conciliation, indicates a restoration. It implies the restoration of cordial relations that existed before the breach. But in many places what existed before was not community or conciliation …. For the writers of the biblical creation stories, human history offered no examples of true conciliation…. So they looked back instead to a time before time. They imagined the ideal, the time when all creation lived in harmony with God in the Garden of Eden. When we reconcile, we inhabit that territory conceived by the hope-filled imagination." Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness*, 153.
[102] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 204-205.

"All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them."[103] In the build-up to the TRC in Canada, the Canadian government and churches responsible for residential schools, along with many survivors who suffered in them, spoke about reconciliation as a beginning or as a turning point. Book metaphors abounded, particularly in government speeches: turning the page, closing a sad chapter of the past, beginning a new chapter, and so forth.[104] Rejecting this rhetoric, the TRC noted: "Reconciliation is not about 'closing a sad chapter of Canada's past,' but about opening new healing pathways of reconciliation that are forged in truth and justice."[105] Elsewhere, the TRC used the 'sad chapter' metaphor to subvert the implied narrative of harmony and its return. The preface to one report opens by quoting Stephen Harper's use of the metaphor, then states: "That chapter is part of a broader story: one in which the Canadian government gained control over Aboriginal land and peoples, disrupted Aboriginal governments and economies, and sought to repress Aboriginal cultures and spiritual practices."[106] These book metaphors remain open to other subversions which preserve their connection to beginning. One response to Canada's official apology noted "hopefully it will close the chapter on this unfortunate part of First Nations history so that an entirely new book can begin, hopefully this time with Aboriginal people as co-authors."[107]

However, the hope that reconciliation can be a new beginning is generally tempered with caution. As Paulette Regan notes, perhaps investing hope in the struggle against colonial

[103] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 175.
[104] Paulette Regan quotes Chief Robert Joseph's testimony before a committee, in which Joseph uses this expression, "turn the page on this chapter" alongside other language of exceptionalism, "called upon to do the extraordinary," to describe the work of reconciliation. See Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 127.
[105] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 12.
[106] See The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The Survivors Speak*, v.
[107] Drew Hayden Taylor, "Cry me a River, White Boy," in *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey*, eds. Gregory Younging, Jonathan Dewar and Mike DeGagné (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2009), 102.

oppression is more effective than hoping for a sudden change.[108] For others the truisms themselves are suspect. The symbolic beginning marked by apology could be interpreted as a continuing settler colonial policy rather than a fundamental shift, with a real danger that imagining reconciliation as a new beginning is an attempt to secure certainty by putting the past in the past, bypassing crucial concerns with land, reparation and restoration.[109] As Kiera Ladner argues, we must revisit the relationship between reconciliation, space, and Canada's story of beginnings. Her example is illustrative in this regard. She tells two distinctive stories about the Cypress Hills, or Manatakawikewin in Cree, beautiful hills which rise suddenly out of the prairies. One story is about massacres in sacred places; the other is the origin story of the Northwest Mounted Police, sent west "to lay the groundwork for the peaceful expansion of civilization as opposed to the American model of war, lawlessness, and conquest."[110]

One point I take from Ladner's comparison of these two narratives is that the relationship between spaces and beginnings must be suspect in reconciliation, which must deconstruct the association of prior space with empty lands for new beginnings. "Foundational myths," she writes, "have to be dismantled and decolonized…. Canadians need to acknowledge and reconcile themselves with the true history of these lands. These were not unoccupied lands."[111] Similar misgivings are mirrored in the loose collection of political theory I am terming 'agonistic'. This is a suspicion with beginnings themselves, with the western philosophical tradition which has invested beginnings with significance as the locus of truths and principles which inform contemporary governance.

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[108] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 22-23.
[109] Jeff Corntassel Chaw-win-is T'lakwadzi, "Indigenous Storytelling, Truth-Telling, and Community Approaches to Reconciliation," *ESC* 35, no. 1 (2009): 137-159.
[110] Kiera L. Ladner, "Political Genocide: Killing Nations through Legislation and Slow-Moving Poison," in *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, eds. Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 227.
[111] Ladner, "Political Genocide," 228.

The concern with reconciliation as a beginning which leaves the past behind lies in the propensity of this formulation to leave two underlying assumptions untroubled. These include, first, that there was once a united community to which reconciliation can return; and second, that the foundations of this community are not themselves subject to contest, but are the condition of possibility for contest. In short, this line of thinking asks whether conceiving of reconciliation as a beginning acts instead to shut down disagreement about foundations and unity. As Regan notes, "an overemphasis on closure and moving ahead will simply gloss over a difficult past."[112] There is a concerning parallel between the assertion that public space requires prior walls, and the possibility that reconciliation either retrieves a prior foundational narrative or inaugurates a new respect for plurality.

Yet agonistic thought does not dismiss reconciliation as inevitably an appeal to a mythic origin, nor does it displace the hopefulness that reconciliation might produce lasting change. In place of the expectation that the truths of reconciliation will foster a new beginning, the resources of agonistic democratic thinking seem to proffer an alternative. This approach interprets the public-making work of truth commissions as a public contest about the meanings of the past and of community, a contest which discloses an immanent, always-already plurality and concomitant respect for plurality. What truth commissions make public is neither an original community nor a new set of principles (re)establishing a future community. Instead, the stories of the past which so poignantly attest to division and difference serve to disclose the immanence of adversarial respect to democratic contest, and the perpetuity of contest (including about foundations and origins) as *the* activity of politics.

[112] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 60.

The hopefulness of juxtaposing agonistic contest with re-conciliation depends upon the expectation that the disclosures of stories, narratives and perspectives on the past generated by TRCs will serve as a catalyst for the further disclosure of the ontological permanence of difference as the primary feature of politics. But this realization of an agonistic stance of respect will emphatically not be a new beginning, nor a re-assertion of an original consensus or community. What is made public by the contests over the past is precisely not new, but always-already the condition of politics, belatedly recognized as the impossibility of a consensual, re-conciled community as the foundation for democratic disagreement.

These are the two moments of agonism - the inauguration of expressive contest requiring walls and boundaries already in place, and the sudden recognition of present plurality which cannot require a new beginning but nevertheless resembles one. The tension between these moments requires clarification, not resolution. What particularly requires clarification is the role of public space in this disclosure of plurality which is not a new narrative of inclusion, and yet resembles a new beginning in the hoped-for shift to an immanent ethos of respect. It is the *publicity* accorded to the stories told by survivors of state violence which serves as a catalyst for an ontological revelation and ethical shift for settler society. However, the emphasis on the disclosive aspect of contest tends to crowd out reflection on the need for a public forum, or space, where the contest about memory and identity can be seen and heard. Mirroring the tension between the notions of perpetual contest and new beginnings, there is an under-examined tension in agonistic theory between the ontological disclosures facilitated by contest and the requirement of public space for such revelations.

Objections to Arendt's public space

Expressive action requires spectators, and the organized remembrance of a political community requires a distinction between public activity and privacy.[113] The space-making work of the TRC suggests that a corollary to disclosure is needed to adequately characterize agonistic reconciliation. But for reconciliation to require the creation of public space *and remain agonistic*, several serious objections to the *necessity* of public space must be overcome. The utility of the distinction I have been making between public space and disclosure depends on Arendt's description of agonism as not only the freedom to act amid contingency and plurality, but the specifically public character of the contests thus enacted between fellow citizens.

Proponents of agonistic theory who otherwise endorse aspects of Arendt's description of political action and judgment remain deeply suspicious of the notion that such contest requires a bounded public space. These suspicions resemble the critique of liberal and deliberative theory, and mark a turns away from a republican strain of Arendt's thought. Of particular concern is the estimation that public space will transcend and stabilize the *agon*.[114] Echoing Habermas's identification of Arendt's argument as a route to intersubjective rationality, Mouffe disclaims Arendt's public space as a device of intersubjective agreement, an "agonism without antagonism".[115]

Two related objections, drawn from Honig and Rancière respectively, are worth noting. They run as follows. First, a strict delineation of public and private space renders Arendt's vision of equality and respect useless precisely where it is needed most, to rectify patterns of exclusion

[113] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.
[114] See Emilios Christodoulidis and Andrew Schaap, "Arendt's Constitutional Question," in *Hannah Arendt and the Law*, eds. Marco Goldoni and Christopher McCorkindale (Oxford and Portland: Hart Publishing, 2012), 101-116.
[115] Chantal Mouffe, "Cultural workers as organic intellectuals," in *Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony, radical democracy, and the political*, ed. James Martin (New York: Routledge, 2013), 213. See also Bonnie Honig, "The Politics of Agonism: A Critical Response to 'Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action' by Dana R. Villa," *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (August 1993): 528-533.

and marginalization in the private sphere. The second challenge is simply that public space is not constructed by rules or institutions prior to political contest, but that the eruption of disagreement is what stages public contest. Rancière identifies this erroneous insistence on pre-delineated public space with both Arendt and with deliberative theory. Concerning the latter, he writes:

> Political demonstration makes visible that which had no reason to be seen…. This is the reason why politics cannot be identified with the model of communicative action. This model presupposes partners that are already pre-constituted as such and discursive forms that entail a speech community…. Now, the specificity of political dissensus is that its partners are no more constituted than is the object or stage of discussion itself. [116]

Similarly, Arendt's "rigid opposition between the realm of the political and the realm of private life" faces the same accusation of assuming what political dissent is about: the "configuration of its own space."[117] Together, these objections suggest that public space cannot be an *a priori* necessity without falling into the trap of ascribing rational foundations for democratic disagreement. They further suggest that public space does not result from a given ontological division of activity, but from eruptions of sites of resistance, which also resist the division of public from private.

One answer to these objections lies in the paradoxical character of public space as both necessary for and conditioned upon disclosure. Although an agonistic conception of action cannot posit a fundamental division of public from private as an *a priori* condition of possibility for action, this does not mean public space is only the contingent and fragile result of disclosive action. Instead, public space can paradoxically both precede and yet depend upon expressive action for its possibility. This precedence of space is particularly important in freeing settler society from the constraints of its colonial legacy, where eruptive and disruptive action is only one half of the

[116] Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Contiuum, 2010), 37-38.
[117] Rancière, *Dissensus*, 64.

agonistic paradox. Public space does not recuperate an original foundation or enact a new once-and-for-all agreement; but it may signal the space for freedom as unprecedented action which always depends upon a willingness to let it appear.

I will approach these objections through Honig's re-reading of Arendt. Honig reads Arendt's account of performance and expression *against* Arendt's own insistence that such action is only possible within a public sphere protected against the intrusions of constative, repetitive and behavioral traits of the private realm. For her, "any reading of Arendt that takes seriously the agonistic, virtuosic, and performative impulses of her politics must, for the sake of that politics, resist the a priori determination of a public-private distinction that is beyond contestation and amendment."[118]

For Arendt, a public-private delineation is necessary to preserve the distinctive character of political action as more than mere application of norms and behaviors, and more than mere cyclical repetitive consumption and production. Eliminating it would collapse the distinction between political action and all of the other forms of human activity. Arendt's specific worry is that politics can be co-opted by these other activities - work and labour - and cease to inspire spontaneous and performative action. This worry leads Arendt to identify lost natality with the colonization of public space by a preoccupation with cyclical economic management that leaves no room for the performative disclosure of the 'who' of each political actor, but rather compresses people into behaviors.[119] The loss of public space thus eliminates the special character of political action as struggle between equals before spectators.

[118] Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 118-119.
[119] I am referring to Arendt's account of the "rise of the social," in *The Human Condition*, 38-49.

But as Honig rightly points out, there are two significant costs of asserting a public-private distinction as ontologically prior to contest. First, although metaphors of agonistic politics treat contest as the striving for distinction among equals, many contemporary struggles are for equality in economic, gender, class, and ethnic relations, among others.[120] By her fear that politics would end up as a preoccupation with representing and managing our private-sphere identities and interests ('what' we are), Arendt ironically establishes a public sphere devoid of the struggles that really matter and might express 'who' we are. According to Honig it is precisely these 'new' struggles which disclose the beginnings of a new story begun unwittingly through action.[121]

The second cost is simply that such a distinction is impossible to maintain if action really is born out of plurality and contingency. This impossibility is the source of Honig's reading of Arendt against Arendt, the hope that the unpredictable contest in the public sphere might also draw the distinction between public and private into question. There is evidence enough in Arendt's thought, in Honig's estimation, to read the public-private divide as itself a product of action *in the private sphere*. Such evidence includes the American Revolution coming unsuspectingly to those who initially acted before a public space existed for/by revolution; the interruption of the will occasioned by action, the irrepressible performativity of the Declaration of Independence's foundation-making claims.[122] And, if the public-private distinction is itself one of the sedimented results of action which can come to undermine our ability to act anew, then it too is subject to the destabilizing new narratives produced by political action.

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[120] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 118, 123.
[121] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 125, citing Arendt, *On Revolution*, 47.
[122] Bonnie Honig, "Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the Problem of Founding a Republic," in *Rhetorical Republic: Governing Representations in American Politics*, eds. Frederick Dolan and Thomas Dumm (Amherts, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 201-226; Dana R. Villa, "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere," in Dolan and Dumm, *Rhetorical Republic*, 227-248.

Honig does not ask whether all such divisions could be abolished, but asks whether we could treat them as also the contingent products of action:

> What if we treated Arendt's notion of the public realm not as a specific place, like the agon, but as a metaphor for a variety of spaces, both topographic and conceptual, that might occasion action? We might be left with a notion of action as an event, a 'miracle,' a disruption of the ordinary sequence of things, a site of resistance of the irresistible, a challenge to the normalizing rules that seek to constitute, govern, and control various behaviors.[123]

Two things follow from Honig's attempt to preserve some sense of a public-private distinction while also dispersing it. First, the difference *in kind* between action and other forms of activity no longer depends upon the distinction between form and content. Given Honig's suspicions that Arendt evicted the *content* of social struggle from the public sphere by designating action according to its *formal* quality as inter-action amid plurality and contingency, it follows that distinguishing agonistic action no longer depends upon its form. All struggles, no matter what they are about, *could* be agonistic in form - expressive, adversarial, unprecedented and disclosive. This is not quite to say that agonistic politics are ubiquitous, a claim Honig resists, citing Nancy Fraser's concern that when everything is political, nothing is.[124] In her reluctance to entirely banish from consideration the difference between public contest and the privacy to which political actors sometimes retreat, Honig's interpretation *increases* the emphasis on the spatial character of political action. Since all struggles may well be agonistic (yet not all are), what matters especially is the *site*, the *spaces* organized to permit resistances. That these sites are not only physical places, but also conceptual spaces seems to indicate that something like visibility, in the sense of being known and perhaps also being known as public, becomes the chief separator between public and private. But instead of representing an ontological ordering which cannot be changed, or even a

[123] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics,* 121.
[124] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics,* 121.

definitional ordering requisite for the good Arendt calls politics, "The distinction between public and private is seen as the performative product of political struggle, hard won and always temporary."[125]

This objection to Arendt unsettles the account of public space as the necessary precursor to expressive action, and inclines to the conclusion that action itself makes publicity, since its interruptions of privacy surprise even those who are inadvertently caught up in the new stories it makes possible.[126] This is in keeping with another objection advanced by Rancière, that equality cannot possibly be presumed as the condition of an agonistic freedom to contest - not only because such equality is the aim of so many struggles, but because the expressive freedom of contest is always staged amid *inequality* and the *lack* of public space. The sites of resistance to which Honig refers are not ontologically discoverable but temporarily created by struggle. These have something in common with the eruptions of public dissensus which Rancière posits as the politically relevant constructions of space for dissent.

The reversal here is stark: where Arendt speaks of virtuosic contest between equals, Rancière speaks of equality staged by those who *are not equal* and yet act as though they are - a novel conception of action as *dissembling* as much as disclosing. Rancière's discussion of those who *profess* to belong to the proletariat illustrates how this is not merely an opposition, but an impossible assertion. "Profession" means the occupation which assigns each their place in a social order, but it also means the assertion of membership in a faith, a community. To profess to belong to the proletariat creates political space for equality through the paradoxical assertion that those who are not counted are precisely those who count - their claim to be the community of equals

[125] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics,* 122.
[126] Action *interrupts* the private dilemma of both simultaneously willing and nilling, just as revolution seems to have caught the revolutionaries themselves off guard.

because they have been excluded from it interrupts the hegemonic logic of assigned places.[127] Again the distinction between public and private remains, but it is rendered political rather than given, as public space is pictured rather as the result of action than its forerunner.

But it does not necessarily follow that if public space is not an ontological prerequisite of action, it is its contingent product. There remains the possibility of thinking about this ordering of space and expression paradoxically, as a mutual implication. This is necessary, in my view, to flesh out an account of reconciliation as an opportunity for settler society to engage in agonistic contests not only through resistances, but through a responsiveness to the public appearance of survivors. Moreover, if this responsiveness is to be a recuperation of the lost capacity to begin anew, then it must not be only a response to public spaces inaugurated by struggle, but a *preparation* for such struggles to be made visible. This is the paradoxical account of space and disclosure which I think is able to meet the objections levied by Honig and Rancière, by positing public space as neither ontological priority nor only the product of struggle, but *also* as a precursor which nevertheless depends upon disclosure. This pattern of thought interprets the TRC as both a site of resistance where counter-hegemonic narratives are generated, and as a site of appearance *prepared* for these disclosures.

Natality and the paradox of public-making

Margaret Canovan calls Arendt the pre-eminent "theorist of beginnings" in part because of her propensity for describing politics as inter-action between participants who cannot stand in relation to their deeds as authors stand in relation to their books, but who courageously assume the

[127] See Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 37-39.

risks that neither the meanings nor consequences of their actions will be as they had hoped.[128] Natality indicates more than the vivacity accompanying participation together with others; it also means the power of acting in concert with others to produce the unprecedented - outcomes and meanings unbound by the authority of precedent. For Arendt, natality describes both the capacity to begin new enterprises and the contingency always attaching to them. Contingency is unavoidable in politics because, in Arendt's estimation, politics indicates a kind of activity categorically unlike the types of doing pursued by individuals acting alone. The activity characteristic of politics thus refers to the speaking and doing together. And, because every new project an individual might launch inevitably becomes tangled in a 'web' of intersecting ambitions and actions, the first risk of action is always that its consequences will turn out different than expected or intended.

But there is a second risk of action, namely, that the *meanings* of action also bear an irreducible contingency because they, too, exceed the capacity of actors to determine them ahead of time. This risk differs from the first, however. In part, this is because meaningful action requires spectators; to act with others is to expose those actions to their judgment. The significance of words and deeds may exceed the capacity of actors to determine them because inter-action is not only contingent, but expressive. The expressiveness of action is never only that it reveals characteristics of the actor which were there prior to their revelation. It differs from this logic in two ways. For Arendt, the expressiveness of words and deeds is indicative of 'who', rather than merely 'what' a person is. Further, the characteristic of this expression is such that each life can be put into a story, or that a story is expressed through the words and actions of a person's life which does not end until after their death. As Arendt notes, although to be an actor is to be a doer and sufferer, the

[128] Margaret Canovan, introduction to *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed., by Hannah Arendt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), vii-xx.

meaning of one's expressive action is not determined ahead of time but only through the disclosure of acting and speaking with others.[129] Her well-known figure to illustrate this is the ancient Greek notion of the *daimon* looking over the shoulder who could be seen by others but not the person who carried it.[130]

There are good reasons to frame the TRC of Canada in terms of the recovery of lost natality. In telling the history of the suffering of many of the 150 000 children who attended residential schools, "the TRC that is about children" addressed a colonial policy aimed squarely at the disintegration of indigenous families by separating children from their parents and communities.[131] A focus on children pervaded most of the TRC's work. At each national event, the commission dedicated one day to a series of workshops, presentations and exhibitions for school-age children, who attended by the thousands. The very first calls to action (recommendations) issued by the TRC upon its conclusion were for a reduction of indigenous children in state care and for redress of inequitable education funding for indigenous children.[132] In common with previous TRCs the commission frequently linked the past with concern for the future, suggesting not only that children were the hope for reconciliation, but that reconciliation was needed *for* the children. This connection is illustrated by one of Commissioner Sinclair's remarks, "It took a long time to make this problem. It's going to take a long time to fix it. Reconciliation isn't going to happen today, maybe not in our lifetimes, but it has to happen if our children are going to live in peace."[133]

To my mind the most poignant link between natality and public space was a presentation by Andrea Walsh, an art professor and honorary witness. Twenty survivors came up onto the stage,

[129] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 190.
[130] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 179.
[131] Remarks by Anglican delegation at the TRC Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014.
[132] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 1.
[133] Murray Sinclair, Vancouver Event, September 18, 2013.

each carrying a framed child's painting. The paintings had been made by children in an art class at the Port Alberni residential school decades before, and were preserved by the school's art teacher and eventually turned over to a university collection. Dr. Walsh presented them at the Victoria Regional TRC Event, and again at the Vancouver National Event. As the paintings were brought on stage, Dr. Walsh remarked that she had intended to present them in groups, until a survivor had said to her: "every child must be carried". And, Dr. Walsh added, every story must be told.[134] The TRC's final report included Walsh's reflections:

> I witnessed something else, though, around the paintings. It was pride, it was strength, it was pleasure, and it was a profound sense of truth. I've come to think of these paintings as direct connections to the children who created them. They are the children, and as Chief Ed John said, the truth is in the survivors. And against all odds, these paintings too have survived. They are not small things forgotten.[135]

Framing the TRC in terms of lost natality helps contextualize the dilemma of public space as also a dilemma for contest within and about the framework of reconciliation as a response to Canada's settler colonialism. Both in content and structure, the narrative of Canada's colonial past - of settlers who left European societies, traveled to Canada and established a free, beneficent, and lasting nation-state - is contested. One reason why reconciliation stands in an uncertain relationship to such narratives is because truth commissions can produce a new narrative of settler colonialism or publish the contest between diverse narratives, while equally, reconciliation can be inscribed as an alternative triumphant conclusion to the story of settlers who came to stay.[136] Thus, assumptions about how to proceed (with reconciliation) can mask disagreement about how to think about the problem (of settler colonialism). Assumptions about redress as healing old injuries, for instance, preclude articulations of colonialism as ongoing systemic exploitation. How we imagine redress

[134] Andrea Walsh, Vancouver Event, September 21, 2013.
[135] Andrea Walsh, as cited in The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 185-186.
[136] Lorenzo Veracini, "Telling the End of the Settler Colonial Story," in *Studies in Settler Colonialism: Politics, Identity and Culture*, eds. Fiona Bateman and Lionel Pilkington (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 204-218.

or restorative justice imposes restrictions on how we imagine the imperialism inhering in residential schools. One way to address this problem is through a reversal, such as Regan's reversal of narratives of injury of and healing for indigenous sufferers. Speaking of settler Canadians, she writes: "Still casting ourselves as neutral arbiters of justice intent on saving Indians, we now focus on their need to heal themselves and reconcile with us."[137] To overturn this equation of settler colonialism with indigenous injury, she claims we must "ask ourselves who is really sick and in need of healing, those who were the victims of the system or those who created, implemented, and maintained it for over a century?"[138]

This poses a dilemma about how a truth commission might make both the solution and problem to which reconciliation is addressed the subject of public contest. What emerges is a problem in parallel with the difficulty of staging contest without presuming an *a priori* public space. This is the dilemma of publishing the contest about narratives of Canada's foundation, settlement, and ongoing nation-building without presuming an uncontestable narrative of settler colonialism to which reconciliation is the appropriate conclusion. First, there is the problem of what *counts* as public - which disagreements a truth commission will publish. Second, there is the problem of the public as a community - if reconciliation is a solution belonging to a conception of a singular community, then a public effort to reconcile might well efface contest about whether we conceive of settler colonialism as something susceptible to such redress. Conversely, if truth commissions disrupt and problematize settling and nation-building narratives, the status of conciliation as a fitting response is jeopardized. Yet contesting both the problem of settler colonialism and the solution of reconciliation together is an enterprise fraught with the peril that

[137] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 116.
[138] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 117.

such a pairing may not bear up under scrutiny. In a way, this is a return of the dilemma raised by Arendt's terminology of the *polis*: what walls must be presumed in order to secure public contest?

But a third difficulty poses itself specifically to agonistic conceptions of reconciliation, to the extent that the settler colonialism of residential schools is interpreted as a problem for our *capacity* for public contest. This depends particularly on an Arendtian reading of agonistic politics as action made possible by public spaces in which natality can appear. There are eerie similarities between attempts to destroy indigenous peoples by targeting their children, and what Arendt characterized as totalitarianism's aim to eradicate spontaneity, "man's power to begin something new out of his own resources."[139] Coupled with Regan's reversal, Arendt's language of space and natality suggests it might be possible to frame the legacy of the schools as a diminution of natality for non-indigenous Canadians - the capacity to hear new narratives, or perhaps to feel astonishment at what we already knew.[140] This reversal takes seriously the TRC commissioners' repeated declaration: "We know that this is not an aboriginal problem, it is a problem for all Canada."[141]

Thinking of reconciliation in terms of lost natality evokes the story Arendt tells about the fragility and loss of public space in modernity. With its roots in contingency and expressiveness, natality often seems an inexhaustible resource of novelty in human affairs. And yet this capacity is very fragile. In *The Human Condition*, her quasi-nostalgia for the ancient Greek *polis* starkly contrasts with her assessment of the near-eclipse of natality in modern political associations. Much of her concern with totalitarianism, with modern economic discourses, and with the loss of public spaces for action, suggests that the capacity to begin anew cannot be taken for granted.

[139] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966 [1951]), 455.
[140] Dion, *Braiding Histories*, 52.
[141] Murray Sinclair, Vancouver Event, September 18, 2013.

She tells the story of this loss as a series of conceptual substitutions. First, the model for politics ceased to be action, but became instead work: the linear process of producing from an idea. Subsequently, political life began increasingly to resemble neither action nor work, but labour, characterized by its endless cyclical pattern of consumption and production. These substitutions occasioned the loss of a distinctive public realm of action which had been contrasted with a private realm for making and labouring. This loss eroded the capacity for public action as an experience of freedom and creativity. Her dismay at the pre-eminence of economic production and consumption as the content of public action confirms her lament.[142] In her story of loss, she notes that the modern capacity to act has never been greater in terms of technological and organizational prowess, but our ability to make sense of these actions has not kept pace. As a result of the incredible scope of human activity combined with our lost understanding of inter-action, not only the consequences but the *meanings* of past actions can capture, over-determine and starkly limit our capacity to imagine ourselves differently in the present. Strikingly, natality can be lost to its own excesses.[143]

Into this tale of loss comes Arendt's well-known proposal that two faculties can provide at least partial redress, tempering "the growing meaninglessness of the modern world."[144] One of these is promise-making, which she re-tools from its more familiar expression in social contract theory. Promises can mitigate (but not eliminate) contingency by securing a durable space for

[142] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 38.
[143] My analysis differs from Canovan's. Arendt's discussion centers on the 'process' quality of action, the fact that it is always part of a story which has gone one before and will go on after. But Arendt is concerned that action can lose its meaningfulness if an instrumental rationality of *making* is substituted for it - the difference between action *in order to* and action *for the sake of*. Arendt and Canovan are both primarily concerned with action's replacement by instrumental making, rather than with the tendency for the meanings of past actions to crowd out alternatives. But in the context of post-colonial challenges to hegemonic narratives, this second concern seems equally pressing. The narratives of imperialism can occlude the natality of settler society; it is thus not enough to hope for new narratives. The historian's backward glance must be contested by other forms of remembrance. I take this up in Chapter 7.
[144] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 78.

action.[145] The other faculty is forgiveness. Political forgiveness can release others from the meanings of the past which constrain them. Such forgiveness, Arendt specifies, is for the sake of the world and the natality of the other.[146]

But my purpose is not to invoke Arendt's solutions, but to urge more sustained attention to her articulation of the problem. Two aspects of this problem are intriguing. First, Arendt's specification of promising and forgiveness illustrates natality as not only the latent capacity of newcomers to accomplish something as yet undone, and not only the unintentional capriciousness of action amid many, but as unprecedented expressiveness of speech and appearance before others. Her call for forgiveness focuses not on whether or not sufficiently meaningful apology and reparation has been made, but on restoring the *capacity* to revisit the meanings of past actions. By consequence, forgiveness for the sake of 'who' the other is, does not merely provide closure, but opens the possibility of undoing the meanings of the past, of finding release from its strictures. Forgiveness of this kind would thus be a supremely courageous act because it could not await sufficient proof of worthiness. As Derrida suggests, such forgiveness must interrupt "the ordinary course of historical temporality" if it is to change the meaningfulness of the past in the present.[147] Whether we think this would do more harm than good would surely depend on whether we accept

[145] The TRC offers a ten-point summary of principles upon which reconciliation must be based. Several of these principles identify the importance of promise-keeping regarding the Treaties signed between indigenous peoples and settlers. Notably, these principles address such promise-keeping in terms of *respect*: "All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships." See The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned*, 4.

[146] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 154. See also Dennis B. Klein, "Forgiveness and History: A Reinterpretation of Post-Conflict Testimony," in *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past*, eds. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Chris Van Der Merwe (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 113-129. Klein argues forgiveness is implicitly embedded in the determination of survivors to "bear witness" as a way of asserting strength (pg. 115, 119). Forgiveness may be one way to claim the radical natality to set in motion something unprecedented, but reading it as the subtext of resentment (pg. 126) presumes forgiveness by reading it into survivors' assertions of strength as a political interruption which open spaces for action amid otherwise continuous chains of reaction.

[147] Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Richard Hughes (London: Routledge, 2005), 32.

Arendt's characterization of the problem. In my view, the problem to which both forgiveness and promise-making apply themselves is the problem of lost natality, the political capacity for expressive action which cannot be determined ahead of time, and thus always brings with it a great measure of risk.

There is a strong case for applying this analysis not only to the damage done to the children who attended residential schools, but to Canada as a settler-state. Applying Arendt's analysis of lost natality to a colonial state diagnoses the legacy of the schools as a problem for all of Canada because it marks an inability to begin anew, an inability to listen to disclosures which undo hegemonic narratives of Canada's stability and justice. Taking up Arendt's story of loss suggests that the prospect of beginning anew requires spaces for such listening.

The unsettling effect of the revelations to and by truth commissions cannot be interpreted only as the disclosure of immanent plurality and as a catalyst to a shift in thinking about plurality as ontologically permanent and integral to politics. This is not only because such a shift (to agonistic respect) is itself a kind of beginning, even if not the kind of foundational or prescriptive beginning of which agonism is so suspicious. Arendt's story suggests something further is needed. The political contest instantiated by the plural and competing narratives re-told through a truth commission requires certain conditions. Public space is required for multiple and competing accounts to disclose the always-already plurality which characterizes political community. Public space is needed because the stories told to truth commissions depend for their resonance not only on their factual and informative impact, but on the cultivation of a capacity to listen to them, and to be surprised and astonished by them. Arendt's account of political action implies the proviso that disruptive struggles about memory and community are possible only to the extent that participants perform them in public. As a point of departure for thinking about reconciliation

agonistically, Arendt's insights suggest the need to supplement an interpretation of the ontologically disclosive character of truth commissions with an account of how witnessing such contest is made possible.

Conclusion

What I want to retain from Arendt's description of public contest among equals is not an unsupportable distinction between public and private as ontologically given. Rather, it is her assessment of natality as part of the human condition which is fragile and difficult to sustain politically. Public space is not prior to contest in the sense that it delineates political action from private necessity. But public space is required for the expressive disclosure by which new deeds and stories can appear. It is a requirement in two senses. First, visibility is required for the courageous appearing before others characteristic of the disclosures of survivors. But second, public space is required for a sustained orientation towards what might challenge ossified ideas of community; unprecedented beginnings are impossible without public spaces where new stories can appear. Insofar as agonistic reconciliation posits the hope of perpetual openness in place of a logic of closure and re-unification, public space must indicate the sustained capacity for beginning anew through listening rather than the formulaic boundary between what can and cannot appear as politically relevant. This requires a paradoxical relationship between public space and disclosure, one which clarifies the sense of paradox inherent in reconciliation's new beginning through the disclosure of reconciliation's impossibility.

In the next several chapters I outline and engage with a distinctive agonistic appraisal of reconciliation as a form of public-making. I argue that agonistic depictions of public-making centre on *disclosure* as the catalyst for substantive political change - disclosure of plurality as permanent,

disclosure as itself a commitment to democracy, and disclosure as the discovery of the in-between which makes politics risky and worthwhile. In separate ways, these appraisals tend to evade the dilemma I have posed in terms of the priority of delineated public spaces for action. These evasions are accomplished through a focus on truth-telling as the disclosure of plurality and the impossibility of foundational politics. However, this emphasis tends to overlook how something of Arendt's insistence on fragile public space as the realm of action might be retained, including the connection between the natality of stories performed through truth commissions and the paradoxical receptivity they might provoke.

Chapter Three: Disclosure as Ontological Revelation

Introduction

Faced with the charge that discourse theory turns reality on its head by rejecting the possibility of an "ultimate rational foundation", Chantal Mouffe replied simply that "the absence of foundation 'leaves everything as it is'; it merely "obliges us to ask the same questions in a new way."[148] Her response neatly encapsulates one way of imagining a distinctively agonistic reconciliation: our political relationships are as they always were, but we must ask different questions about them. This is because reconciliation shows us something that was always there: the *contest* about how we imagine those relationships. Truth commissions promote a shift in thinking because the contests they make visible prompt an ontological revelation about the inherent plurality of political antagonisms, and the concomitant impossibility of reconciliation. Reconciliation's impossibility, of course, depends on it being understood as the quest for consensual relationships, healed rifts, or restored unity.

This description of reconciliation as *closure* or *consensus* closely parallels Mouffe's critical description of liberal democratic theory. In fact, importing Mouffe's account of the failings of liberal and deliberative democratic theory to the subject of truth-telling reinforces one impression: the value of reconciliation lies not in the rapprochement of estranged peoples, but in its capacity to disclose the permanence of contest amid plurality as the central feature of politics.

[148] Chantal Mouffe, "Radical Democracy: modern or postmodern?" in Martin, *Chantal Mouffe*, 97. My discussion of Mouffe's agonistic theory relies heavily on James Martin's compilation of her work, which highlights connections between class struggle and hegemony, and discursive struggle over the symbols and principles of democracy. Through these connections I wish to draw attention to Mouffe's work as also a discursive struggle over the ontology of the political, which merits consideration as a model for the public-making of truth commissions.

This is the first answer that could be given to the question of what an agonistic truth-telling might look like: the ontological disclosure that difference and contest are always and necessarily endemic to democratic politics. In this chapter I will chart how Mouffe's critique of liberalism furnishes this view of the public-making of reconciliation, and how more than ontological disclosure is required for an account of truth-telling as the catalyst for political change.

Ontology of identity/difference

There is no question but that truth commissions call attention to a multiplicity of memories that challenge previously dominant narratives of political community. The discomfiting revelation that Canada funded schools designed to destroy indigenous languages, families and communities has disrupted many narratives about Canada as a just society. The TRC has included two salient justifications for the schools as among these disrupted narratives - the presumption that European cultures and religions were superior, and the doctrine of imperialist expansion.[149] In its findings, the TRC has sought to dispel other, more specific narratives - that residential schools were run with good intentions; that teachers thought they were doing what was best; that all children of earlier eras received similar education and treatment; and that the effects of residential schools are all in the past.[150] Such justifying accounts fail to consider how the intentions underlying the schools were "forged in Europe and implemented without any consultation with Aboriginal people."[151] But for survivors' stories to resemble Mouffe's depiction of agonism, something further is required

[149] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned*, 15-21.
[150] Andrew Woolford calls these related narratives the "trap of accepting perpetrators' claims to humanitarianism as an alibi for their role in the attempted destruction of another people." Andrew Woolford, "Discipline, Territory, and the Colonial Mesh: Indigenous Boarding Schools in the United States and Canada," in Woolford, Benvenuto and Hinton, *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, 30.
[151] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, vol. 1, bk. 2, *The History, Part 1, Origins to 1939* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 677.

than the disruption of these narratives. An argument is required to the effect that plurality is a permanent characteristic of democracy not as a matter of fact (which could be otherwise), but because plurality is necessarily a component of the activity we call politics. In place of the essentialist supposition that identity arises from discrete characteristics, Mouffe proposes to understand social struggles as multiple, contingent subject positions "that can never be totally fixed in a closed system."[152] Instead, identity and difference are discursive constructions which necessarily imply one another in ways which exceed binaries.

Mouffe's ontology of plurality is expressed simply enough: every social identity is formed discursively through contrast with what is different from it.[153] The reverse is also true - differences are articulated only as part of identity/difference pairings. Thus no identity is identical with itself; put otherwise, no identity exists without iterating what is different from it. Social identities such as gender, class, or peoplehood are formed through construction of borders: they are created in relationships with the relevant differences, the 'other(s)' they cannot help but invoke. This suggests the act of forging an identity is always at the same time the act of excluding what is different from it; no creation of identity is possible without a correlate exclusion of something else. Moreover, it is not the case that every concrete 'them' has a concrete 'us'. Jacques Derrida's notion of the "constitutive outside", on which Mouffe relies, does not mean every identity has a given binary.[154] Rather, identity can never be fully specified: the outside is "the symbol of what makes *any* 'us' impossible."[155]

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[152] Chantal Mouffe, "Feminism, citizenship and radical democratic politics," in Martin, *Chantal Mouffe*, 134.
[153] William Connolly and James Tully advance similarly terse formulations of this proposition. "Identity," Connolly says, "requires difference to be." Following Derrida, Tully suggests a culture "is not identical to itself." William Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 144; James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an age of diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 47.
[154] Mouffe, "Politics and the limits of liberalism," in Martin, *Chantal Mouffe*, 120.
[155] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2009), 12-13.

Because identity is thus always relational and under-specified, the possibility remains that its relationships may be expressed violently, as the repudiation of the differences by which identities are formulated. Relationships may be between friends and adversaries, or friends and enemies. The first pairing Mouffe calls 'agonistic', the second, 'antagonistic'. But because neither adversaries nor enemies can be eliminated by recourse to an encompassing identity, "the very condition of possibility of the formation of political identities is at the same time the condition of impossibility of a society from which antagonism has been eliminated."[156] This is the understanding of 'the political' which agonistic critique aims to disclose.[157] Perhaps it is also the realization which truth-telling might foster - that reconciliation cannot build an inclusive, post-colonial community which would not also be constructed through iteration of differences.

Mouffe unpacks the possibility of antagonism as a condition of possibility through Schmitt's description of a 'people's' constitution as an exclusionary act in tension with the inclusive proclivity of liberal democratic society. Following Schmitt, Mouffe takes the constitution of the 'people' as an exclusion turning on the logic of equality – the exclusion of what is not equal.[158] For Schmitt a universalized notion of equality, such as equal human rights, lacks the characteristic of "substantive equality", by which it is possible to distinguish the frontiers of a democratic people. From this premise Schmitt launches the affronting, consternating supposition that *race* provides the necessary substantive equality by which democracy may be established. But Mouffe takes a different tack. Censuring Schmitt for his insistence on the violent, racist

[156] Chantal Mouffe, "Politics and passions: the stakes of democracy," in Martin, *Chantal Mouffe*, 185.
[157] Here Mouffe distinguishes between politics as engagements between adversaries, and 'the political' as the permanent possibility of antagonism ontologically associated with identity formation. This distinction defends her against the potential accusation of tautology, for instance when she claims: "Democratic politics requires that the others be seen not as enemies to be destroyed but as adversaries whose ideas should be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas will never be questioned," since this is true of politics only, not the political. See Mouffe, "Politics and passions: the stakes of democracy," 185.
[158] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 53-57.

establishment of democratic boundaries, and suggesting substantive equality need not mean race, she nevertheless appropriates his argument that economic and moralistic vocabularies have concealed a tension between two separate logics – a logic of liberal rights and universalization, and a logic of the bounded demos. Unlike Schmitt, Mouffe sees no need to renounce one such logic in favor of the other; rather, she suggests that the tension between them adds vibrancy to democratic contestation. As she explains:

> The democratic logic of constituting the people, and inscribing rights and equality into practices, is necessary to subvert the tendency toward abstract universalism inherent in liberal discourse. But the articulation with the liberal logic allows us constantly to challenge – through reference to 'humanity' and the polemical use of 'human rights' – the forms of exclusion that are necessarily inscribed in the political practice of installing those rights and defining 'the people' which is going to rule.[159]

The "logic of democracy" demands closure in the constitution of the people. This closure cannot be avoided, but it can be negotiated. This argument draws together the several strands of her thought. Democracy requires boundaries, just as identity is formulated through exclusion; conversely, these exclusions are always susceptible to challenge, often in the name of a liberal logic of universal rights. But for both democratic boundaries and discursive social identities, these unavoidable exclusions are only negotiable if we first "acknowledge" the paradox of these two competing logics.[160]

This idea of acknowledgement suggests the second revelation of agonistic critique, and again, perhaps the second revelation of reconciliation. Although the relationship between identity and difference renders plurality *permanent*, Mouffe argues we have lost sight of it. Instead, we speak of political decision-making in juridical, administrative and economic vocabularies. For Mouffe, with the predominance of these vocabularies comes a concomitant "inability to think in

[159] Chantal Mouffe, "Carl Schmitt and the paradox of liberal democracy," in Martin, *Chantal Mouffe*, 172.
[160] Mouffe, "Carl Schmitt and the paradox of liberal democracy," 174.

political terms".[161] By imagining fully inclusive regulatory ideals for democratic societies, these vocabularies conceal the struggle intimately tied to political decision-making as necessarily producing borders. Since this struggle to formulate identities and differences takes place without the comfort of an inclusive or consensual foundation, politics always faces the "inescapable moment of decision" made "on an undecidable terrain".[162] Because this terrain is undecidable, it is always contingent and contestable. And yet, because the political is suppressed by hegemonic vocabularies which displace it in favour of ethical, economic or juridical administration, the contestability of political decisions and their exclusionary consequences often remains concealed.

Mouffe's critique, then, aims to reveal two strands of thought together - the permanence of difference and the displacement of the political. Recognizing the ontological status of plurality implies recognizing politics as the business of discursively constructing and articulating identities in relation to their exclusions. These related revelations highlight the precarious democratic possibility permanently attached to *recognizing* the possibility of antagonism.

Common symbolic space

A microcosm of Mouffe's hope for these entwined revelations can be located in her treatment of common symbolic space. One of Mouffe's central concerns is to establish how democratic institutions and principles might foster and preserve agonistic relationships.[163] Crucially, the first, most important step towards a more fully agonistic democracy is the *realization*, *admission* or *recognition* of the impossibility of completely eliminating antagonism. Thus she speaks of the need to cast off the "escapism" of liberal theory and the need to "face" the

[161] Mouffe, "Politics and passions: the stakes of democracy," 182.
[162] Mouffe, "Politics and passions: the stakes of democracy," 184.
[163] Or, as she says, "to provide democratic channels of expression for the forms of conflicts considered as legitimate." Chantal Mouffe, "The radical centre: a politics without adversary," in Martin, *Chantal Mouffe*, 161.

pluralism of values entailed by the tension between liberal and democratic logics.[164] Mouffe castigates radical theory, too, for a similar pattern of escapism. Where liberalism seeks refuge from politics in the study of institutionally mediated relationships, radical politics rejects such engagement. But, as Mouffe argues:

> Radical politics today is often characterised in terms of desertion, exodus and refusal to engage with existing institutions…. [The] problem with the form of radical politics advocated by 'critique as withdrawal' is that it has a flawed understanding of the very nature of 'the political' itself."[165]

The relationship between spaces and ontological revelation about 'the political' is complex. On one hand, Mouffe lauds agonistic public spaces for their penchant for "bringing to the fore" and "making visible what neo-liberal hegemony represses": the ineradicable possibility of antagonism.[166] Moreover, to the extent that an agonistic reconciliation marks a shift in questioning rather than a (re)founding of social relations, its spaces might resemble these public sites where, Mouffe writes, "the dominant hegemony would be questioned."[167] But on the other hand, she speaks of common symbolic space quite differently, as follows:

> I propose to distinguish between two forms of antagonism, antagonism proper - which takes place between enemies, that is, persons who have no common symbolic space - and what I call 'agonism', which is a different mode of manifestation of antagonism because it involves a relation not between enemies but between 'adversaries', adversaries being defined in a paradoxical way as 'friendly enemies', that is, persons who are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organize this common symbolic space in a different way.[168]

This claim emphasizes Mouffe's break with a Marxist concept of struggle. Through a reading of Gramsci, she ascribes a wider application to the concept of hegemony than merely the domination

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[164] Chantal Mouffe, "For an Agonistic Model of Democracy," in Martin, *Chantal Mouffe*, 198.
[165] Chantal Mouffe, "The Importance of Engaging the State," *What is Radical Politics Today*, ed. Jonathan Pugh (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 230. What I take from Mouffe's argument is not the importance of re-engaging radical politics with state institutions, but rather, the pivotal role of revelation in this process.
[166] Mouffe, "Cultural workers as organic intellectuals," 213.
[167] Mouffe, "Cultural workers as organic intellectuals," 213.
[168] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 13.

of one class by another. Instead, the struggle for and against hegemony is less a class struggle than it is a *discursive* contest to associate powerful symbols with a set of linked identities.[169] Mouffe associates this contest for symbols with the tension between competing logics of liberalism and democracy, of freedom and equality.[170] Her sketch of the struggle to organize the common symbolic terrain retains this sub-text.

This spatial metaphor for political struggle raises the question of whether common symbolic space precedes agonistic relationships, and if so, how it originates.[171] Eva Erman, for one, concludes that Mouffe's account of common symbolic space cannot account for the difficulties it raises. The particular charge leveled by Erman is that even before common symbolic space appears to resemble a prior condition for agonism, it seems to be a prior condition for *antagonism*. Without a common "intersubjective linguistic context", antagonists could not recognize each other as such - they could not be sure they shared no common symbolic space.[172] To this line of thinking, then, Mouffe's theory necessarily presupposes the possibility of rational consensus. First, it presupposes a shared communicative context because the common symbolic space for agonism (and perhaps also antagonism) requires shared values, including commitments to liberty and equality, which are then organized through contest. Second, Mouffe's form of argumentation, including her hope to make agonistic relationships visible, implies the possibility of rational agreement. As Andrew Knops puts the challenge, "Mouffe's alternative is firstly grounded in a universal account of the political and the democratic which she wishes us to accept

[169] Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and ideology in Gramsci," in Martin, *Chantal Mouffe*, 36.
[170] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 102.
[171] Mouffe employs a second spatial metaphor to try to distinguish agonism from antagonism, suggesting democratic politics must aim to provide "channels through which collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues which, while allowing enough possibility for identification, will not construct the opponent as an enemy but as an adversary." Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 103.
[172] Eva Erman, "What is wrong with agonistic pluralism? Reflections on conflict in democratic theory," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 35, no. 9 (2009): 1046.

on the basis of the rational arguments she advances."[173] These challenges, then, seek to re-inscribe Mouffe's agonism within a framework of deliberative democracy. Were this the case, agonistic reconciliation would also replicate the necessity of a prior common context in which disagreements about past injustices like residential schools would be recognizable.

Setting the deliberative democratic challenge aside for the moment, I wish to consider the portrait of agonistic reconciliation following from Mouffe's ontological arguments. Together, the set of ontological revelations highlighting the possibility of a radical democratic politics run something as follows. Identity implies difference, producing either enemies or adversaries; politics is the contingent, contestable arrangement of these relationships, but it can never eliminate the possibility of enmity. This contest is a discursive struggle for and against hegemonic patterns of domination; this struggle is about (re)defining key symbolic values such as liberty and equality. Finally, hegemonic vocabularies associating democratic politics with inclusivity and consensus conceal the permanence of this struggle. If the expressive evocation of plural narratives displayed by truth commissions are to facilitate recognition of these ontological depictions of politics, then the stories told by survivors must perform a double function. First, they must name the violence of hegemonic practices of governance, and illustrate by their protest alternative conceptions of relationships which are oppressive.

But the narratives published by the truth commission must also perform a second function. In addition to contesting the colonial narratives justifying residential schools, the stories told by survivors must illustrate an agonistic conception of politics as struggle. Perhaps, given the lack of visible confrontation between perpetrators and victims which characterized the South African commission, the Canadian TRC is an unlikely inspiration for a theory of agonistic reconciliation.

[173] Andrew Knops, "Debate: Agonism as Deliberation - On Mouffe's Theory of Democracy," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2007): 117.

However, the stories told by survivors resemble Mouffe's exposition of plurality in another way, by drawing attention to the impossibility of a return to an original unity or a consensus on rules or procedures for the recognition and redress of injuries.

If the disclosures brought about through truth commissions are to be agonistic in the sense developed by Mouffe, they must do more than reveal the inherent plurality of political struggle. They must also reveal the danger of conceptualizing reconciliation as the sublimation of political decision-making within a rhetoric of consensus. In the next section I want to consider whether Mouffe's insistence on *facing* 'the political' casts agonistic reconciliation as a similarly doubled disclosure, exposing permanent alternative narratives *and* the danger of their suppression. This entails asking how the public-making of truth commissions might parallel Mouffe's critique of liberal theory.

The doubled critique of liberalism

As liberalism is impossible, so reconciliation is impossible. That seems to be the salient conclusion of Mouffe's critique in this context. A schema of potentially universal liberal rights is always in tension with the democratic impulse to define the people by drawing lines between inside and outside. This impossibility derives *not* from the practical difficulties of identifying rights or procedural standards to which all could agree despite the "fact of pluralism".[174] It derives from a misunderstanding of pluralism at the ontological level. Such is Mouffe's contention regarding all forms of theory which fail to grasp politics as necessarily replete with adversarial and friend/enemy distinctions, and which yearn for a community where differences are moderated by a common foundation, narrative, procedure or *telos*. For this impugned fault, radical theory supplies the

[174] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3-4; John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 216-217.

remedy through the revelation that plurality is permanent because identity is relational, always implying a constitutive outside which undermines its claims to be identical with itself. This revelation entails a new understanding of politics as perpetual struggle between adversaries to define the terms of their relationships.

But importing this critique to reconciliation raises two objections. The first would ask whether these ontological revelations are another transcendental truth for politics. Perhaps an avowal of politics as contest is the functional equivalent of a call for reciprocity or national unity. Each limits what reconciliation might achieve, if only vis-à-vis other limiting ideals. By contrast, the second objection is that ontological revelation lacks motivational impetus and is consequently unable to produce change. Merely exposing the plurality which was always characteristic of politics is not in itself a call for change - the impossibility of reconciliation might bring only bitterness. But the more salient objection is as follows: because ontological disclosure operates as and amid rival knowledge claims, it fails to initiate an ethical responsiveness.

These objections suggest the weakness of over-emphasizing the ontological disclosures effectuated by agonistic critique (or by truth commissions) as a catalyst for significant political change in the wake of long-standing injustices. However, a meaningful response to them might be formulated by considering a structural feature of Mouffe's appraisal of liberal theory. Specifically, I want to return to the peculiar *doubling* of disclosure as the structure of both Mouffe's agonistic critique, and of a similar train of argument advanced by Bonnie Honig. This structure begins with the disclosure that politics without exclusion is impossible. But it includes a second disclosure: that pursuing the dream of politics without division itself contributes to the marginalization and injustice to which reconciliation is a response.

Honig's critique of liberalism aims to demonstrate how securing pre-political transcendental standards for politics is impossible. But she also argues that *trying* to constrain plurality in this way does incalculable damage in the process. The goal of liberal theory, according to her critical assessment, is to confine politics "to the juridical, administrative, or regulative tasks of stabilizing moral and political subjects, building consensus, maintaining agreements, or consolidating communities and identities."[175] Kant and Rawls come in for particular censure as examples of theorists concerned with deriving the institutional parameters of democratic politics from universal or rational principles.

Through the articulation of such theories, Honig suggests, politics is *displaced* by an ontologically mistaken hope that democratic pluralism might be regulated by rationality. Her claim has two components. First, liberal theorists do not acknowledge the role their theories play in producing "remainders", subjects who do not fit expectations for political subjects and are excluded, criminalized, and depoliticized.[176] Her point is that the assumed inclusiveness of modern liberal democracy belies a series of exclusions – those who do not match the model of liberal citizenship. Her second point is embedded within the first, and particularly, embedded in the notion of 'remainders', an ambiguous word signifying marginalization, but also resilience. The search for consensus may well marginalize some. And yet, in a cocktail of 'however', 'despite', and 'because' of such marginalization, Honig claims the result is not the elimination of dissent, but the resurgence and intensification of conflict. The term 'agon' describes the perpetuity of contest characteristic of politics. Crucially, Honig argues "that attempts to shut down the agon perpetually fail, that the best

[175] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 2.
[176] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 2.

(or worst) they do is to displace politics onto other sites and topics, where the struggle of identity and difference, resistance and closure, is then repeated."[177]

Mouffe makes the same double claim as Honig: suppressing political contestation cannot succeed, but it can do a lot of damage. Like Honig, she contends that the impossible search for consensus is not without consequence. Yet where Honig's claims about the remainders of politics sound faintly predictive, Mouffe is much more specific in the effects she ascribes to the eclipse of adversarial politics. Her concern with radical right-wing parties in Europe made possible by the hollowing out of traditional right vs. left competition for votes serves as one example. Mouffe ascribes the reactionary rise of such groups to the politics of centralization which claimed to have eclipsed right-left distinctions in a new neo-liberal hegemony. She points to Tony Blair's New Labour Party's rhetoric of becoming a "radical centre" in the late 1990s as an instance of this loss of an adversarial arrangement of politics.[178]

This doubled critique advances an ontological claim followed by a secondary claim about the consequences of praxis which elides the permanency of democracy as struggle. But this two-fold structure reappears in a different register through the accusation of *deceit* leveled against liberal theory. I will take Mouffe's accusations against Rawls as a first example. To Mouffe, Rawls' attempt to formulate a moral and neutral arrangement of justice ignores the political context of drawing frontiers between reason and unreason. So while she blames Rawls for acknowledging only liberty and equality as formative political values and for dismissing the historical and contingent context in which liberal values are understood, she blames him further for hiding his premises and for pretending rationality is a power-free mechanism for eliminating other political

[177] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 15-16.
[178] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 108-128.

positions.[179] With rather suggestive word choice, she reasons that this "illusion" causes "occultation" of the "proper workings" of democracy.[180]

Likewise, the comparison Honig draws between agonism and liberal theory takes great pains to point out the deceitfulness of the latter. Agonistic theory provides "a contrasting alternative, a perspective from which agonistic conflict is celebrated and the identification or conflation of politics with administration is charged with closing down the agon or with duplicitously participating in its contests while pretending to rise above them."[181] Mouffe takes this accusation of duplicity further.[182] For her, liberalism's disguise of its own lack of unassailable foundations is perfectly fine, so long as the consequences of such disguise are acknowledged. Of course, no liberal theory could support an appeal to liberal values premised upon deceit and concealment of the contingency of those values – to do so would embroil the liberal position in untenable contradictions. This leaves Mouffe free to criticize liberal theory's lack of transparency about the uncertainty of its foundations while maintaining that deceit is only a problem for liberal thought - not for agonistic struggle.[183] This seems an odd position to take, but it attempts to inure her own articulation of a radical democratic hegemony from any criticism that it is based upon a better claim to truth. In other words, I would argue she is well aware of the double-move I am illustrating and of the revelatory thematic of agonistic thought, and wants to clarify that she is not proposing that radical democracy has merely got better claims to truth (or to transcendental values) than the liberal thinkers she rejects.

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[179] Mouffe, "Politics and the limits of liberalism," 120-125.
[180] Mouffe, "Politics and the limits of liberalism," 124.
[181] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 2.
[182] Mark Wenman suggests Mouffe's critique is aimed at democratic theories and practices "in denial" about the nature of the political, and "naive" in their renunciation of it. But Mouffe suggests this denial is a deliberate "disguise". See Mark Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy: Constituent Power in the Era of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 181; Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 105.
[183] This is particularly true for Rawls, who takes great pains to differentiate even a non-transcendental liberal theory of justice from a *modus vivendi*. See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 146.

Two ramifications of this doubled structure stand out. First, the ontological disclosures which agonistic critique facilitates are not transcendental; they do not replicate the truth claims they expose as contingent. It is tempting to ask whether the accompanying claim - that abortive attempts to reduce struggle to administration do great damage - is strong enough to bear the weight of the strident accusations leveled against liberal thought. But the most interesting ramification, to my mind, is that this ontological disclosure is itself an engagement in political struggle. This is apparent enough in Mouffe's aspersive comments about the role of truth in liberal theory. Liberal theory is accused of duplicity, and yet not from a position of greater veracity, but as a radical democratic *tactic*. The understated irony of Mouffe's assertion that liberal theory misunderstands what politics is about, is *not* that such a statement necessarily posits an essential view of politics as struggle, but that it is itself an instance of struggle. This opens the possibility of characterizing ontological disclosure as also a practical struggle, as itself a participant in an agonic contest and not a forerunner to it. In which case, the disclosures brought about by truth-telling might be simultaneously assertions and instances of politics as permanent struggle.

Conclusion

Reflecting on Mouffe's work poses the question of whether reconciliation is (or could be) the *doubled-revelation* she describes, disclosing the permanence of difference and the damage done by attempts to circumscribe it within commonality. What is more, it opens the possibility of understanding this doubled disclosure as a *normative*, and not just ontological, move. Against the criticism that Mouffe's postulate of common symbolic space re-inscribes agonism as a kind of liberalism (making her strident critique hypocritical), there remains the possibility that her argument attempts to disclose this symbolic space from *within*, as itself a practice of contest. In

other words, Mouffe opens the door to considering both the disclosures of critique and of truth commissions as contestatory assertions of the continuous tension between closure and contest, which might be a paradigmatic tension within both politics and reconciliation.

However, even if ontological disclosure as critique is a tactic of struggle and not a truth claim that precedes and defines legitimate disagreement, there remains a significant difficulty with ascribing such a function to the truth-telling of reconciliation. The difficulty is that such disclosure remains a species of knowledge claim, an argument about whether or not there are rational grounds for delimiting legitimate and illegitimate democratic claims. As such, the argument for the impossibility of reconciliation is not connected *as a practice* to ethical transformation. This is Linda Zerilli's point, cited approvingly by Aletta Norval. Norval breaks with Mouffe's concept of agonism precisely over the need for a radical democratic imaginary which does more than disclose the insufficiency of foundational theory. For Zerilli, exposing the groundlessness of political community replicates the same genre of knowledge claim advanced by those seeking such grounds.[184] More credit, perhaps, is due to the secondary claim that trying (and failing) to circumscribe difference ahead of time does tremendous damage to those whose claims are not recognizable within hegemonic norms of governance.

The recounted horrors of residential schools certainly expose the injustice of their colonial framework, and generate ethical imperatives for acknowledgment, apology, and redress (alongside other responses ranging from apathy to denial). But perhaps equating this exposure with ontological revelation undervalues the need for forms of disclosure which operate as ethical practices rather than descriptive knowledge claims. Mouffe's species of ontological argument about politics requires more than responses to particular injustices, because these responses may

[184] Norval, "A Democratic Politics of Acknowledgment," 59-75.

well reiterate the search for inclusive norms or reduce reconciliation to administration. But perhaps agonistic truth-telling must do more than advance alternate descriptions of the political. Such disclosures would be instances of struggle, located both as particular grievances and as the assertion that politics must be contestable. Nevertheless, this articulation of truth-telling as doubled disclosure remains disconnected from the ethical practices it seeks to engender because it retains the form of a knowledge claim which precedes and informs the dispositions towards plurality which it might hope to cultivate. The public-making of reconciliation cannot be the catalyst for such a shift in perspective without also being a practice of ethical claims-making. The resources of Mouffe's theory suggest how agonistic reconciliation need not advance a transcendental truth claim about plurality as an *a priori* precursor to the injustices articulated by residential school survivors. However, this portrait of disclosure requires further consideration as a mode of claims-making which implies a commitment to plurality established through democratic praxis. It is this possibility to which I turn next.

Chapter Four: Disclosure as Exemplarity

Introduction

Calling truth-telling a form of ontological disclosure means ascribing the function of critique to the work of the TRC. In one sense, this is exactly what the TRC has been doing. The colonial narratives of assimilation, superiority and exploitation have all been publicly highlighted by the commission's research and the testimony of survivors. But no single story told by survivors is likely to disclose politics as an expressive struggle between perspectives on the past; the institutional framework of the commission preserves the concern that individual stories, however critical, can be inscribed within an overarching narrative of community. This presents two difficulties if reconciliation is to approximate agonistic critique. First, it would seem as though ontological argument remains the purview of the theorist, a second-order description of the multiple revelations about the damage done to indigenous children who attended residential schools, and to their parents and children. Second, it seems unlikely that making this knowledge claim could itself be a transformative ethical practice.

But ascribing an agonistic function to truth-telling raises a second possibility. Instead of privileging ontological revelation about plurality as the locus of transformation, disclosure might instead be the practical activity of expressive struggle. By exposing the gap between narratives of Canada's inclusivity and its historically violent exclusions, a performative, expressive disclosure unsettles hegemonic patterns of governance. Crucially, such disclosure also develops the democratic commitment of the claims-maker or storyteller, who acts in name of a deferred political community rather than the present one. This interpretation is presaged by James Tully's combination of disclosure and respect as immanent to the two related activities of public

philosophy and practices of freedom. But the key articulation of truth-telling as an agonistic and ethical practice is Aletta Norval's argument that truth commissions *exemplify* courageous claims-making in the face of our inability to hear such claims.

This approach addresses the further difficulty of how disclosing the contingency of our political foundations fosters better relationships. Mouffe's critique entails this cannot be accomplished through democratic institutions which presume the very community called into question by truth commissions. And yet, disclosing the perpetual possibility of antagonism seems insufficient to transform relationships into adversarial ones. By contrast, Norval's approach suggests an aversive democratic ethics may be inculcated by the very truth-telling which indicts present democratic norms. But the optimistic argument that truth-telling can be an ethical and imaginative democratic practice encounters this same challenge in a modified form. It raises the question of whether such truth-telling requires further institutional or practical conditions for its instantiation: whether disclosure requires a prior public space, and whether exemplarity first requires attentive listeners.

Permanent provocation and perpetual disclosure

The hoped-for change wrought by agonistic reconciliation turns out to be the recognition of a certain kind of changelessness - the perpetuity of contest and plurality as the ingredients of political activity. Tully takes up this dynamic through Foucault's description of resistance as a "permanent provocation," rather than a quest for emancipation.[185] But if transitional justice is to proffer such a re-description, the question becomes: who is doing the revealing, the theorist or the

[185] See James Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity, *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (2002): 541, reprised in James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, vol. 1, *Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 15-38.

truth commission? The theory/practice debate is a central plank of Tully's attempt to think through what doing theory comes to mean if we accept the proposition that it should not mean rationally deriving unquestionable rules for democratic governance. For Tully, doing public theory is a type of political action which discloses the horizons of our thought – not in order to transcend those limitations by appeal to transcendental standards – but to demonstrate how new horizons can call current ones into question. As he puts it, even if a grand narrative of citizenship could be ascertained, "from the situated standpoint of diverse citizenship … the attempt would overlook the very diversity that the civic approach aims to disclose, keep in view, learn from and work with."[186] Thus the terms by which we are governed are contestable even though those who wish to contest them may not have - and need not have - recourse to unquestionable terms of governance.

This process of bringing governance into question he calls "practices of civic freedom", and accords political theory a participatory role which elides the theory/practice duality.[187] In his well-known exposition of political philosophy as a species of critical practice, Tully lays out four steps for this horizon-expanding venture. First, those practices of governance which are called into question by those who object to them are "taken up as a problem" through philosophical reflection.[188] Second, the conditions of possibility for these practices of governance are called into question through *re-description*, through the articulation of new vocabularies in which the rules of governance might appear as contingent rather than necessary. The third step, borrowing from Wittgenstein and Foucault, calls for an inventory of the forms of subjectivity and argumentation accompanying these sets of practices, then expands this search through a genealogical examination of these practices and their correlate languages of argumentation. Uncovering the historicity of

[186] James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key,* vol. 2, *Imperialism and Civic Freedom.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 308.
[187] James Tully, "Dialogue," *Political Theory* 39, no. 1 (2011): 146.
[188] Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity," 534.

practices of government, the sense that they might have been otherwise, has a particular relevance both to the historical research conducted by truth commissions and the very public remembering performed through them.

The fourth step is curious. Through the first three steps we might come to recognize that the structures of contemporary governance draw upon vocabularies of argumentation which are contingent both historically and in terms of their place among alternative normative descriptions and practices of subjectivity. These contemporary and historical surveys establish the contingency and therefore contestability of the practices of governance to which we are subjected. Terms of governance which seemed immutable become situated among historical alternatives. The apotheosis of critical theory seems already achieved, the contingency and contestability of governance revealed. The fourth step Tully recommends is an ongoing engagement with those who seek to modify, negotiate or challenge practices of governance, a mutually beneficial relationship between theorists and practitioners. This perpetually extends the first three steps, suggesting theory has no terminal point except in sustained dialogue. But it is also an exchange of sorts, with theorists gaining pragmatic tests for their reflections, and offering in return "a disclosive sketch of the arbitrary and unnecessary limits" of governance.[189] Alexandros Kioupkiolis offers much the same description of critical reason as "disclosive criticism that prefigures new possible worlds."[190]

Two consequences follow. First, disclosure itself is accorded the same temporality ascribed to contestation: it is perpetual disclosure, without a teleological end-point. The second consequence is simply that the dialogical aspiration of theory as itself a political practice

[189] Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity," 535.
[190] Alexandros Kioupkiolis, "The agonistic turn of critical reason: Critique and freedom in Foucault and Castoriadis," *European Journal of Social Theory* 15, no. 3 (2012): 391.

considerably softens the dichotomy between theorist and practice as regards the origin of disclosure in an agonistic conception of reconciliation. Following Tully's format there is no need to sharply differentiate between the disclosure offered by agonistic theory as a re-appraisal of the grammar of reconciliation, and the disclosure brought about by the alternate histories made public by survivors. The gulf between theory and practice is thus considerably reduced, if not eliminated altogether.

This matches Duncan Ivison's descriptions of Tully as above all a *practical* philosopher who deliberately situates practice and language games as *pre-theoretical*, thereby displacing the privileged position of theoretical knowledge.[191] Much of Tully's work in this regard, Ivison states, centers on imperialism as the continuing, pervasive context in which critical democratic praxis is located. But instead of looking for emancipation from its ubiquity, Tully turns instead to local practices of engagement with its language and governance. This, Ivison notes, leads Tully to the claim that although imperialism is pervasive, so are practices of freedom. They are co-extensive with imperialism. But they are harder to see. Ivison puts it this way: "There is 'another world of pluralism' to discover, Tully insists, *if only we would look more carefully*."[192]

Critical theory is thus disclosive by showing what is already there. Moreover its concerns are not with emancipation, but with ongoing resistance to and modulation of hegemonic practices and vocabularies of power. Ivison's complaint stems from the uncertainty as to whether "modification" of imperialism could ever constitute "transformation", and how we could distinguish between them.[193] This is to ask whether local practices of resistance could ever significantly alter the imperial context of western democratic rule. They may not. Mark Wenman

[191] See Duncan Ivison, "'Another World is Actual': Between Imperialism and Freedom," *Political Theory* 39, no. 1 (2011): 131-137.
[192] Ivison, "'Another World is Actual'," 135, emphasis in the original.
[193] Ivison, "'Another World is Actual'," 135-136.

makes the persuasive case that Tully's theory of agonism is unduly limited by an emphasis on civic freedom as *augmentation*, as the capacity to contest norms and practices of governance only from the premise that we never challenge them all at once.[194]

In fact, Wenman extends this charge to include Tully, Norval and David Owen, suggesting that for each, "there is no qualitative distinction to be drawn between the kind of politics that found a new regime or a new framework of law, and the agonic freedom of citizens to challenge the constituted forms of authority from within the horizon of a given constitutional arrangement."[195] By contrast, Wenman hopes to preserve "two qualitatively distinct moments of the constituent power," including both augmentation and "genuinely exceptional moments that institute and announce" new worlds.[196] This raises a concern with whether the dialogical interrogation of governance rests on "immanent rules that are said to condition the legitimate exercise of democratic freedom."[197] The most important of these rules may well be Tully's insistence on the motto *audi alteram partem*: always listen to the other side.[198]

To the extent that civic freedom is circumscribed by *immanent* dialogical restraint, it may be less attentive to the radical freedom of beginnings which agonistic theory seems to proffer. But I am not so sure Tully's description of listening as immanent to contest corresponds to a view of civic freedom as only augmentation. Instead, I wonder whether his insistence on disclosive critique does not carry with it a complementary aim of cultivating an ethos of listening. Contrary to Wenman, I suspect the difficulty is not in articulating the revolutionary moment of agonism alongside its subsequent augmentation; rather, the difficulty resides in the propensity of agonistic

[194] Mark Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 158.
[195] Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 94.
[196] Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 95, 94.
[197] Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 160.
[198] Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*, 24, 35; Tully, "Political Theory as a Critical Practice," 535; Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, 159-160.

thought to privilege disclosive augmentation over the practices of listening thus made to seem immanent to them. Put another way, perhaps the revolutionary moment of Tully's project resides not in the plurality it discloses, but in the opening of an ethics of listening somehow associated with these disclosive genealogies. This depends on whether the fourth step of critical theory as practice means simply 'rinse and repeat'. The injunction to continue dialogue with citizens who question and resist the terms of their governance might signal the achievement of a new perspective altogether. Returning to the metaphor of horizons, what might be disclosed through critical theory is not the contingency of this or that horizon of thought, but a pluralization of horizons, a new way of thinking about horizon-ness.[199]

Tully calls this "an ongoing mutual relation" in his discussion of the role of the theorist, but I prefer the resonance of his characterization in *Strange Multiplicity*, where he calls it simply *listening*.[200] There is a similarity between the structure of his argument there and his reflections on the kind of work he is doing. The book tells two stories. The first is a story of how European imperialist assumptions permeate the tradition of liberalism in Hobbes, Locke, early American settlers, and so on. The second story details how, at each juncture of the ascendency of imperialist assumptions, an alternative story was available and indeed taken up in part by thinkers and writers of the era. These stories jointly produce the genealogical survey of practices and vocabularies for which Tully advocates. They reveal not only the contingency of liberal theory in terms of its historical association with colonial conquest and settlement, but the plurality of alternatives which accompanied the hegemonic tradition of liberalism at every step. Each of these stories unsettles the hegemonic terms in which claims for justice are articulated, first by demonstrating the

[199] By means of the dialogue he stages between Foucault and Habermas, Tully asserts one novel way of thinking of horizons, through critical genealogies which *transgress* boundaries of present thought, even though they do not *transcend* them. Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, vol. 1, 93-94.
[200] Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*, 182-183.

associations between the western democratic experience and settler colonialism, and second by revealing both forgotten and enduring alternatives. But unsettling the contexts in which claims are rendered intelligible is not the end point of Tully's storytelling, nor is his aim to supplant one vocabulary with another. Instead, Tully concludes with a call for greater listening.[201] At a minimum, I believe this implies a shift in attitudes towards claims which are difficult to voice within dominant paradigms of democratic subjectivity and argumentation, claims which perhaps entail a challenge to those very paradigms. There remains a kinship between Tully's idea of listening and notions of presumptive generosity advocated in different ways by William Connolly or by Charles Taylor.[202]

This brief exegesis of Tully's work suggests two conclusions. First, it softens the dichotomy between theory and practice by taking theory as a form of critical praxis where disclosive critique itself passes through multiple iterations.[203] Tully is not content with merely disclosing the perpetual presence of plurality, though he does attempt something very much like this through his genealogical investigations of counter-hegemonic narratives and his insistence that they remain alternatives in the present. Instead, Tully calls disclosure itself a perpetual practice, through the mutual interrogation of philosophical reflection and practical resistance to the terms of governance within which claims are articulated and rendered intelligible. The second conclusion, however, cuts against this distinction between a singular disclosure of ontological significance and the repeated disclosures of ever-moving horizons. For as the *structure* of Tully's

[201] James Tully, "Recognition and dialogue: the emergence of a new field," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 7, no. 3 (2004): 99.
[202] Tully's description of an ethos "where each listens to the voices of the others in their own terms" is reminiscent of Taylor's theory of recognition. See Tully, *Strange Multiplicity*, 24; Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-74.
[203] "These continuous contests of mutual disclosure and acknowledgment," Tully notes, "are also ends in themselves. They are the activity of democratic freedom." James Tully, introduction to *Multinational Democracies*, eds. Alain-G. Gagnon and James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22.

critical praxis and the examples I have given suggest, Tully continues to trust that the pluralizing and disclosive practices he endorses might prove conducive to a further change: an altered ethical stance towards claims which seem outside familiar vocabularies of justice and democracy, but which might nevertheless be considered practices of freedom. There remain stark differences between Tully's perpetual disclosure and Mouffe's insistence that liberalism misunderstands the political on an ontological level. But each of these theories bears hallmarks of a continued reliance on disclosure as the mechanism of a substantive change, from an ethical orientation towards rule-bound democracy to an ethical orientation towards open-ended contestation.

Exemplarity and disclosure

Next I turn to Aletta Norval's sophisticated account of reconciliation, voiced from the perspective of a radical democratic theory assembled variously from agonistic, deliberative and post-structural insights. Norval considers the role of plurality in the reconciliation efforts of South Africa. But her argument departs from the familiar context of the pluralizing/unifying debate about history and nationality, which cannot sufficiently distinguish agonistic reconciliation from other models prizing diversity, either as a nation-building strategy or as the great benefit secured by liberal values and institutions. The further assertion, advanced by Norval's innovative description of democracy as 'aversive', is that re-uniting a broken society or forging a singular community is impossible.[204] The disclosure of this impossibility, this *gap* opened by democracy's inability to hear claims made in its name, is what reconciliation facilitates through the exemplarity of truth commissions.[205]

[204] Norval takes up the agonistic vocabulary but does not adopt it, preferring her own term 'aversive' democracy'.
[205] Once again this is a doubled disclosure, with a further twist. The gap between norms and injustice revealed by truth commissions is not simply a catalyst for change, it is the *opportunity* for further expressive disclosures and imaginative political judgments advanced by *exemplars*.

Norval's argument is complex. Moving through the emphasis on the (historical) contingency of the emergence of democratic subjects through forging equivalent demands for equality taken from Laclau and Mouffe, she turns to Wittgenstein, Tully, Derrida and Cavell. With them, she articulates a normative theory of the imperative to make claims in the name of democracy despite the failure of any such democracy to forge a just community. Through these theorists she asserts that the democratic subjectivities we take up through practices are imbued with a normative grammar of "aversion" as they hang between the realization of democracy's broken promises and its call to an impossible perfectability through self-critique. In other words, both democratic subjectivities and democratic practices rely upon a radical incompleteness, an exposure to openness and plurality. This incompleteness is not exposed by argument alone, but by rhetoric and practices which disclose alternate paths and exceed, at times, the grammars which structure democratic argumentation and institutions.

Moreover, Norval argues that the contingency attaching to processes of democratic subject-formation brings normative constraints. While these may not be substantive, they nevertheless impel us to renew our democratic allegiances through the claims we make. Using Cavell in particular, Norval asserts that such claims-making involves repeated assent and dissent which illustrate not only our dissatisfaction with present democracy (in the name of a perfectible future democracy) but our complicity in (or perhaps identification with) the always-failed democracies of the present. This claims-making process relies on what Norval calls the "grammars" of democratic argumentation.[206] These grammars exist in the plural, representing the practices which delineate the boundaries of the intelligibility of the claims which can be put forward in a

[206] Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 105.

democracy. Following Wittgenstein, Norval wants to suggest that these grammars are not reducible to a single rational structure.

But as with Tully's approach, revealing the plurality of the grammars in which democratic claims can be rendered intelligible is not the end-point of Norval's argument. Instead, this argument propounds a doubled movement of critique and promising, implied in the aversive formulation of 'democracy to-come'. The realization that there are plural democratic subjectivities and grammars invites a perpetual openness (to a better self, a better democracy). Norval suggests that the experience of democratic subjectivity formation not only departs the terrain of structured argumentation, but illustrates a gap between our present ethical/democratic grammars and "perfect justice" (in Cavell's term).[207] Put otherwise, attachment to democracy is not cultivated by an appreciation of a democratic rationality within which dissent may be circumscribed. Rather, it is cultivated by a dawning awareness of the gap between present practices and democratic horizons of possibility. The metaphor she appropriates to express this newfound appreciation is Wittgenstein's notion of *aspect dawning*, the experience of looking at a drawing and suddenly realizing it contains two distinct images.

But it is not political theory, distinct from political practice, which facilitates the kinds of recognition which resemble this 'aspect dawning'. In this Norval agrees with Tully's assessment of theorizing as itself a kind of critical democratic praxis. Yet while she notes Tully's position that political philosophy operates in precisely this gap between present democratic subjectivities and possibilities which exceed existing grammars, Norval proceeds in a slightly different direction by stressing the place of "exemplars" who direct our attention to futures lying outside the scope of present political grammars.[208] The exemplarity of such figures is not given, but is accorded through

[207] Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 182.
[208] Norval also notes Tully's response. Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 167.

struggles which exceed the boundaries set by authorized structures of argumentation. Nelson Mandela was such an exemplar. So is Archibishop Desmond Tutu. And so was South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In perhaps one of the most illuminating passages of her book *Aversive Democracy*, Norval explains the role of the exemplar through Cavell's close reading of Nora in Ibsen's famous play *The Doll House*.[209] Nora has difficulty articulating her inchoate sense of injustice precisely because there is no room for it in the prevailing political grammar articulated by her husband, Torvald. Nevertheless, her sufferings and claims mark the inadequacy of the terms governing her; they necessarily elicit a response – either a reaffirmation of the rejection of her claims, or a re-thinking of the grammars involved. And yet, Nora's claims also mark her own subject position, revealing not only the gulf between the terms of her governance and ideal justice, but also the responsibility for that gulf embodied in her continuing consent (understood in Cavell's sense as the ongoing practices of assent and dissent).[210] It is from within this gap that Norval locates the peculiarly democratic response to the claims and suffering which exceed intelligibility in existing authority structures. She notes:

> Cavell's reading here not only foregrounds the important challenges faced by and inaugurated by those whose demands cannot be heard in the dominant political discourse, but it also emphasizes the specificity of a democratic response to such demands. As he argues, it is not sufficient to say '"This is simply what I do," and wait'. Instead, the alternative is to find oneself dissatisfied with what one does and with the order for which one has responsibility. This is where the core of the democratic response is to be found: in the responsibility to respond to claims, to acknowledge 'society's distance from perfect justice' and to cultivate an aversive disposition.[211]

[209] Her discussion owes something to James Tully, who discusses how Nora is unable to articulate her difficulties in a way which amounts, in Torvald's view, to a "claim of reason". See Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity," 537. What is peculiarly helpful in Norval's account is her argument that the process of articulating claims also lays a claim upon the claims-maker, Nora. In part this is because both dissent and assent amount to practices of identification with democracy; practices of identification felt as an injunction or call by democracy-to-come.
[210] Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 180-183.
[211] Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 208.

Only at this juncture, after weaving together the several threads of post-structural theories, does Norval consider the exemplarity of South Africa's TRC. This discussion is replete with registrations of the many complaints made about the TRC's work. Interestingly, these form an effective (though doubtless unintended) visual illustration in her book. Piles of rapidly accumulating footnotes mark up the pages just as the unresolved questions, debates and criticisms they register marked the commission's work, until – as Norval notes – it seems difficult to offer anything like a positive assessment.

And yet her ultimate, triple assessment of South Africa's TRC is somehow fitting in this context. She claims:

(1) The TRC may have assumed too much would be accomplished by giving 'voice' to victims of apartheid crimes, yet this does not deflect our concern with giving voice, which it exemplified;

(2) There is a danger of replacing apartheid history with new national mythology, yet the TRC is only one possible source of multiple narratives;

(3) Finally, the TRC is exemplary of multiple possible futures which dramatically exceed both apartheid grammars and perhaps our other democratic structures of thought because, in Norval's words: "the whole process … inaugurated, embodied and inspired . . . a democratic openness to contestation in which history is understood as something 'writerly'" – where the reader is a producer, not mere consumer, of the text.[212]

In an earlier, tightly worked account of the role the TRC played in facilitating the creation of new myths and memories following the end of apartheid, Norval suggests such an institution can contribute to a post-national construction of memory. Such a construction stands in contrast

[212] Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 205. This conclusion is perhaps the most fitting given the broken trail of footnotes leading up to it which give an apt visual illustration of how Norval's reading of the TRC was also a kind of writing.

with the national identity written by apartheid institutions. It also differs from subsequent attempts of the white political parties in South Africa (notably De Klerk's National Party) to narrate the transition from apartheid to democracy. Submissions to the TRC by these parties tended to emphasize the context (the need for a national identity) in which the racist violence of apartheid appears, if not justified, then at least situated as appropriate to the needs of nation-building.[213]

At first glance this distinction between national and post-national memory appears to substantiate the qualitative difference between plural and singular stories urged by adherents of post-structural or agonistic accounts of democratic theory. Claire Moon's take on the institutional funnelling of multiple accounts into one follows exactly such a pattern; for her, the TRC is a suspect institution insofar as it condenses plural testimony into a singular account. It is suspect to the extent that this process, whatever its outcome, obscures the plurality of previous interpretations of the past, reifying a singular history (apartheid) by the very desire to contrast it with plural futures (democracy).[214] This plurality/singularity dualism is never wholly absent from Norval's writings, yet her reading of the TRC in South Africa offers more subtlety. The TRC represents the possibility of reconciliation because it moves beyond what she calls the simple identification of national memory with national identity – the assumption that national identity is simply given by history and guarded with memorials, institutions and monuments whose portrait of unity papers over any fragilities in the account. This Norval calls a logic of closure. Apartheid's racist exclusions, which functioned as the counterpart of South African nationalism, is the vivid example of what she means by closure.

[213] Aletta Norval, "Memory, Identity and the (Im)possibility of Reconciliation: The Work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa," *Constellations* 5, no. 2 (1998): 250-265.
[214] This is a gloss on Moon's work. Her concern lies with the TRC's unwillingness to stretch back its chronology to cover the pre-apartheid period of colonial violence, and with the pressure on it to produce a coherent singular account of history and identity suitable for a multi-racial democracy. See Moon, *Narrating Political Reconciliation*.

And yet the TRC does not simply move beyond closure to openness, from an exclusive to an inclusive story of human dignity. Rather, Norval thinks that reconciliation is doubly anchored. Its possibility, which might be figured as just such a move to plural identities and histories from a restrictive national past, is also anchored in a kind of impossibility. Theoretically, this takes the form of a double movement. First, the contingency of the link between memory and identity is called into question – since each informs the other (as our identity is premised on remembering some things and forgetting others), both are politically constructed. This is what exposes apartheid as a logic of closure – a constructed, not given, closure of identity premised on a refusal to accept non-white identities and histories as involved in any dignified way with white history in South Africa. The second move is the act of remembering. Only now, what is remembered is the logic of closure and the revelation of its contingency. As closure is remembered, the present is opened up as a sort of not-closure. Norval explains it this way:

> If apartheid signifies the denial of difference at the heart of identity, a remembrance of apartheid would consist in a remembrance of (the effects of) closure as such. A pluralistic, post-apartheid social order would consequently be one in which the constitutive nature of difference is thought. It is this constituting function of difference, this holding-against-an-other, which I would argue becomes visible in the memory work of the TRC.[215]

Mouffe's theory of identity as differentiation (pulled in part from Derrida) is the central pillar of this argument. With it comes the ambiguity I mentioned earlier: the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid is not simply a transition to plurality, but some sort of recognition of the impossibility of securing plurality, the impossibility of pluralising the otherwise intact connection between a nationalist identity and a nationalist memory. It does not "simply call forth a plural past, that is, a past consisting of many, but completed, elements. Rather, the continuous

[215] Norval, "Memory, Identity, and the (Im)possibility of Reconciliation," 259.

reworking and re-elaboration of the past point toward a fundamental impossibility: the impossibility of completion as such."[216]

Norval explains the openness which results from remembering closure by an analogy to the structure of our memories, which she draws from Derrida. "Remembrance," she claims, "serves as the not-now which is constitutive of the possibility of the presence of the now. Remembrance thus in essence points to the incompleteness of the present."[217] Remembering the closures of the past (apartheid) points both to the openness and the limits of the present. This was manifest politically in South Africa's TRC because the transition from de Klerk's National Party government to Nelson Mandela's presidential election was marked by vigorous negotiations with many old elites still in positions of significant power. It was not a sea-change or revolutionary destruction of existing institutions which led to the establishment of the TRC, but a hard-fought constitutional negotiation process which laid the groundwork for the amnesty provisions and other marked features of the commission. The continued presence of old elites through the reconciliation process contributes an ambiguity to the TRC's remembering. And yet, it is partially this very ambiguity - the plurality of narratives encountering one another through the TRC - that positioned the commission to exemplify not only plurality, but the attachment to democracy in the face of the impossibility of its full realization as a new singular community immune to further claims.

Through this exposition of Norval's work I have attempted not so much to summarize her argument as to direct attention to one of its understated features, the hope invested in a revelatory process of disclosure through the instrumentality of the TRC. Her work positions the public-making activity of reconciliation as a kind of claims-making in the name of democracy to come, including claims about the damage done by past attempts to secure unity, and hopes invested in

[216] Norval, "Memory, Identity, and the (Im)possibility of Reconciliation," 260-261.
[217] Norval, "Memory, Identity, and the (Im)possibility of Reconciliation," 259.

future plurality. As the TRC "opened up areas of contestation around the character of nationhood, national identity, history, truth and justice, which were previously deeply sedimented and resistant to interrogation, it did so in the name of a democratic future…."[218] Yet the claims published by truth commissions are neither teleological nor imitable insofar as they exemplify the *perpetual* openness of democratic claims-making itself, an *imperative* to participate democratically in this contestation despite the impossibility of creating a democracy which fulfils all its promises. This is why exemplarity differs from modelling, differs from procedural accounts of democratic norms. "The TRC," Norval writes, "cannot be imitated in any simplistic sense; any re-enactment and reiteration of a process such as this in a different context cannot but be singular if it is going to succeed. Its functioning has a continuing capacity to unsettle us …, but without the comfort of a simplistic and uniform model of democracy and nationhood."[219]

But what facilitates this kind of reconciliation, this ethos balanced between critique of, and identification with, democratic ideals, is the revelatory capacity of public contest amid plurality. The truths made public by a TRC do not proffer a sufficient model of democratic plurality to which the closures of assimilation and cultural genocide are contrasted. Instead, they incite a paradoxical rejection of the possibility of a sufficient, completed democratic community, while acting as an insistent call to take up a democratic subjectivity through articulation of its deferred ideals.

Conclusion

Together, Tully and Norval furnish a conceptual framework for considering truth-telling as ongoing practices of reimagining normative vocabularies through exemplary claims that exceed them. Both propound something different than a singular ontological revelation about the damage

[218] Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 206.
[219] Norval, *Aversive Democracy,* 206.

done by the quixotic quest to circumscribe plurality within an already-assumed community. They open the possibility of reconciliation as a perpetual practice which is at once revelatory (and thereby inaugural, new, a beginning) and permanent (revealing only the gap between present norms taken up and challenged by exemplars or citizens, and an always-deferred democracy-to-come). This revelation is distinct from an ontological knowledge-claim about the insufficiency of pre-political boundaries for public disagreement because the *process* of public philosophy, the *practice* of claims-making inculcates a commitment to democracy from the standpoint of its incompleteness, its radical promise and impossibility. Perhaps the public truths told to and through truth commissions are like the claims-making Norval describes: they not only show the limits of democratic justice, but they commit us to act aversively against present injustices, in the name of a perpetually deferred democracy.

But a difficulty arises in specifying whether the (new) adoption of an ethos of aversion or listening is produced by, required by, or immanent to the public-making disclosures of truth commissions. In particular, it matters whether or not exemplars such as residential school survivors require public space to press claims in the name of a democracy-to-come and thereby disrupt assumptions about the community to be reconciled, and its governing norms. There remains a nagging concern with this proposal that truth-telling can foster a commitment to a democratic ethos of aversion. One way to phrase this concern would be to ask whether the practices of disclosure are the substance of an expressive political contest, or whether such contest is only possible if attitudes of aversion, or of listening, themselves furnish the public space in which contest transpires. Alternately, we could return to the question posed earlier: does expressive, disclosive contest require some sort of condition for its instantiation? What would it take for exemplarity to earn a receptive audience?

The return of this dilemma poses a familiar problem, concerning the relationship between the ongoing practices of claims-making and their reception. In Tully's portrait of theory as critical praxis, there remains a sense in which the multiplicity revealed by critical disclosure is instrumental to the cultivation of an ethical responsiveness, an attitude of listening. Similarly, Norval's assessment of exemplarity culminates in an attitude of aversion to hegemonic vocabularies of governance which cannot recognize claims made against them in the name of an always postponed justice. This pattern differs from the doubled disclosure evinced by Mouffe's critique of liberalism. Nor does it seem that either exemplarity or public philosophy stand in a preparatory relationship to the democratic dispositions they seemingly inculcate. It seems more accurate to suggest that in each case, the dispositions of aversion and listening are *immanent* to the ongoing practices of identifying and transgressing horizons. And yet this answer does not wholly satisfy, since as Norval points out, those hearing exemplary claims are faced with the very real possibility of ignoring them, perhaps exacerbating the exclusionary violence of hegemonic grammars of justice. Moreover, should an aversive or a listening disposition arise through the articulation of claims which are not intelligible within governing grammars (and yet call attention to the problem of intelligibility), they curiously supply the condition of possibility for their own appearance.

The prospect remains, of course, that the stories told by residential school survivors might meet a hostile reception, or prompt further antagonistic discord over what is to be done. But neither listening nor aversion constitutes a new norm of full inclusion which would be immune from the chance of antagonism. To the contrary, a democratic ethos of aversion grounded in practices of assent and dissent positions reconciliation as an always incomplete form of redress. This conclusion is at once pessimistic, in line with Ivison's worry that practices of freedom can never

overcome imperialism, and optimistic, since it makes commitment to democratic negotiation possible despite the otherwise damning evidence of its failure published by truth commissions.

The question of whether aversive or attentive dispositions can be cultivated by practices of disclosure marks a crossroads of sorts. In answer, I want to consider two distinct relationships between public space and disclosure. The second of these I intend to develop through a consideration of witnessing as a structural complement to the stories told by survivors. First, however, I want to turn to a possibility articulated by Andrew Schaap: reconciliation understood as perpetual struggle *does* require a prior common space where an ethos of listening or aversion can be cultivated, but this space must itself be *disclosed* through the instrumentality of truth commissions. If this chapter has raised the possibility that agonistic reconciliation can foment an ethical shift in our perspective on plurality and closure, then the next chapter will consider whether this shift is actually brought about through recognition of the space for contest already existing between divided peoples.

Chapter Five: Disclosing the Space of Politics

Introduction

Alongside ontological revelation and exemplarity as elements of a truth commission's public-making, there remains the possibility that truth commissions actually disclose the space for expressive politics itself. By my estimation this is what Andrew Schaap's *Political Reconciliation* claims.[220] Drawing on Arendt's vocabulary of freedom and intersubjective action, Schaap suggests the contests made public through reconciliation may disclose the *worldliness* which relates and separates us, a worldliness that intimates the dual proclivities of action to both delimit and disrupt political community. In place of the construction of a new inclusive identity, political reconciliation imagines instead a community tenuously balanced between these world-constructing and world-contesting tendencies of action. Achieving such a fragile community depends on recognizing the unavoidable risks of action, a recognition which the competition made public by truth commissions facilitates by disclosing our worldliness to us.

Schaap hopes that political reconciliation can reveal how the *space* in which it is possible is simultaneously the reason why a fully inclusive community is impossible. However, as I will argue, this hope occasions a curious circularity: agonistic disclosure is *realized* - in the twofold sense of recognized and actualized - in the disclosure of its own durable conditions. As I read it, this circularity is an attempt to evade the troubling question of whether the conditions for agonistic contest might require an uncontestable delineation of public space. This account of political reconciliation differs from previous depictions by addressing the spatial requirement for disclosure. However, it fails to evade the question of how such space is made because it compresses

[220] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*. Paulette Regan expresses a similar hope that "Truth-telling from multiple perspectives … creates space for dialogue." Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 64.

both the enduring possibility of political struggle and the rare, fragile spaces for its appearance into one term, worldliness.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: first, I consider Schaap's turn away from Carl Schmitt's framework of the risks of antagonism in favour of Arendt's account of the vagaries of non-sovereign intersubjective action. To clarify Schaap's distinction between Schmitt's and Arendt's notions of risk, I highlight how the risk of antagonism motivates several rejections of reconciliation as effective anti-colonial struggle. Second, I discuss the ambiguous durability and fragility attaching to Schaap's concept of worldliness, whereby a disclosed, permanent space for intersubjective action becomes both the durable condition for agonism and its fragile space of appearance.

The risks of politics

Schaap begins by rejecting liberal tolerance and communitarian recognition as frameworks by which to address the *risks* of reconciliation. These rejected accounts stand as examples of *any* framework in which reconciliation imposes limits on political action. For reconciliation to be political, the terms and outcomes of transition must remain open to contestation. Schaap calls this reversing "the order of our moral thinking" by considering politics as preceding and accompanying reconciliation, rather than following the construction of a polity in which respect, negotiation and democracy are secured.[221] Reconciliation must be contestable because it is only through such contest that its risks – the risks of action – can be appreciated.

What are the risks of reconciliation? Here Schaap invokes Schmitt's claim that politics consists of the negotiation of friend/enemy relations. Schmitt's concern with the necessity of

[221] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 9.

drawing lines in order to construct a democratic people furnishes Schaap with two key concepts: first, that politics risks enmity and violence, and second, that trying to circumvent this risk will fail. Schaap ascribes this failure to circumvent risk both to John Locke's theory of tolerance and to Charles Taylor's theory of recognition, and also to economic, therapeutic and religious vocabularies for transitional justice.[222] Each of these last three vocabularies tends to presume through its metaphors what Schaap thinks must be contested – the unity of the community reconciliation might produce. An economic metaphor treats the injustices of reconciliation like an accountant treats the debit column of a balancing sheet, through a process of cancellation or compensation. A metaphor of healing tends to imagine reconciliation as medicine for *one* body, presupposing the community which Schaap thinks reconciliation must both work towards and put in question. And finally, the religious modality of reconciliation aims to "redeem a painful past for the sake of a common future," where the commonness of the future must be presumed in order for redemption to be tenable.[223]

In the case of liberal tolerance (taking Locke's theory as his example), Schaap gives several reasons for dismissing it as a suitable architecture for reconciliation. First, the pursuit of common security provides no solution to the problems incurred by state-sanctioned violence carried out in pursuit of security and justified in the selfsame manner. Moreover, to the extent that toleration remains premised upon the exclusion of the intolerable, the political moment of exclusion lingers as the danger of politics to which Lockean tolerance remains blind. Lastly, Schaap argues reconciliation ought not to be constructed on a prior commitment to tolerance in the name of

[222] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 18.
[223] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 18. Some of these points seem specious in the Canadian context, where compensation is restricted to the Common Experience Payment for those who attended the schools.

security because this pre-empts the possible discovery of good reasons (other than security) why people divided by state violence might want to engage with each other once again.[224]

Recognition fails for slightly different reasons. Although Charles Taylor's schema of mutual recognition is alive to the risks of enmity, there remains a concerning ambiguity in the role played by identity in the struggle towards a mutuality of understanding between former enemies. On one hand, Taylor advocates a profound openness, not only towards others as they appear in our vocabularies of valuation, but an openness to understanding others in terms suggested by their own vocabularies of judgment. This is predicated upon the initiating assumption that other systems of judgment have worth. Yet this openness propounds a reification of identity, because our ability to extend second-order moral judgments about what is worthy of praise and emulation depends upon our embeddedness in culture and traditions. The difficulty arises in Taylor's suggestion that identities can be more or less *authentic*, and that being true to one's authentic identity is a good worth pursuing. For Schaap, reconciliation premised on mutual recognition would depend upon fixing the identity of the other to a reified image of authenticity, thus discounting their potential for novel action. This recognition of reified, authentic identities resembles the friend/enemy distinction. Reconciliation cannot depend upon mutual recognition because it might thus replicate the very risk which it seems to overcome.

Schaap's rejection of recognition as the framework for reconciliation parallels the arguments advanced in the Canadian context by Glenn Coulthard and Taiaiake Alfred.[225] Coulthard formulates three objections to the political provision of recognition as a response to colonialism. Following Franz Fanon, he links the internalization of derogatory images by the

[224] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 36.
[225] Glen Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada," *Contemporary Political Theory* 6, no. 4 (2007): 437-460; Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005).

colonized (the psychological damage of misrecognition) with the structural inequalities occasioned by the twin forces of colonialism and capitalism.[226] Recognition, he contends, necessarily imagines a symmetry between parties which fails to see these related structural and internalized subordinations, and fails to consider the attachments which colonized peoples may develop towards non-reciprocal forms of (mis)recognition.[227] This asymmetry is reinforced because the colonizers do not want recognition from the colonized: they want work.[228] This is exacerbated because modern political recognition consists of large-scale practices mediated by state institutions which favour the dominant culture, not the face-to-face recognition posited by Hegel's master-slave dialectic.[229]

Coulthard's third objection takes up Fanon's complaint that thinking of recognition as *struggle* becomes problematic in the context of the post-colonial politics of *granting* recognition and independence to former colonies by settler empires. Coulthard suggests Taylor misses the difference between Hegel's master/slave dialectic, where the slave achieves recognition through struggle, and settler-indigenous relations of the past few decades in Canada, where recognition is a means of obviating struggle entirely. For Coulthard, throwing off the psychological affect of misrecognition requires struggle which recognition seeks to bypass. He writes:

> the dialectical progression to reciprocity in relations of recognition is frequently undermined in the colonial setting by the fact that, unlike the subjugated slave in Hegel's *Phenomenology*, many colonized societies no longer have to *struggle* for their freedom and independence. It is often negotiated, achieved through constitutional amendment, or simply 'declared' by the settler-state and bestowed upon the Indigenous population in the form of political rights.[230]

[226] Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire,"444.
[227] Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire,"438, 445.
[228] Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire,"449-452.
[229] Coulthard relies on Patchen Markell's work for this argument. See Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire,"439.
[230] Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire," 448, emphasis in the original.

Without struggle the colonized will never be able to throw off affective inferiority complexes, but will come to identify the "constrained recognition conferred to them by their colonial 'masters' *as their own*."[231]

Taiaiake Alfred's hope for decolonization through indigenous warrior traditions echoes Coulthard's concerns. For Alfred, the reclamation of indigenous spirituality, community and resilience begins with spiritual shifts of the self, including an engagement with indigenous histories and traditions which exceed and resist the story of colonialism as *the* story of indigeneity. For Alfred as well as for Coulthard, resistance is preferable to recognition because it requires and fosters indigeneity as individual and communal spiritual resurgence rather than waiting upon state-centric practices of recognition.

These rejections of Taylor's model of recognition are interesting because they both acknowledge the necessity of engaging with the risks of politics, understood especially as the potential for relations of enmity which cannot be bypassed without also bypassing valuable processes of political struggle and spiritual work on the self. For each critique, a central problem with recognition is precisely its failure to acknowledge this risk. This failure is not due to a blindness to violence, but to an unwillingness to incorporate this risk into decolonization or reconciliation as a permanent feature. The aspiration towards a political community premised on tolerance or recognition makes it difficult to recognize the *potential* accompanying the permanent risk of enmity. Similarly, by pulling reconciliation away from liberal models seeking to constrain struggle by reference either to a greater good or an authentic identity, Schaap seems to preserve an understanding of reconciliation itself as a matter of struggle, of *political* contest.

[231] Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire," 450, emphasis in the original.

But despite the similarity between Schaap's notion of political reconciliation and decolonizing struggle, there is a crucial juncture in his argument occasioned by his turn to Arendt's vocabulary of freedom and action. While Schmitt's interpretation of politics as the fight to draw lines between peoples affords a first insight into the opportunities associated with political struggle, Schaap suggests that Schmitt's assessment of the risks of politics fails to consider the novelty and freedom of contingent plural action, because it remains mired in a language of sovereignty and nationhood. For a further understanding of the risks and opportunities of political action, Schaap turns to Arendt.

Schmitt's account of politics brings to mind the real danger that reconciliation might not produce the community it envisages, but might instead result in the realization that antagonistic groups do not want to continue to engage politically with each other. But for Schaap, Schmitt's assessment of the risks of politics is ultimately inadequate because it presumes human actors are *sovereign*, that sovereignty is what is at stake in the construction of frontiers around the identity of a democratic people. Schmitt grasps the permanent plurality that characterizes identity formation, but by reducing this dimension to its international significance in a system of sovereign states, he hangs on to the doomed quest to establish self-contained sovereignties.

I have already discussed this point of departure from Schmitt in Mouffe's application of Derrida's insight that every identity is articulated with and inseparable from difference, so that no political group can be exhaustively identified. But for Schaap, this departure relies on Arendt's perspective instead: sovereignty cannot adequately describe the risks of politics because to engage with others is always to act within a network of actors who may distort, appropriate or add to our own conception of what we are doing. We are non-sovereign actors precisely because we cannot, in concert with or in opposition to distinct others, carry through our intentions as though we were

the authors of our own stories. To act, Arendt famously writes, means to be both the doers and sufferers of our actions.[232]

Several consequences follow. First, an unavoidable contingency attaches to all political action. The consequences of action cannot be prescribed or anticipated because of the plurality of actors whose courses intersect and entangle one another. Second, the distinctiveness of each new person entering the world brings with it the permanent possibility of novelty in human affairs. Action thus gains an element of sheer freedom - not necessarily the freedom to create modeled on a sovereign 'maker', but the freedom to begin something new and unforeseen. This distinctiveness is not reducible to character traits (the 'what' of identity) nor is it the projection of an authentic inner reality. Instead, it is the 'who' of identity disclosed as a story over the course of a lifetime through speech and action with others. It is disclosed in a manner perhaps equally surprising (or at least, imprescriptible) both to actors and to those who witness their deeds. Because this distinctiveness is expressive and performative, it is fully realized only with the cooperation of others who acknowledge, judge and remember. Because these performances are plural, the meanings of action and the memories of the past are always open to contestation. The potentiality of action to disclose meaning and to disclose the identity of the actors thus requires a public space, or a public realm, like the ancient Greek *polis* that so fascinates Arendt.

However, a fragility inheres in the public spaces of appearance by consequence of the features of action amid plurality which these spaces shelter. It might provide a bit of rhetorical clarity to say that this fragility is occasioned from *within* and not only from without: the contingency and natality of action, which are threatened by the dissolution of public spaces, cannot themselves guarantee a permanent place of appearance because of what Arendt calls the

[232] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 190.

"boundlessness of action."[233] Contingency and novel action may well prove the source of the dissolution of political community, or of potential communities imagined in the course of the contests of reconciliation. At the very least, and most importantly to Schaap's account, although political action may be the only appropriate response to the risks of antagonism, it can never *guarantee* a harmonious community or singular identity; the very plurality and natality upon which disclosure and remembrance are predicated bring with them the permanent likelihood of new and contingent outcomes.

By moving from the risk of enmity to the fragility of contingent interaction, Schaap invokes the need for reconciliation to do more than recognize the impossibility of risk-free community. If we accept that the risks of politics are entangled in the possibility of performative, free, expressive and novel action which can be remembered and celebrated by others, we also accept the need for a space for this politics which can never be the commonness of community. Schaap calls this space *worldliness*.

Worldliness

Worldliness and risk

Worldliness means the world as the locus of intersubjective action. It is where words and deeds can be shared among disparate people who nonetheless inhabit the same world together. The concept of worldliness introduces a spatial reference to difference and identity. Plurality is not only the mutual implication of difference and identity, but their *situation* in a shared world, a world-in-common, and crucially, a world *in-between*. Because this plurality is always spatially mediated as both relation and separation, it indicates more than a multiplication or a holding-

[233] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 191.

together of several. In Arendt's deceptively simple metaphor, the space for intersubjective action is like a table: it both relates and separates us.

This matters to Schaap's argument. In parallel to these two contradictory features of the world as the shared space of separate people, Schaap draws an analogous portrait of action as itself divided between two impulses. These he calls the world-delimiting and world-rupturing capacities of action.[234] World-delimiting action carves out space for appearance by establishing the boundaries of community, suggesting the togetherness made possible by worldliness as shared space, actualized by the acting-together which Arendt calls power. World-disrupting action signifies the creative transgression of those boundaries, the freedom of challenge, struggle and novelty accompanying action amid distinctive people. Each of these tendencies heralds Arendt's evocative language of politics as always *inter*action, action made possible because of the distinctiveness and plurality of individual actors both related and separated from each other.

These two features form the condition of possibility for action for two dissimilar reasons in Arendt's analysis. The first is her division of human activity into three categories, labour, work and action, with only the latter requiring the presence of others. The second reason why distinction and plurality matter to action is because without both, neither reality, significance nor remembrance could be granted to human deeds. While the first reason accounts for the gulf Arendt reads into the canon of western philosophy between politics as *making* and politics as *acting*, it is the second reason which best accounts for the stress Schaap places on the contradictory tendencies of worldliness. Togetherness (identity, community) is a necessary condition of agonistic action, but not a sufficient condition. Separation is also required if politics is to be, among other things, a struggle for distinction.

[234] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 87.

Insofar as the two features of worldliness (relation and separation) imply and highlight the contradictory impulses of action as both world-delimiting and world-disrupting, they complete Schaap's shift in our understanding of the risks of reconciliation. This shift has two steps. First, the parties to political reconciliation are situated by the shared worldliness which both relates and separates them. As such, the danger of exposing the injustices of the past is not only the likelihood of exacerbating antagonisms and abandoning the dream of a common community. The danger is that *even as* and *even if* a space for expressive action is established, action will tend toward creative transgression of those boundaries. Such transgression - including the struggle between contrasting accounts of community and memory - means that even a reconciled community cannot provide inclusive norms of justice capable of permanently delimiting the boundaries of what is contestable.

Almost, this description posits political risk as the unfortunate tendency of action to transgress the very community it might otherwise make possible. If this were so, then political reconciliation would merely be the next best course pursued under the shadow of the impossibility of healing historical wounds. But there remains a second step in this shift in how risk is understood. The contradictory aspects of worldliness intimate not only the lurking threat of dissolution accompanying attempts to address serious injustices, but they also intimate a possibility for agonistic struggle. This possibility could never be realized without the inherent contradiction of separation and relation, or of the world-delimiting and world-disrupting facets of action. Reconciliation premised on the recognition of worldliness is not balanced between the possibility of community and the risk of its dissolution. Instead, the community to which reconciliation might aspire is always tenuously poised between togetherness and distinction because political struggle ultimately depends upon this tension.

Functionally, the argument from worldliness closely parallels Mouffe's argument from identity/difference. Each device identifies the contradictory impulses which make closure impossible. The contests made public by truth commissions reveal the paradox of agonistic action, but this paradox is in turn the condition of possibility for what both Mouffe and Schaap insist is *political*. Political reconciliation aims to disclose the spatial in-between which is the condition for continued expressive struggle about origins and about community. The public-making of truth commissions distinguishes the in-between of worldliness from reconciliation predicated on closure, healing or ledger-balancing. "When conceived in these terms," Schaap writes, "reconciliation would be oriented towards disclosing the world in its commonness through an agonistic interaction."[235] And yet, an unsettling ambiguity accompanies this argument: worldliness discloses the potentiality of agonistic politics by disclosing our relation to, and separation from, others. But worldliness is in turn disclosed by the agonistic politics evinced through reconciliation. In other words, political reconciliation discloses the conditions of agonistic struggle through the instrumentality of such struggle made public.

Ambiguity of worldliness

This circularity betrays an ambiguity in the concept of worldliness. Schaap's account of worldliness obfuscates a distinction between the fragile public spaces in which expressive struggle briefly appears, and the durable and singular in-between which makes such struggle possible. The chief distinction which Schaap's account elides is between the fragility of the spaces in which agonistic struggle might be realized, and its durable possibility in a common world.[236]

[235] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 74.
[236] Lynn Staeheli raises the interesting point that talking about *a* public often slides into talking about *the* public, because although there may be multiple publics, the relevant public is always assumed to be singular. Similarly, the distinction between multiple public spaces is easily condensed into talking about the singular space of worldliness. See Staeheli, "Political geography: democracy and the disorderly public," 67-78.

Something similar is echoed in David Owen's term, *medium*, for the spatiality of expressive disclosure as the distinctive feature of agonism. "Politics," he writes, "is the *medium* through which this activity of working out the terms of our association and one's relations to one's fellow citizens is accomplished."[237] Owen's intention is to contrast this notion of the medium of expressive association with an alternative - democratic institutions as the 'vehicle' for negotiating conflicting interests.[238] But this notion of a medium of political expressiveness is helpful in unpacking Schaap's insistence that reconciliation might disclose an immanent worldliness which can convince us to embrace the risks of contest rather than the destructive impossibility of unity.

Like worldliness, *medium* denotes not an empty space to be occupied by politics, but the *in-between* in which political relationships are continuously worked out and expressed.[239] Speaking of politics as struggle within a common medium affords a way of differentiating agonistic conceptions of struggle from notions of civic relationships requiring a prior commonality. But Owen also offers a second term, *stage*. For him, "[to] conceive of the democratic polity as an *agon* is, first and foremost, to conceive of it as a site of *plurality*, as a stage" for contestation.[240] While *medium* describes the relationship between political actors, *stage* implies a further, distinct relationship between actors and audience which emphasizes the performative aspect of agonistic expression. Moreover, this spatial metaphor suggests something of the fragility and specificity of sites of appearance which relate agonistic performance to spectatorship, a

[237] David Owen, "The Expressive Agon; On Political Agency in a Constitutional Democratic Polity," in *Law and Agonistic Politics*, ed. Andrew Schaap (Ashgate: Farnum, 2009), 71.
[238] Owen, "The Expressive Agon," 72. He associates the 'vehicle' for negotiating interests with Pettit's proposal that we seek a neutral arbiter for competing claims.
[239] Like Arendt, Owen is keen to locate the ethical responsiveness of the agonistic political scene in the performative dimension of action, a morality which is not reducible to adherence to universal standards of conduct, but which depends upon the expressiveness of action. But like Norval, Owen follows Cavell in relating this expressive modality of action to the ways in which civic activity determines through performance - not representation - our relationships to those for whom we (as citizens) claim to speak and who in turn claim to speak for us. In this respect his notion of the expressive *agon* forges the same links between disclosure and ethical change depicted by Norval.
[240] Owen, "The Expressive Agon", 71.

fragility less clearly reflected in the metaphor of *medium*. To the extent that either *medium* or *worldliness* are not complemented by some such other spatial terminology, they remain fraught with difficulty because neither can express both the durability of inter-relatedness and the fragility and evanescence of a space of appearance.

In part, the ambiguity of worldliness stems from Arendt's equivocal account of the ephemeral appearances of political freedom despite the enduring conditions for such activity. Arendt's work is replete with notable distinctions between the lasting conditions for political activity and the fragile public spaces in which agonistic contest appears. Nonetheless there is a sense of both fragility and durability embedded in her notion of worldliness that lends credence to Schaap's attempt to draw out an account of agonistic reconciliation as disclosed by and disclosing the world in common. But unpacking the concept of worldliness suggests that the impermanence of the world is not the same as the fragility corresponding to the risks of reconciliation. In the next sections, I take up Arendt's conceptualization of the world in order to contrast the durability associated with human plurality with the fragility of its expression in public spaces.

The durable world

The notion of worldliness brings to mind Arendt's resonant line: "men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world."[241] This terse remark lends itself to many interpretations; I will use it to highlight two dimensions of worldliness. The first is the plurality - "men, not man" - lauded by Arendt as integral to political activity, and integral to the space for agonistic politics. With this phrase Arendt begins to recuperate politics as an activity enabled by plurality, to which she contrasts the regime carved out by philosophers as a bulwark against the messiness of multiplicity. The second dimension relates to inhabiting the world, to the world as a home for

[241] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.

plurality, and the importance of its durability for the distinctiveness accompanying every newcomer who enters it.

I - Reality

Plurality does not mean separateness. This is clear in the short shrift Arendt gives the Cartesian worry of radical subjectivity, of the impossibility of bridging the gap from subject to subject. We do not need Descartes' circuitous route through radical doubt and the proposition of a benevolent God for our sense of reality, because such reality is secured through our everyday experiences with plurality. We confirm the reality of our world first by the 'common-sense' produced through concord of our five senses. We also confirm it through the commonness of the world, understood as the same object perceived differently by many people. Our reassurance comes from the multiplicity of perspectives on the same world. This abeyance of doubt is secured by living in a world with others. The difference of perspectives which seems to threaten our sense of reality - whether two people see the same colour, and so forth - actually enables it: calling something the same that appears differently from different perspectives is reassuring rather than concerning. Arendt's gloss in *The Human Condition* and again in *Life of the Mind* hardly constitute a philosophical engagement with Descartes, but that seems to be the point.[242] Arendt's casual dismissal of radical doubt is offered from our everyday experience of plurality as a kind of togetherness, rather than from an attempt to first posit, then overcome, the suspicion that plurality means radical disjuncture from others.[243] The human condition of plurality, always situated in the *in-between* of the world we share in common, affords us the frequent experiences of seeing the same things differently which guard us against Cartesian skepticism. The reality of the world is the first anchor of its durability.

[242] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 208.
[243] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* vol. 1, 46-52.

II - Artifice and the rectilinear trajectory of human life

These same characteristics of durability apply just as well to worldliness as the objects surrounding and contextualizing our human experience - what Marx called simply "the objective world". To Marx, only in a world created through labor can we say that man "contemplates himself in a world that he has created."[244] If we follow Arendt we would amend this formula three times, replacing *labor* with *work*, pluralizing the singular *man*, and replacing *contemplates* with *act* and *remember*.[245] Only through the durability of the world are individual human lives enfolded in lasting patterns and protected from the abyssal thought of the absurdity of decay. And although the earth may well be susceptible to human destruction or departure, the world does not primarily refer to the earth, for Arendt.

First, the world means human artifice - the actual tables and chairs, the houses and buildings and art, etc. - that uncertainly mark off human society from nature.[246] What is at issue is not a fundamental distinction between human and animal. Rather, what matters to Arendt is the *durability* of the artificial creations which form the environs of human life. This is the Greek problem - the worry that the span of a human life, running from birth to death, is utterly inconsequential when cast against the endless cycles of natural decay, dissolution and return. This problem presented itself, says Arendt, with particular urgency in the Greek context of the immortality attributed to the gods, and culminated in the creation of the *polis* as a space where great deeds would be remembered. For Arendt, human life cannot overcome decay, but the rectilinear trajectory of a human life, marked with a distinct beginning at birth and end at death,

[244] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," trans. Martin Milligan, in *Classics of Political & Moral Philosophy,* 2nd ed., ed. Steven M. Cahn, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 866.
[245] Our mental life also depends on our perceptions of the world, of course, but in this context Arendt's revision of the Marxist claim that labor produces the objective world, it would be better to draw attention to the role of worldliness in sustaining inter-action by orienting it within a common world of artefacts.
[246] This invokes the criticism directed at Arendt's Aristotelian man/nature divide. Andrew Schaap, "The Rights of Political Animals: Jacques Rancière's critique of Hannah Arendt," *APSA Conference Paper* (August 2008): 1-19.

can momentarily escape the cyclical futility which she, with echoes of Nietzsche's thought-experiment of eternal return, attributes to nature. But it is not enough that human lives run as straight lines from birth to death in the midst of natural circularity: a world of artifice bolsters such a trajectory, as individuals are born into a world created before their arrival and outlasting their life-span. In place of an ultimate durability of the soul vouchsafed by metaphysics or religion, a world of human artifice helps human life cast a longer shadow. In this context, the durability of the world is ironically poised within and against an implacable destruction.

III - Home and newcomers

Human artifice is the backdrop for this further extension of the meaning of the *world* because it illustrates one of Arendt's central concerns: finding a *home* for plurality. Men both "live in" and "inhabit" the world, but perhaps these are not the same thing. Perhaps we might distinguish between two projects underfoot in Arendt's ontology of plurality: the first is to combat the sense in which politics is understood as an administration that takes the proper organization of 'man' as its objective. Under this heading, we might file Arendt's reconsideration of the philosophic tradition, which she finds altogether too Platonist in its attempt to derive models or transcendental standards by which politics can be judged and structured. The suspicion that truth must look quite the opposite of the cacophony of plurality and opinion becomes lodged at the head of the canon through Plato, Arendt asserts. It was Plato who discovered, in the capacity to *make*, the simplicity and tranquility absent from action as the tangled intersection of lives, words, and deeds. For Arendt, action departs from artifice because there can be no *pattern* for action, no model for politics such as a craftsman might employ. Action must be distinguished from *work* (making) because

action is performative interaction, requiring a space of appearance and spectators.[247] The list of articulations of this kind of political theory would include Rousseau's ascription of a singular will to the 'body politic', the mistake of associating freedom with sovereignty, and *sovereignty* with the power of an individual will. Hence Arendt's famous quip: "If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce."[248]

Perhaps Arendt's second concern might be to identify the possibility of a politics in which the human condition might find fuller expression. Two things are needed to welcome newcomers: the durable artefact world that provides the context for newness, and action together in word and deed which lends this newness significance and welcomes it into the public web of interaction, contingency, and remembrance. It is amazing how precisely residential schools violated these conditions, as children separated from their parents and cultural contexts were deliberately cut off from meaningful expressive interaction, even to the extent of forbidding brothers and sisters from contacting each other.[249] The suppression of cultural difference via the schools was also the suppression of this sense of novelty. And as Arendt's conservative quip concerning education illustrates, novelty requires location in a durable and interactive context: "Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world."[250]

In this context, Arendt's resistance to political theory which reduces politics to will or reason shares a common feature with her resistance to totalitarianism. Both projects are motivated

[247] Action is not contrasted only with making, but also with labour, and with contemplation. Thinking against Marx, Arendt claims action must also be distinguished from *labour*, with its cyclical necessity that resembles in microcosm the great circles of decay and renewal.
[248] Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 165.
[249] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, vol. 1, bk. 2, *The History, Part 2, 1939 to 2000* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 481, 538.
[250] Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 11.

by a concern with the ways in which plurality can fail to find a home in the world, the ways it can be defaced, obscured or even destroyed. Inhabiting the world, and not merely living in it, requires spaces for appearance where the risks of plurality are embraced because they are understood as also the enabling conditions for the practices which invest human life with significance and novelty. Danielle Celermajer argues that for Arendt, "what most needs our attention is then not our selves, to be healed or comforted in their hermeneutic self experience, but the world, and more specifically, our sense of being at home in the world.[251]

Arendt's appropriation of the ancient Greek concept of the *polis* as a space for the appearance of plurality is thus both an attempt to correct a misunderstanding about the nature of politics by insisting on human plurality as a central condition of the possibility of such activity, and also a normative project of integrating the bare fact of plurality with the conditions fomenting its fullest expression. Within the former we might locate Arendt's famous distinctions and careful etymologies. The latter concern includes her hope that we might somehow act out of a distinct care "for the world", for the in-between which is at once the always-present condition of the world we live in, and perhaps also the possibility of the space for appearance we might come to inhabit. And yet it is not only action that cares for the world which Arendt promulgates, but action for the sake of natality, or perhaps its namesake.[252]

The fragile world

For all its durability, the world is not permanent. The earth, as the singular world of common human reality, is no longer obviously or forever so, as now people have left it and

[251] Danielle Celermajer, "The Ethics of Friendship," in *Power, Judgment and Political Evil: In Conversation with Hannah Arendt*, eds. Andrew Schaap, Danielle Celermajer, and Vrasidas Karalis (Ashgate: Farnam, 2010), 61.
[252] Arendt's etymological distinctions seem to propose a categorical ontology of human activity, but action amid plurality exceeds ontology, exceeds the question 'what is', because only the performances of word and deed disclose 'who' each individual is. Natality thus reflects the particularity of action which exceeds classification and can only be named, narrated and exemplified.

returned to it, and the possibility of living elsewhere has been afforded a certain tangibility by modern science. Moreover we have for some time now possessed the capacity to destroy the earth, or at least to destroy the human presence on the earth, through our nuclear weapons or through climate change. The twin possibilities of alienation from the earth or its destruction limit the durability of the common world. And, as Schaap points out, Arendt's concern with fragility is bounded by the horizon of the holocaust. This was the ruthlessly efficient compression of plurality into mass politics, the effacement of distinctiveness through torture, murder and disappearances, and the paralysis of new beginnings through terror and through subscription to higher-than-human laws of history or nature. These events made it clear that although the human condition makes political activity and remembrance enduringly possible, plurality and natality require a home in the world. For Arendt, both the ancient Greek problem of forgetfulness and the modern apocalypse of the holocaust convincingly attest to the fragility of such a home.[253]

Plucked from this discussion and applied to the context of reconciliation, the question becomes whether worldliness endures the gross denigrations of human plurality evinced by apartheid and settler colonial violence. Long decades of racism and imperialism attest to the evident failure of plurality and natality to find a home in the world, either in apartheid South Africa or the settler-states Australia and Canada. The question is whether, from the wreck of such destructive dismissal of plurality, political practices might disclose to us the worldly in-between which remains and reminds us of the possibility of agonistic activity in a common world. Arendt concludes *The Origins of Totalitarianism* with just such a note of hope and warning. The loneliness

[253] Arendt's call for an expressly *political* response to the totalitarian eclipse of action, and Schaap's insistence on *politicizing* the response to apartheid violence both express a plea that our desire to find a home in the world not eclipse the need to find a home *for plurality*. Schaap's discussion gives rise to the hope that recognizing the irrepressible contest, plurality, and contingency inherent to our common worldliness will be sufficient to turn us away from the first impossible search for community.

and loss of public space in totalitarianism cannot be permanent: "Their danger is not that they might establish a permanent world," Arendt writes, because totalitarianism "bears the germs of its own destruction." And yet, "Its danger is that it threatens to ravage the world as we know it … before a new beginning rising from this end has had time to assert itself."[254]

Worldliness must have endured if it exists to be disclosed by truth commissions. But if worldliness is so resilient as to withstand the sweeping injustices to which these commissions attest, then what does truth-telling risk? What remains fragile? Two possible answers stem from Arendt's account of earth-alienation and world-alienation: the loss of the earth as a dwelling-place, and the replacement of action with work and labouring.[255] The former risks seems neither Schaap's concern, nor the primary concern of truth commissions. And yet, Arendt's story about the loss of action in modernity does not seem adequately redressed by Schaap's hope for disclosed worldliness. This, I believe, is because in appropriating the concept of worldliness Schaap deliberately leaves behind its corresponding spatial metaphor, public space. Instead, the fragility implied in Schaap's calculus of risk and reconciliation seems to be a fragility permanently attached to worldliness - an enduring fragility. The agonistic struggle which might be oriented towards disclosing the commonness of the world is durable in the sense that it remains available even after injustice; but it is also fragile because it can never amount to closure of the past or the comprehension of difference within a singular community. Instead, what is *realized* through such disclosures is the durably bifurcated community of relatedness and separation, world-delineation and world-rupturing action.

[254] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 478.
[255] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 209.

Circularity

Thus described, worldliness is the durable fragility of political struggle. Durable, because not even apartheid division or colonial oppression has destroyed the in-between which relates and separates actors; fragile, because this in-between makes a final reconciliation impossible. It is fragile because it enables a contingent struggle about identity and memory which makes a home for plurality possible, even while always jeopardizing such a home with the very freedom to contest and redefine political relationships which it makes possible.

By this reading of worldliness as enduring fragility, Schaap's argument assumes a certain circularity, as follows. First, because worldliness is the durable condition for agonism, political reconciliation is possible even in the wake of long-lasting state violence. Political reconciliation is not the presumption of unity or closure, but an agonistic struggle over memory made visible by truth commissions. Agonistic activity, including the work of promising, forgiving and remembering, is disclosive and hotly contested. This is true in two senses: first, agonistic struggle is performative and expressive, disclosing something of the distinctiveness of each of its participants. But Schaap's specific point is that agonistic struggle discloses the commonness of the world and the dual inclinations of action to delineate and challenge community. Worldliness is thus both the condition of possibility for political reconciliation and the object of its disclosures. Political reconciliation discloses the worldliness necessary for political reconciliation. As Schaap puts it:

> Our feeling for reality depends upon the disclosure of the world as an object held in common but perceived from a multitude of perspectives. The commonness of the world is not merely revealed, then, but is constituted by contesting reality through political interaction…. As such, plurality is not merely a condition of politics but its achievement - a potentiality that is actualized through action.[256]

[256] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 61.

Celermajer offers a strikingly similar formulation when she suggests that "the world, ontologically distinct from the self, must be rediscovered in the common space that arises between us."[257] Yet these pairings - rediscovery and arising, revelation and constitution - do not mark discrete processes, but jointly characterize the disclosive contest, promising, and forgiving made visible by a political reconciliation both premised upon and publishing the space for its realization.

This circularity marks the argument that agonistic reconciliation discloses the space for disclosure. To the degree that this formulation evades the question of whether agonism first requires the delineation of public space, Schaap decisively breaks with those aspects of Arendt's thought appearing to posit such a prior requirement. These aspects include her description of agonism as facilitated by the laws and boundaries of a *polis*, or of her insistence on agonism as only possible in a public realm strictly separated from private concerns. By associating risk and fragility with worldliness alone, Schaap's explanation of agonistic reconciliation takes on a different tone than that evinced by Arendt's lamentation for the loss of the public realm. If the fragility of agonistic politics derived from such public spaces, worldliness would seem a necessary but insufficient condition for agonism. The further construction of public space would be necessary to realize the fragile home for plurality and natality only ever latent in the human condition. But compressing two spatial metaphors (world and public space, medium and stage) into the concept of worldliness yields two consequences. First, fragility or risk is no longer associated with the loss of the political, but with its achievement; and second, the disclosure and constitution of agonism amid worldliness are collapsed together.

[257] Celermajer, "The Ethics of Friendship," 61.

Conclusion

According to the interpretation I have advanced, Schaap premises agonistic reconciliation on the worldliness immanent to contest because this worldliness is both the *space* for disclosure and yet can itself be disclosed. In so doing, he deliberately chooses not to take the obvious road: to speak of worldliness as a latent condition for agonism and of public space as its fragile realization, as a kind of *recognized* worldliness. Worldliness is the dual relation and separation which makes a fully inclusive community impossible, and yet preserves the fragile possibility of spaces where expressive action is accorded lasting remembrance and meaning. Schaap's distinctive telling of how this space of appearance might be disclosed by the public-making of truth commissions takes on particular significance in light of my contention that disclosure alone cannot account for the conditions necessary for agonistic struggle. For this reason I find the ambiguity of worldliness disconcerting. Worldliness is the durable inter-relatedness which makes speech and action between plural people so distinctive, and which is always already there. In this sense its disclosure resembles Tully's counter-hegemonic narratives or Mouffe's impression of plurality: it needs only to be seen, not built. And yet the experience of public freedom amid contingency might equally be described as rare, evanescent, and dependent on public space.

Two related difficulties could be raised with my imputation of circularity to Schaap's argument. First, for agonistic reconciliation to disclose the world-in-common which makes it possible, *all* the practices of truth commissions must be agonistic and disclosive. If agonistic reconciliation discloses the space required for disclosure, then both the struggle between contrasting memories and also the practices of promising and forgiving would need to demonstrate the worldly in-between they seek to sustain. The argument is only circular if promising and forgiving, in addition to struggle, also disclose worldliness. More plausibility attaches to struggle as the activity by which the in-between is manifest, given Arendt's characterization of promising

and forgiving as deliberately oriented to preserving such spaces for action *after* their value is perceived. And to the extent that world-delineating functionality of promising and forgiving follows from the realization of worldliness fostered by world-disrupting contest, perhaps political reconciliation remains a two-step affair, with worldliness disclosed and public spaces constructed.

But this type of objection, which would reclaim a constructive function for reconciliation, faces its own difficulties, attendant on the curious temporality associated with an agonistic reconciliation disclosing and constituting its own spatial conditions. On one hand this implies a retrospective disclosure, but on the other hand, Schaap insists that political reconciliation is oriented *toward* disclosing the world-in-common. Forgiveness shares this retrospection, as does the marquee promise first made by Argentina's truth commission: *Nunca más! Never again!*[258] But Schaap eschews the *prima facia* suggestion that we forgive past injustices in order to constitute the commonness of the future. Instead, he adds remembrance as a third faculty by which the durable fragility of agonistic activity is realized. This remembrance is not actualized in the present, but projected into the future. It is the remembrance of political reconciliation from the perspective of its success, the recognition of worldliness *after* its disclosure. This temporality evades the thorny question of how space for disclosure is created, while also resisting the paralysis of action which might well accompany the revelation that political community could only ever be contingent and contestable. Political reconciliation, Schaap writes, "is sustained by the hope that the present will be remembered as the moment in which an anticipated community originated."[259] This process casts political reconciliation less as a circular disclosure of (disclosive) political action, and more as the disclosure (of worldliness) which affords a (perpetually delayed) disclosure (of community).

[258] *Nunca Más: The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared, with an Introduction by Ronald Dworkin* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986 [1984]).
[259] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 85.

Of course, this retains the subtext that the community eventually disclosed by reconciliation will turn out once again to be the in-between of worldliness which gave rise to the possibility of its anticipation, a theme I return to in Chapter 7.

If the first objection distinguishes contest from forgiving and promising, a second objection to the attribution of circularity could be made on the grounds that worldliness retains an implicit distinction between the preparatory condition for agonism and its achievement through truth-telling. Disclosure might be interpreted as a preparatory activity for the constructive work of promise-making and forgiving which are the faculties through which the fragility of action can be addressed. Perhaps the struggles over memory and community merely disclose a clearer understanding of the unavoidable risks of reconciliation, by including not only the risks of antagonism, but also the unavoidable risks of action. Promising and forgiving might be subsequent steps to address the contingency and consequences of such action once they are recognized.

But to the extent that this objection is merited, a duality between a *durable* in-between and a *fragile* space for agonism is re-introduced. It may be that worldliness as an immanent possibility for agonism is durable, but that a disclosed worldliness achieved through political reconciliation is fragile. And yet this proposition seems only to reintroduce the twin difficulties concerning ontological disclosure as the catalyst for new respectful approaches to plurality - whether such disclosure is simply the purview of the theorist, and whether there is any motivating force to ontological argument. Moreover, the dilemma of public space returns again. For all its durability, the human condition may make fragile public spaces possible, but it does not make such spaces.

Moreover, forgiveness and promising are only partly differentiated from contest, as these faculties, along with remembrance, remain precisely what truth commissions make public: contests about how residential schools and Canadian narratives are remembered, and contests about what

promises of reparation are made and kept. The revelation of risk attached to the permanent tension between world-delimiting and world-rupturing action seems proffered only through those devices by which it is already mitigated; the possibility of agonistic action appears only with these expressive modalities of promising, forgiving and remembering which are already agonistic. But if political reconciliation consists of the agonistic practices of remembering, forgiving, promising and contesting which the separation and relation of worldliness render possible, truth commissions seemingly exhibit the expressive contest which both discloses the risks of action and yet is already characteristic of agonistic politics - nothing further need be achieved.

One aspect clarified by this reading of Schaap's approach, however, is that locating the spatiality of agonistic politics in reconciliation cannot comfortably follow a linear pattern whereby spaces for contested memory are created independently from and prior to the expressive, contingent and plural activity of appearing with and to others. For this reason, there remains lasting similarities between Schaap's articulation of the tension between world-delineating and world-disrupting action and my own attempt to clarify the paradox of how claims which disrupt hegemonic narratives can be afforded space and respectful listening without presuming a fundamental unity immune from interrogation. In the next chapter I will pursue this possibility by pairing the fragile, disclosive activity of agonistic performance with the space-making technique of witnessing.

Chapter Six: Witnessing and the Preface

Introduction

What I saw of the program of Honorary Witnesses at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission national events has convinced me that witnessing represents an engagement with the unprecedented courage of survivors which might clarify the dilemma of public space. Earlier, I noted two related difficulties with imagining truth-telling as the cultivation of space for agonism. Although truth commissions might supply public space for disclosive contest, to the extent that this condition precedes and structures such contest it presents an untenable limitation on politics as the contingent, performative freedom to challenge and reiterate the terms of civic relationships. The lurking suspicion that agonistic reconciliation requires *a priori* conditions threatens to render it equivalent to reconciliation premised on an original national unity or on consensual procedural reciprocity. I have structured what I take to be the best responses to this challenge by unpacking the possibility that reconciliation is *disclosive* - as an ontological revelation, as an ethical practice of claims-making, or as the disclosure of a durable worldliness.

But these approaches do not evade the concern that practices of disclosure are realized only in fragile public spaces. In each case, the dilemma of spaces for expressive contest returns. Mouffe describes the terrain of agonistic struggle as symbolic common space, inviting comparison with assumptions of unity underlying democratic dissent. This criticism is only partly mitigated by her ontological reordering of politics as "failed unicity".[260] Ontological disclosure may be an instance of agonistic politics and not a prior condition for it, but if it is to provoke political and ethical change it may well require public space for its reception. Similarly, Norval's notion of exemplarity

[260] Mouffe, "Cultural workers as organic intellectuals," 215.

represents one half of a dynamic relationship between those whose claims disclose new normative horizons, and the responsiveness of those hearing such claims. To her account, the question of public space could also be posed not in terms of responsiveness to exemplarity, but of listening *for* exemplary claims.[261] Finally, Schaap's depiction of worldliness attests to the perpetual possibility of disclosive contest. But without conceptualizing public spaces where these latent hopes are realized, it is difficult to locate the fragility inherent in the politics worldliness makes possible. Although Schaap suggests this fragility attaches to the dual characteristics of action amid plurality in a common world, the question remains as to whether the world disclosed through reconciliation is itself a type of fragile public space.

Conversely, Arendt's insistence on a public realm demarcated from private spaces by the distinction between labour, making and action seems equally problematic. As Honig, Rancière and others point out, such public spaces take for granted what agonistic struggle performs. The notion of expressive contest ironically established by uncontestable delineations of public and private arenas must be abandoned. And yet, Arendt's insistence on public space as necessary to the remembrance and distinction granted to words and deeds remains compelling, even while its priority must be disputed. The second riddle of agonistic reconciliation, then, is how such fragile spaces might be created agonistically.

Picturing reconciliation as both witnessing and disclosure addresses both the *a priori* problem and the need for agonistically sustained spaces. It articulates a paradoxical relationship between the witness which precedes and makes space for the courageous disclosures which are

[261] Sonali Chakravarti suggests a distinction between listening and hearing countenances "the possibility of willful or unconscious refusal to engage with what has been said." The distinction between listening and listening *for*, I would add, is helpful in distinguishing between the reactionary and anticipatory moments of listening, and also of witnessing. Sonali Chakravarti, *Sing the Rage: Listening to Anger after Mass Violence* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 15

nevertheless the condition of possibility for the witness. Witnessing engages with the sheer novelty of emotion, memory and identity courageously made public by survivors of injustice. Reconciliation premised on the disclosure of immanent respect between contestants is necessarily suspicious of claims of beginning anew which might constrain the acceptable bounds of contest. By contrast, witnessing cultivates beginning anew through a sustained orientation towards what is 'to come'.

In what follows, I want to illustrate this paradoxical relationship between witnessing and disclosure through a figure drawn from Jacques Derrida's scrutiny of a familiar literary device, the preface. Arendt rejects craftsmanship - making - as a metaphor for politics, and rejects authorial story-making as a metaphor for human action. But exploring Derrida's metaphor of the preface shows how it is not easy to get rid of reconciliation as a form of narration. It is not sufficient to disclose the impossibility of reconciliation as grand narration and reveal contingent and expressive contest in its place. Instead, this impossibility relies on the dual moment of witnessing as both disclosure and the fragile, ephemeral space for disclosure. Witnessing is like prefacing: an impossible coming before which is subsumed by the narratives it publishes. Yet like a preface, the narratives made public through witnessing leaves traces of what cannot be presented, what exceeds the order of representation and remains possible.

Analogy of the preface

Witnessing is analogous to prefacing. For Derrida, the preface as a literary figure helps reveal an irony in what he labels the philosophy of presence - western philosophy's ambition to

fix the meaning of terms to unambiguous, present identities.[262] Derrida advances the following proposition: a preface does for a book what philosophical argument does for its material - it presents (it *pronounces* and *makes* present) what needs no presentation. The relationship of witnessing to the stories told to truth commissions is analogous in three ways. Witnessing shares the *dilemma*, *paradoxical impossibility*, and *temporality* of prefacing. This temporality suggests a going-before made possible only by what comes after. Because of this untimeliness, witnessing and prefacing give rise to a particular dilemma: by announcing what is to come, they present as authoritative what has not yet transpired, thus fixing in advance the future and eliminating it as the 'to come', 'l'avenir'.

These comparisons illustrate the dilemma of public space as an *a priori* requirement for, and constraint upon, the truth-telling of reconciliation. The third comparison is more optimistic. The third aspect of the analogy follows Derrida's assertion that in their paradoxical foreclosure of what is to come, the pronouncements of prefaces are both *required* and *negated* by the books they precede. Crucially however, this negation is never complete. It leaves a *trace* of its erasure which cannot quite be made present, and which haunts the prospect of unambiguous identities with its plural possibilities. Likewise, honorary witnesses foster expectation for, and grant dignity to, the stories told by residential school survivors. And although the space afforded by this expectation may be superseded by the institutional gathering-together of truths by the TRC, traces of the concern with the 'to come' remain and resist any final narrative product of reconciliation.

[262] For this discussion I rely on Simon Glendinning, *Derrida: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Glendinning self-consciously positions his introduction to Derrida as a species of preface by exploring the preface as a link between Derrida's literary/grammatical writings and later political writings.

The dilemma

Prefaces are beginnings. Oddly, though, this role is only made possible by what comes after, since unlike an introduction, prefaces are designed to explain the arguments they precede. But prefaces are problematic. They explain what a book will contain by virtue of being written after the text they precede. Prefaces have explanatory and predictive powers because they are in a privileged position of having been written after the text they come before. It would be more precise and suggestive to say they precede the *core* of the text. This implies the close association between the function of *presenting* and an interpretation of texts as containing *essential* or *core* messages. Prefaces act as guarantors of the essential message of the work which is to follow, a guarantee made good only because the text to come is already in the past - from the perspective of the preface, at least.

Bound up in this temporal oddity, then, is the question of the essence of a text and the authority of its author. Simon Glendinning puts it this way: "The supposed problem with prefaces is that the '*prae-fatio*' is a saying-before-hand that is actually written-after-the-fact, after the work, and as standing outside the (real) work of the work, that real work thus being the essential '*prae-fatio*' of writing the preface."[263] Or, as Derrida puts it in his own preface to *Dissemination*, "From [this] viewpoint, which re-creates an intention-to-say after the fact, the [main] text exists as something written - a past - which, under the false appearance of a present, a hidden omnipotent author (in full mastery of his product) is presenting to the reader as his future."[264] Three threads draw together: prefaces make the future like the past, they disclose the essence of the (future) text, and guarantee the author's mastery over the text. All the while, the text is itself the prior condition

[263] Glendinning, *Derrida: A Very Short Introduction,* 32-33.
[264] Jacques Derrida, as quoted in Glendinning, *Derrida: A Very Short Introduction*, 33.

(the preface) of its own preface. And if a preface can do all this, Derrida suggests ironically, there hardly remains any need to read further.[265]

In other words, prefaces begin by fixing the future. The contingency and plurality of the future are already summed up, summarized, by the preface. Of the preface's confusing temporality, Glendinning notes:

> The 'pre' of the pre-face makes the future present, a future which is in fact already written and past. One might wonder then whether there can really be a preface to what remains to come that does not render what remains to come everything except, precisely, 'to come'. Perhaps only if what remains to come will have always already resisted an idea of '*complete* gathering up' that a writer of a preface or indeed a writer of a system of philosophy might yearn for.[266]

To the extent that fragile public spaces afford a new beginning for disclosures, they are problematic. So long as beginnings are only beginnings inasmuch as they decide what is to come (in part to stake out a new pathway, the necessary departure from policies of the past), they render the future exactly *not* to come, but already present, complete, *fixed*. Not only does this attitude to beginning seem categorically unable to promise openness to plurality and difference, but it seems pointless. If beginning makes the future present by deciding first what it will be, then nothing needs commencing: it is *done*. If reconciliation necessarily announces its outcome, there hardly remains any need to read further.

The phrase 'remains to come' indicates more of the same, more of what has already come. But the wording is curious. It expresses a faint hope that prefaces might not present *all* of what is to come. They present only what has not resisted the 'gathering up' conducted by beginnings which establish what *must* come. The word *remains* recalls Honig's term, "remainders" for all those

[265] Jacques Derrida, as quoted in Glendinning, *Derrida: A Very Short Introduction*, 33. Put more sharply, one could say a preface makes the future (text) *unnecessary*.
[266] Glendinning, *Derrida: A Very Short Introduction*, 33.

excluded from participating in democratic contests.[267] And since remainders suggest the past, not the future, what 'remains to come' resists both past and future. More specifically, it resists the presentation of past and future in the preface. Perhaps the 'survivors' of colonial genocides explain what 'remaining to come' can signify. Those who have survived residential schools are resistant to the past, to the difficulty and trauma accompanying their experiences. But by standing up as survivors they resist also the closure of the future associated with that past - the assimilation government and churches once insisted *must* be the future, and the brokenness now associated with traumatic pasts. If so, survivors are not only remainders of a destructive past, but remainders against a scripted future - including a future scripted by reconciliation.

Derrida ascribes both *necessity* and *impossibility* to the preface. Of course, not all books have prefaces; nor are all disclosures granted publicity by designated witnesses. In his example of Hegelian philosophy, Derrida indicates that Hegel's self-explanatory argument requires (and yet cannot require, and is compelled to efface) presentation in a preface.[268] As Barbara Johnson notes, Derrida treats the preface as both promoter and transgressor of the boundaries and authority of the book. Commenting on the opening lines of *Dissemination*, Johnson writes:

> Derrida's exposition of the preface begins with both a denial of the book and of the beginning. The opening sentence "This (therefore) will not have been a book," … marks itself as presentation ('this'), anticipation ('will'), negation ('not'), recapitulation ('have been'), and conclusion ('therefore'). The juxtaposition of the title (*Hors Livre*, lit. 'outside the book') and the opening sentence is thus designed to map out the play of anticipatory retrospection and internalized exteriority involved in that metalinguistic moment of self-reflection traditionally known as the *Preface*. Situated both inside and outside, both before and after the 'book' whose 'book-ness' it promotes and transgresses, the preface has always inscribed itself in a strange warp of both time and space.[269]

[267] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, 210.
[268] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2004), 8-9.
[269] Barbara Johnson, Translator's introduction to *Dissemination*, by Jacques Derrida, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2004), xxxii.

Survivors face and resist the dilemma expressed by the preface. The impossible reconciliation urged by Norval, Schaap and others must resist the closure implicit in the hope of reunification. Such narratives imply an author, an authoritative community made whole again and able to declare its own beginnings, to make reconciliation its preface. Even while the counter-hegemonic stories told by survivors resist colonial authority, these same stories require the publicity and remembrance afforded by the attention of honorary witnesses. This is the paradoxical requirement and rejection of public space as the precedent of agonistic contest. But although expressive disclosure always implies the space in which it appears, this is not to say such space cannot precede it. In fact, it is precisely this hope of precedence without foreclosure which Derrida's deconstruction of the preface might illustrate, and which he refers to as the *trace* left by the preface's paradoxical impossibility.

The preface and the trace

In Derrida's metaphorical assessment of western philosophy as a book, the preface must be subsumed within the main body of the text. This main text consists of the philosophical self-presentation of concepts as present, identical to themselves, and fixed. Using Hegel as his foil, Derrida shows how such philosophical argument cannot need, cannot have needed, a preface to present what was self-evident: the truths which either manifest their own justification, or cannot be justified. Speaking of Hegel, Derrida notes: "Philosophical exposition has as its essence the capacity and even the duty to do without a preface."[270] Self-evident truths necessarily efface their own prefaces. And yet, he argues, even as the presentation of the preface is effaced, its erasure leaves a *trace* upon the assured sufficiency of philosophical truth.

[270] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 8.

To an extent, this parallels the relationship between witnessing and the expressive disclosures of agonistic reconciliation. Witnessing, too, is negated and yet leaves a trace. This parallel with Derrida's figure hinges upon the dual functionality of the witness, whose expectant readiness makes room for new stories to emerge into public discourse, and whose re-iteration of those stories always risks subsuming them within meta-narrative. In the first moment, it is the readiness to witness that creates space for the appearance of testimony. In the second moment, the representation by witnesses of what they saw and heard publishes this testimony, makes it widely known.[271] Although we tend to think of eye-witnesses whose function is to recall events seen and heard, the honorary function of witnesses attending the TRC remains distinct from, and prior to, remembrance and re-telling.[272] Recalling Christine Anthonissen's arguments about the tendency of truth commissions towards finality and meta-narrative, however, suggests a similar danger that survivors' testimony will be condensed and represented by a handful of public figures. But the danger is not in getting the stories wrong. Instead, representation eliminates the *futurity* of testimony; it effaces the sense in which survivors' claims *might yet* exceed hegemonic normative vocabularies.

The anticipatory public-making of witnessing (in its first moment) is quickly subsumed by the proliferation of stories by high-profile figures. As a former Prime Minister and Honorary Witness of the TRC, Paul Martin's role proffers a useful example. His declaration that residential schools amounted to cultural genocide marked a high point of publicity for the TRC. This epithet retained major prominence in the commission's ensuing reports and in further media

[271] In this second function, the witnesses of the TRC were asked to remember, to publish what they saw and heard in their own circles, and to be allies with the survivors of residential schools. This seeming association of witnessing and solidarity led Murray Sinclair to defend the choice of some Honorary Witnesses from the criticism that they were not adequate allies. Murray Sinclair, Edmonton Event, March 28, 2014.

[272] We speak of eye-witnesses and religious witnesses in much the same vein, as occasioned by events and not prior to them. Ceremonial witnesses (to marriages, etc.) are required prior to the event they are to witness, yet their legal function is to remember these events in case of dispute.

discussions.[273] Doubtless this media attention was assured by the polarization of the term 'genocide', and abetted by its adoption by Beverley McLachlin, the Chief Justice of Canada's Supreme Court. At the Ottawa Event shortly after McLachlin's comments, Phil Fontaine, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations thanked her "for speaking the words that could not be spoken," noting she "changed the vocabulary and narrative around residential schools."[274] These declarations emphasize the importance of witnesses to the TRC's public-making strategy.[275] But they emphasize the second moment of witnessing, the disclosive representation of survivors' stories. In fact, these remarks made such an impact that they obscured long-standing descriptions of residential schools as cultural genocide.[276] This re-presentation of truth-telling by witnesses is an effacement of sorts. However, it is not the effacement suggested by Derrida's metaphorical appropriation of the preface. Rather, Martin's declaration illustrates the effacement of the *preparatory* role of witnessing by its *summarizing* role. This anecdote suggests how the space-making function of witnessing is subsumed by its disclosive successor.

But Derrida describes more than this dilemma: he also locates a trace resistance to this 'summing up' in the negation performed by the text's effacement of its preface. He locates a lingering openness to what *remains* from the preface, and remains *to come* despite its presentation

[273] See The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 1.
[274] Phil Fontaine, Ottawa Event, June 02, 2015. Reproduced in Phil Fontaine, foreward to *A Knock on the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016), ix.
[275] Media stories proliferated after Paul Martin's use of the term in April 2015, and again after Beverley McLachlin's use in May 2015. For media coverage examples, see: "Paul Martin accuses residential schools of 'cultural genocide'," *CBC News*, April 26, 2015, http://www.cbc.ca; Sean Fine, "Chief Justice says Canada attempted 'cultural genocide' on aboriginals," *The Globe and Mail*, May 28, 2015, http://www.theglobeandmail.com
[276] Edwin Kimelman used the term 'cultural genocide' in 1984 following a Manitoba inquiry into child welfare, as the TRC and others have noted. See Edwin Kimelman, *File Review Report. Report of the Review Committee on Indian and Métis Adoptions and Placements* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Community Services, 1984), 51; cited in The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada, Aboriginal Peoples, and Residential Schools: They Came for the Children* (Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012), 80. See also Christopher Powell and Julia Peristerakis, "Genocide in Canada: A Relational View," in Woolford, Benvenuto and Hinton, *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, 70-92.

and representation. I suggest this lingering openness be located neither in the evanescent space-making preceding the testimony of survivors, nor in subsequent publicity-generating, summary declarations. Instead, this trace resistance inheres in the recursive relationship between witnesses and survivors, insofar as counter-hegemonic disclosures conditioned by public space continue to prompt a willingness to witness. If a preface is a "ludicrous" proposition, the witness which makes space for the storytelling upon which it depends (in order to witness) is likewise paradoxical.[277] But in this paradox I note an affinity with Tully's hope for the cultivation of a disposition to listen, or what might equally be termed a disposition towards natality. The trace left by the effacement of witnessing is the possibility of fragile spaces for emergent stories, *sustained* by the impossibility of summarizing, summing up, or gathering together the moment of witness which precedes the very disclosures which are its own conditions of possibility. Only the secondary, disclosive function of witnessing is available for summary. Paul Martin's remarks indicate how norm-disrupting disclosures can be made public through re-telling. But what remains unsusceptible to such re-presentation is precisely the welcome shown to natality in the respect, reality and remembrance granted to the stories of survivors prior to their being spoken.

Temporality of the preface

I have left it until last to discuss the *temporality* of the preface. Witnessing resembles a preface in its odd coming-before which depends for its significance on what comes after. In this way it occasions the dilemma of presenting what is to come. But this odd priority of the preface also unlocks an alternative understanding of the *a priori* problem - the worry that agonistic reconciliation requires bounded public spaces for potentially divisive contest. As one technique of public-making, witnessing *does* make space for disclosure ahead of the stories being told. But this

[277] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 7, 17.

cannot mean an *a priori* public space because witnessing only becomes meaningful and relevant in the context of the disclosures it attends and respects. Just as a text is the condition of possibility for its own preface, so too the courageous storytelling by survivors makes witnessing distinctive as an ethical practice of listening *for* what is to come.

The commission's Honorary Witnesses symbolically guaranteed that the survivors' testimonies were worth public reception and remembrance, *prior* to hearing them. Even before disseminating these stories, witnesses tacitly assured survivors that their experiences were important and would be respected and heard. It was not only the subsequent remembrance and re-telling by these witnesses which survivors' willingness to speak about their experiences enabled; their courage also transformed acts of listening and watching into an attentiveness to the coming words and appearances of survivors. This honouring by public figures fostered a space for the reception of survivors that was necessarily prior to their appearance, and which guaranteed their words further reality and permanence. Disclosure makes witnessing possible, even as witnessing opens up greater space for the reception and dissemination of these voices.

Conclusion

In this appropriation of Derrida's analogy, the fragile public spaces constructed by truth commissions resemble a preface. The disclosures and narratives occasioned by the testimony of survivors resembles the text which follows it. More specifically, the space-making work of witnessing is like a preface in its relationship to the work of disseminating, publishing and summarizing performed by both witnesses and truth commission alike. This analogy portrays agonistic reconciliation as the contrasting yet complementary practices of disclosure and witnessing. In particular, the temporality of prefacing suggests how public spaces might well be

necessary for expressive contest *without* presuming a common normative vocabulary or community which the stories about colonial violence call into question.

But for all that, the analogy doesn't fully distinguish agonistic reconciliation from theories premised on the contest enacted and revealed through disclosure. In fact, Derrida's treatment of the trace left by the preface's effacement closely resembles Norval's argument.[278] Clashing historical narratives such as those displayed in South Africa cannot help but reveal the impossibility of resolution. This impossibility effaces reconciliation's apparent promise of closure - there seems no hope of ending deep disagreement about the past. But the failure of the promises proffered by reconciliation mark the impossibility of closure as such, and the concomitant abandonment of the quest for unity. In South Africa, this failure was doubled. Apartheid was a system of racist closure which failed. Likewise, the multiplicity of competing memories of apartheid offered no closure to this past, only the memory of closure and its failure. The perpetual warning of this memory is what prompts an ethos of aversion. What is left is a trace, the negation of a negation: the promise of closure, its failure, and a lingering aversion to closure which never quite resembles either a new promise or its fulfilment. An ethos of aversive democracy thus resembles the trace left by two practices of disclosure: the promissory disclosure of unity as the goal of reconciliation, and the exemplary disclosures which exceed the norms referenced by such a promise. This implements in the context of national narrative what Derrida's metaphor performs in relation to philosophy. As Catherine Kellogg puts it, "The exhibition or inscription of philosophy's 'remainder' is more than a simple demonstration of the impossibility of philosophy's self-enclosure; it actually provides a resource for re-negotiating the political exclusions that result from the claim to just such a closure."[279]

[278] Or rather, Norval's argument follows from Derrida's position.
[279] Catherine Kellogg, *Law's Trace: From Hegel to Derrida* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 16.

However, my use of Derrida's analogy only clarifies the paradox of disclosure and its requisite spaces by means of an important elision. Prefaces disclose the essence of a text by presuming the authorial mastery of the future content they *present* - very much what Schaap fears reconciliation attempts by presuming a narrative of reunification. But honorary witnessing is not (only) disclosive. It is like a preface because it prepares for coming disclosures, but it does not make them present. In place of the *present-making* function which closes down the 'perhaps … to come' in the process of announcing it, witnessing performs a *public-making* function by honouring survivors' testimony before hearing it. Exhibiting the impossibility of closure depends upon the remainders occasioned by the relationship internal to witnessing: the relationship between propagation of truths seen and heard (attesting, testifying, showing) and the willingness to accord visibility to what has not yet been heard and cannot be attested. The metaphor of prefacing is so helpful because it marks the preparatory function of witnessing as both *prior to* and a *remainder of* the narrative closure it enables. Instead of describing witnessing as a form of disclosure which announces survivors' coming testimony, it would be better to describe it as a preparatory *listening* for disclosure which can never quite be incorporated into the narratives it prepares to hear.

One of the great criticisms leveled at South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was that the commissioners' strategies of active, empathic listening were themselves instrumental in constructing a redemptive narrative in which victim and perpetrator accounts were ensconced in a greater story of South Africa's emerging democracy.[280] The pattern of prefacing and testifying on evidence in the work of honorary witnesses at the TRC of Canada marks the enduring danger of effacing the particularity of survivors' stories. But it also suggests that the prefatory aspects of

[280] Richard A. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Postapartheid State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Tanya Goodman, *Staging Solidarity: Truth and Reconciliation in a New South Africa* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009).

witnessing are not entirely susceptible to being pressed into ready-made narratives (nation-building or otherwise), but remain as traces of the spaces of public remembrance which resist subsequent inscription. In part, this is because the relationship of witnessing to narrative is not quite the same as the relationship of prefaces to texts, or indeed of individual stories to larger narratives. It is not only a question of small stories being swallowed up in rigidly structured narratives, but of spaces carved out by courageous public appearances and respectful anticipation, neither quite reducible to the other.

Two important differences emerge because witnessing is a non-disclosive condition for disclosure. First, an expressive politics is very fragile. It requires more than the impossibility of closure, more than the durability of a world in-between. The appearances of survivors of closure require the ethical practices of listening which make them possible. The practices of public-making which the TRC of Canada have endorsed, including especially the practices of witnessing, suggest how multiple perspectives disclosed by those suffering from state violence are insufficient to sustain public spaces where exemplary claims can disrupt hegemonic narratives or vocabularies. This insufficiency is of two kinds. First, such disclosures require public space, despite the danger that public/private delineations inure the foundations of liberal democratic communities from criticism (since only disclosures corresponding to norms of public debate are permissible). Second, although traces of the 'to come' always remain, their durability does not guarantee political spaces for their appearance. Despite their failure, the politics of closure can do tremendous damage.

The second difference is more interesting. Picturing agonistic reconciliation as the twinned practices of disclosure and witnessing changes how we imagine the temporality of storytelling through truth commissions. If prefacing and its dilemma are understood as practices of presentation which leave traces of their own impossibility, a strange temporality follows.

Glendinning suggests a preface might escape its dilemma if the text it prefaces *will have* (*always already*) resisted closure. If a preface 'will have … resisted' presentation (in the future perfect tense), it will have deferred its effacement to a future retrospective where this resistance can be noted. This requires that it 'always already' resist such efforts at closure. A preface is not an act of foreclosure if it remains perpetually open to novelty, and thus cannot make *present* what it prefaces.

Derrida's term 'perhaps' expresses this order of the possible: a 'perhaps' cannot be presented. Perhaps in this spirit Derrida hopes his work can become a *preface* to a philosophy which exceeds essentialism. In which case, of course, his work would always be negated, since no such openness to the unexpected could be fully presented in the first place. Derrida's preface would become necessary but impossible, from the retrospective afforded by such a philosophy.[281] But because witnessing precedes disclosure without presenting what is to come, these fragile spaces are not revealed only through retrospection, even though it is only following the singular appearance of survivors' stories that listening can appear as a condition of possibility for them.[282] The preparatory role of public spaces thus shares the temporality of the trace of the attempts to encapsulate them within meta-narrative. But they also share something of the rectilinear trajectory which Arendt insists is the condition for public appearance and remembrance, and continue to mark, however uncertainly, the possibility of new beginnings.

In the following chapter, I will expand on these distinct temporalities by contrasting two ways of imagining storytelling as the possibility of a new beginning through reconciliation. The first of these is retrospective, asserting that the memory of agonistic contest haunts every present

[281] The *Politics of Friendship*, he notes, is like the preface to the book he would have liked to have written. See Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, vii.
[282] As Derrida notes, "it would only be the event of revelation that would open … the field of the possible in which it appeared to spring forth, and for that matter actually did so." Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 18.

system of closure and political administration. The second is the complex prospective retrospection explicated in Schaap's treatment of beginning: we can begin anew through reconciliation without presuming its narrative structure by imagining our actions through the eyes of future historians, to whom reconciliation appears as the contingent beginning of a political community. These two portraits contrast with and help illustrate the spaces for disruptive truth-telling fostered by willing witnesses.

Chapter Seven: Retrospection

Introduction

The tension between reconciliation's opposed tendencies towards disruption and closure is often couched in terms of looking forward and looking backward.[283] Bringing to light the painful stories of the abuse and violence of residential schools seems crucial to any prospect of change in settler-indigenous relations; it also seems needed for personal healing and freedom from oppressive memories. Commissioner Murray Sinclair put this more prosaically: "the truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off."[284]

And yet remembrance does not prescribe how or if reconciliation might be achieved. Pressed with the difficulty of moving forward from the terrible legacy of the schools, the TRC has advanced cautious appraisals of where reconciliation might lead, expressing mindfulness "that knowing the truth about what happened in residential schools in and of itself does not necessarily lead to reconciliation."[285] Such a cautious approach to moving forward navigates several hazards. One such danger is of prescribing a *telos* to reconciliation long before anything like an end is in sight. A second is the hazard of paralysis in the face of unprecedented hurt. (What is unprecedented about the TRC's work is not the pain, but its publication; survivors and their families have been dealing with the legacy of the schools for decades). To these assessments of the dangers at the juncture of past and future, agonistic thought would add a third: the danger of closing down political contest in the name of moving on.

[283] The first volume of the Royal Commission's report is named after this tension. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. 1, *Looking Forward, Looking Back* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1996).
[284] Murray Sinclair, Vancouver Event, September 19, 2013.
[285] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 7.

In this chapter I examine two portraits of remembering at the juncture of disruption and closure. Each presents differing responses to a common concern with preserving a space where retrospection and new beginnings can avoid the pitfalls of paralysis and closure. First, I take up Alexander Hirsch's criticism of immanent respect through his pessimistic argument that retrospection serves only to haunt constitutional ordering (what Norval calls the "administration of things") with the memory of injury.[286] Next, I follow Andrew Schaap's proposal that by deferring retrospection, reconciliation can foment disruptive contest while also marking the beginning of a political community. These two proposals share an emphasis on disclosure as the disruptive publication of the past which can produce second-order reflection on reconciliation as itself an enterprise of democratic contest. By contrasting these portraits of remembrance, I hope to show how an interpretation featuring both witnessing and disclosure evades the several difficulties with making disclosive retrospection the space-making technique of reconciliation. Both Hirsch and Schaap take retrospection as the instrument by which an agonistic democracy can emerge from reconciliation, though they differ as to whether this politics can be sustained by deferring narrative, or merely returns to haunt settled orders of governance. But by making witnessing the counterpart to expressive contest, I want to show how the "backward glance of the historian" is challenged by, and held in tension with, the prefatory spectatorship of the witness.[287]

Reconciliation in Canada will be a multigenerational endeavour. As Murray Sinclair noted: "It took us seven generations to get to where we are today, and it may well take us seven generations to get to where we want to be."[288] What is at stake in my reordering of retrospection

[286] Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 185.
[287] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 192, 233.
[288] Murray Sinclair, Québec Event, 24 April 2013. See also John Borrows, *Seven Generations, Seven Teachings: Ending the Indian Act*, Research Paper for the National Centre on First Nations Governance (May 2008); The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 81.

is the possibility of sustaining fragile spaces for disruptive remembrances which nevertheless permit acting as though reconciliation was a new beginning. Witnessing suggests this requires more than disclosive retrospection to promote meaningful change. In Canada, the awful stories of settler colonial violence disclosed by survivors have exposed the contingency and injustice of the national community. Survivors' courage in contesting this violence and publicizing it might yet mark reconciliation as an experience of freedom rather than of closure. But retrospection is not sufficient for this achievement: it requires also the cooperation of spectators and a relinquished control over the stories told through and about reconciliation. In this context, witnessing may be an ethical practice capable of building a disposition to welcome natality and plurality which the program of residential schools has damaged.

Reconciliation as democracy, democracy as memory

I will begin with Alexander Hirsch's tightly worded appraisal of the "agonistic mode of reconciliation".[289] Through a critique of Giorgio Agamben's assessment of 'messianic time', and through a counter-proposal drawn from Sheldon Wolin, Hirsch sets out to replace agonism as perpetual struggle with agonism as the memory of freedom which haunts constitutional and administrative orders of governance. His critique emanates from a deep uneasiness with the apparent requirement that agonistic contestation proceed by non-violent, respectful means. Hirsch asks whether the requirement that contest proceed *respectfully* does not merely echo the "drive to smooth over deep and writhing differences between adversaries … commonly referred to as political liberalism."[290] He words this complaint very seriously, asking whether "the restriction …

[289] Alexander Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation: The Agonistics of Respect, Resentment, and Responsibility in Post-Conflict Society," *Contemporary Political Theory* 10, no. 2 (2011): 169.
[290] Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 167. Rosemary Shinko raises similar concerns about insisting on respect as immanent to contest. Her concern is that agonistic respect still resembles a *post*-conflict peace, which might be

on what sort of action counts as agonistic – that it be constituted through non-violent, respectful terms, for instance – contradicts the otherwise powerful notion that a postfoundational politics of becoming ought not to prescribe strictures of political legitimacy."[291]

This objection motivates Hirsch's appraisal of Agamben's work, in which he locates a tension between an impulse of postponement and the intimacy of conflictual relationships. The notion of postponement, or 'messianic time', emerges against the horizon of Auschwitz. The death camp was an event so cataclysmic it remains vividly real for those who experienced it, yet unwitnessable, beyond the power of communicability. This mute witness expresses what Agamben calls (non)responsibility: an imperative to assume responsibility for what is ultimately unassumable. What cannot be witnessed nevertheless urges the need to at least bear witness of the impossibility of bearing witness; what we cannot assume responsibility for nevertheless urges at least the admission of this impossibility. Hirsch writes: "The fundamental task of the witness, then, resolves in bearing witness, however paradoxically, to the impossibility of witnessing itself."[292] This imperative gives rise to a temporality of perpetual return and deferral: the recurring need to testify to the muteness of our (perpetually deferred) witness.[293]

What troubles Hirsch is the link between this prospect of "infinite apology" and the intimacy illustrated through the shameful bond between sadist and masochist.[294] This intimacy, cast as the togetherness accompanying a conflictual relationship, parallels the agonistic respect

another technology of marginalization. Rosemary Shinko, "Agonistic Peace: A Postmodern Reading," *Millennium* 36, no. 3 (2008): 473-491.

[291] To emphasise his point even further he adds: "To restrict the bounds of action is to engage in the very 'totalitarian' thinking theorists like Connolly despair of." Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 177.

[292] Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 174.

[293] This is the figure Agamben calls the *Muselmann*.

[294] Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 169-170.

emerging through adversarial relations.[295] Hirsch characterizes the juxtaposition of these two concepts as follows: "The problem is that where Agamben's messianism dictates deferred sublation between antagonists, his theory of the intimate alliance of shame suggests an always already reconciled opposition. The restlessness of a time 'to come' is violated by the passivity of intimacy."[296] Similar wording could express the concern that the restlessness of contest is already pre-empted by the passivity of respect.

Drawing upon Sheldon Wolin's work, Hirsch proposes an alternative conception of agonistic reconciliation based on remembering rather than deferral and immanent intimacy. Hirsch begins from the postulate that what he calls the "medium of constitutional order", the legal ordering of the state maintained by elite or expert rule, is often an anti-democratic modality that banishes contest from the political sphere.[297] It is a type of what Wolin calls "forgetting", the suppression of plurality for the sake of preserving the social contract.[298] Forgetting is not only a suppression of plurality generally, but of the social *injuries* of the past. This connection takes Hirsch to Jean Améry's depiction of frank resentment as the guiding light of reconciliation. Reconciliation becomes an eruption of anger as an expression of *memory*. Remembering expresses past social injuries and resists the constitutionalism erected to preserve social harmony by restricting the amount of democratic agitation permitted. What Wolin claims for democracy, Hirsch claims for agonistic reconciliation: perhaps the possibility of political freedom exists through remembering its forgetting. The crucial passage comes from Wolin's essay on "fugitive democracy":

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[295] The connection between this perpetual postponement of responsibility and constant potential for intimacy between rivals bears a strong resemblance to the "ontology of immanence" that Mouffe suggests characterizes Agamben's work. Mouffe, "Cultural workers as organic intellectuals," 214.
[296] Sublation is the Hegelian term, *aufheben*, meaning to 'pick up' in the dual sense of making something no longer there, and keeping it. Hirsch seems to suggest reconciliation implies a deferred responsibility, as we never quite 'take up' our responsibility for atrocity, although it perpetually disturbs us. Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 177.
[297] Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 162, 180. See also Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 163.
[298] From Wolin, Hirsch invokes the belated apology to Japanese Americans as example. Wolin suggests this is a forgetting urged by a new geopolitical hostility towards the Soviet Union. Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 179.

> Democracy needs to be reconceived as something other than a form of government: as a mode of being which is conditioned by bitter experience, doomed to succeed only temporarily, but is a recurrent possibility as long as the memory of the political survives. The experience of which democracy is the witness is the realization that the political mode of existence is such that it can be, periodically lost. Democracy is a political moment, perhaps the political moment, when the political is remembered and recreated.[299]

With this argument in mind, Hirsch performs his reversal of reconciliation's apparent order. He arrives at the "startling conclusion" that democracy, as a resentful remembering which exceeds the boundaries of the constitutional ordering of politics, appears only in moments of transition.[300] Far from putting democracy together again in the aftermath of violence, reconciliation is democracy itself. It is a fleeting moment of resistance to the constitutional ordering of everyday life. As a moment, democracy/reconciliation eschews the immanence of intimacy or agonistic respect embedded in the perpetual deferral of resolution, the perpetual openness of contestation and plurality. Agonistic reconciliation is better described in terms of possibility than potentiality. And yet, its possibility is marked by a permanence nonetheless, since "the recurrence of the disruptive, spontaneous moment of reconciliation would persist everlastingly so long as its memorialization remains unbroken."[301] This is the temporality of remembering, the possibility that reconciliation might (or might not) assert again a plurality of remembered injuries and identities.

Reconciliation is thus turned inside-out. Instead of bridging between periods of settled democracy, reconciliation recreates democracy through the memorialization of its loss. Fugitive reconciliation means *remembering*, not beginning anew. Reconciliation cannot be a new

[299] Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 43.
[300] Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 166.
[301] Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 181.

foundational moment because the foundational experiences of 'stable' democracies were produced by genocide and violence, exactly the suppression of plurality in need of remembering.[302]

From paradox to possibility

Notably, this portrait of remembrance is not paradoxical. Instead, agonistic reconciliation is merely possible. To insist upon respect or intimacy as the accompaniment to perpetually provoking recollections of violence, Hirsch suggests, comes too close to iterating an *a priori* condition for disagreement. He poses the question thus: "If agonism takes liberal forms of democracy to be reprehensible insofar as they jettison serious disagreement in the name of resolution, how does it avoid reiterating such a logic in demanding that conflicts be sorted out vis-à-vis an *a priori* civic relation of respectful mutual submissiveness?"[303] Retrospection does not take place at the juncture of a painful past and a hopeful future, but instead takes place at the margins of a constitutional order predicated on forgetting plurality (and injuries) in the name of unity and stability. For this reason, reconciliation is characterized by anger rather than respect. This resentment is the source of its ethical claim. Through resentment, the "affective equivalent to democratic collective remembrance", those who have suffered injustice identify with the moral treatment of others through their anger at its violation.[304] By making anger the source of this democratic identification, the concern that respect might sublimate anger by appeal to mutuality is obviated.

And yet there is a curious hesitation in Hirsch's hope that the mere possibility of remembering might unsettle hegemonic governance, a hesitation concerning whether fugitive democracy must *appear* to be democratic. Perhaps the possibility of the "startling invocation of a

[302] Hirsch makes this point by invoking Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[303] Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 169.
[304] Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 182-183.

bygone past" can "haunt the present as a fugitive moment."[305] But there is a twist: this democratic sensibility depends on the appearance of fugitive remembering, the memorialization of what has been forgotten, so as to be recognized (or remembered) as *democracy*. Fugitive reconciliation is not simply remembering the plurality that was forgotten, or the violence and injury perpetrated in the name of democratic stability. It is the sudden epiphany that democracy *is* this remembering. Democracy does not refer to the plurality and contest which were violated (and could be restored), but to the fugitive moments when we remember their loss. This is why Wolin, in the passage already cited, refers to democracy as itself a *witness* of the (appearing) realization of loss.

Hirsch's concern with mutual respect as a limiting requirement of agonism leads him to reject the paradoxical formulation of imperative and deferral he reads in Agamben. This rejection implies a turn away from agonism as conditioned, and a turn towards agonism as *revealed* - the "epiphanic flash" of democracy-as-reconciliation.[306] Hirsch's transmutation of fugitive democracy into fugitive reconciliation relies on the piercing realization that democracy cannot be stabilized or sustained, but is subject to loss and forgetting. This description implies above all a *revelatory* experience, but not one capable of sustaining an ethos of commitment to democracy. Instead it is the revelation that democracy cannot be guaranteed, that it can and probably will be lost, recurring only in the *memory* of the animating injuries and differences which surface in reconciliation. The profound pessimism of this position is alleviated only by the subtle thread of disclosure woven through his adoption of Wolin's conception of democracy as itself the sudden realization of its own tenuousness. This realization, Hirsch seems to imply, might continue to haunt society simply through the possibility that democracy, as remembering, might return again.

[305] Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 183.
[306] Hirsch, "Fugitive Reconciliation," 181.

Prospective retrospection: the spectator as judge-historian

The tactic of inviting well-known figures from many circles to act as witnesses to the survivors of residential schools, so advantageous to a Canadian TRC far removed from the heights of mass publicity achieved by the South African commission, denotes two relationships: the relationship between public space and disclosure, and the relationship between spectator and actor. The salient role of witnessing says something about how these relationships might structure the juncture of unsettling truths and new possible beginnings. In a sense, witnessing reverses the priority implied by Schaap's account of worldliness. Instead of clashing encounters which also disclose the common worldliness lying between divided peoples and providing the incentive for further world-building promises and forgiveness, witnessing inaugurates a public space for plurality. For Schaap, disclosure helps us recognize the already-present worldliness which makes political contest possible. By contrast, witnessing cultivates the sense of being in public necessary for contest, and the appreciation of natality which makes space for disruptive truths and renewed relationships. And yet the honorary witnessing of the TRC is neither a beginning nor an *a priori* condition, because it depends for its meaningfulness on the expressive disclosures for which it prepares, just as a preface requires the book it precedes.

This order of operation matters when considering the relationship between spectators and actors. By my reading of Schaap's argument, spectatorship sustains reconciliation as a new beginning by coming to resemble the meaning-making judgments of historians. Spectatorship sustains beginnings only by becoming a kind of storytelling, telling a story about the virtuosic contest between political actors which might come to characterize reconciliation. This depiction provides Schaap with an explanation of how, despite painful pasts and uncertain futures, reconciliation could be a genuinely novel attempt at politics which makes room for plurality. A central characteristic of this account of spectatorship is its displacement of judgment as the

dominant response to unsettling disclosures. Schaap attempts to forestall the finality of judgment and offers instead a theory of deferred judgment which makes space for new beginnings. For political reconciliation to be an agonistic beginning and not a programmatic application of rules or presumptions of community, Schaap argues, its political actors must internalize the perspectives of future historians whose judgments mark contested reconciliation as the genesis of the community.

My contention in what follows is that this approach shares a difficulty with prefacing. By appealing to the anticipatory storytelling of an author-figure who tells the future as though it was past, the plurality of the future is guaranteed by the narrative structure of the 'not yet' which closes off the uncertainty and natality of the 'to come'. Schaap's view of anticipated remembrance illustrates the difficulty of beginning something new without the guidance of historical or rational certainty. But because this emphasizes spectatorship itself as only another form of disclosure, it contrasts with witnessing as a preparation for the 'to come' rather than its anticipated disclosure.

Spectatorship and judgment

Alongside his argument that an ethos of worldliness can emerge through the clash of perspectives disclosed through contest, Schaap offers a supplemental account of the spectatorship necessary for political reconciliation, which he calls reflective judgment.[307] Political reconciliation must resist theories of judgment where the act of judging means subsuming the particular (stories, appearances, identities, etc.) under rationally derived principles.[308] Schaap outlines an alternative theory which complements agonistic disclosures rather than adjudicating the success, failure or

[307] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 69-74.

[308] He takes Kant's practical reason as the main example of this form of judgment, adding that Taylor's theory of recognition and Locke's theory of tolerance each bear something of a resemblance to it in their penchant for adjudicating particular appearances and disclosures according to fixed criteria of reason or authentic identity (though in Taylor's case, Schaap makes use of his notion of thick normative judgments as a second-order reflection on our own tastes and reactions). See Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 71.

purposes of reconciliation according to pre-given criteria. To do otherwise, he argues, means once again ignoring the risks of political contest which must be embraced in order to pursue the possibility of political community. To this end, he promotes an Arendtian theory of aesthetic judgment emphasizing the particularity of action, thus tending towards the suspension - or holding-open - of the finality of judgment.

Arendt's notion that virtuosic contest requires spectators is well known. First, spectators are required for reality, the "reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators."[309] Second, spectators are required for remembrance. "The whole factual world of human affairs," Arendt writes, "depends for its reality and its continued existence … upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember."[310] Third, the motive force for this remembrance she ascribes to the human predilection for *action*, the expressive appearing - before each other - of unique individuals in word and deed.[311] This is at once the catalyst for remembrance and the realization of natality, the capacity to begin new enterprises. The connection between natality and remembrance is politics. She notes:

> Action, in so far as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history…. [Action] has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting.[312]

Something quite like these three steps appears in Schaap's portrait of spectatorship. First, our "common sense of reality" comes from "appearing before others and sharing with them how the world seems to us," a process he calls "inserting" oneself into the world, into the public

[309] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 57.
[310] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 95.
[311] "The root of the ancient estimation of politics is the conviction that man *qua* man, each individual in his unique distinctness, appears and confirms himself in speech and action, and that these activities, despite their material futility, possess an enduring quality of their own because they create their own remembrance." Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 207-208.
[312] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 8-9.

sphere.[313] The revelatory aspect of this courageous self-insertion into the world leads to an agonal striving for self-disclosure, the "desire to distinguish oneself before one's equals."[314] This striving brings with it the potential for conflict and disagreement (about how the world seems to us), and thus, the establishment of a world in common is always open, creative and incomplete.[315] These practices of self-insertion and self-disclosure in turn disclose a common world and with it, an ethic of care for that space of appearance. Following Arendt's second step, Schaap suggests that this space of appearance depends on spectatorship: "just as the musician and the dancer are dependent upon an audience in order to give a performance in which they can reveal their virtuosity, so is the political actor dependent upon an audience of spectators to distinguish herself in the world."[316]

With these two steps Schaap at once makes the distinction between actor and spectator the crucial characteristic of publicity, then collapses them back together through the category of judging. Although through acting we ultimately disclose the narratives of our own lives, "we depend upon others to judge the significance of the stories we enact in the world."[317] Like acting, judging is a way to 'insert' oneself into the world. Since this insertion consists of disclosing how the world *seems*, to act implies also to judge. This becomes especially clear as Schaap adopts Arendt's insistence that political judgment begins from the aesthetic experience of taste, and not from applying universal principles to particulars. Thus the care necessary to sustain a world of appearances - the ethic of worldliness - depends on spectators understood as actor-judges. This ethic of care "brings about a responsibility to act and judge because these are the activities through

[313] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 60, 80. The phrase "sharing … how the world seems to us" embraces both judging and disclosing, as a way of 'inserting' oneself into the world.
[314] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 67. See also Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 194.
[315] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 67.
[316] Schaap, Political Reconciliation, 67. Schaap talks of this space of appearance in two separate ways: created by spectators, and created by institutions. He doesn't discuss whether spectatorship must be institutionalized.
[317] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 69-70.

which we constitute and preserve the world. The end of politics is 'to establish and keep in existence a space where freedom as virtuosity can appear'."[318]

Accordingly, the "community of judging spectators" strikes a balance between the subjective aspect of aesthetic judgment and the commonality of the world.[319] Neither an objective nor a transcendental judgment is possible because the spectator-judges are themselves engaged in an agonistic contest for distinction. But an intersubjective standard of judgment *is* possible, so long as judgment is held to depend first on imagining a plurality of perspectives, and second upon judgment attuned not to the success or failure of action, but to its exemplarity, to historical particulars, and to the "unprecedented."[320] By applying such a theory of spectatorship-as-judgment to reconciliation, Schaap forestalls the closure he fears from judgment in terms of rational rules or historical necessity. Thus, instead of judgment as the final summation of action, reflective judgment is "akin to initiatory action" because its appreciation for the unprecedented breaks with "the standards and criteria we take for granted."[321]

By my reading, this connection between initiatory action and spectatorship requires the addition of 'historian' as a counterpart to disclosive action. On the margins of his portrayal of constitution-making as irrevocably caught between its world-delimiting and world-disrupting potentialities, Schaap's account again raises the question of how beginning anew is possible. As action depends for its meaningfulness on the judgment of spectators to whom political action can appear as a story, so initiatory action depends upon the specific judgment of spectators to whom its unprecedentedness is clear - historians.[322] The capacity to make promises is not sufficient for

[318] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 63. See also Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 154-155.
[319] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 71.
[320] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 73.
[321] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 74.
[322] Pierre Rosanvallon suggests Arendt does not simply equate spectators and judges with historians, but establishes instead an intermediary, an "*active and engaged spectator*, whose action helps to institute and regulate the life of the

agonistic constitution-making because the institutionalization of promises tends always to overdetermine the outcome, and thus the beginning, in the name of a community already presupposed. According to Schaap:

> What animates political reconciliation, then, is not the anticipation of community as an absolute end according to which we ought to regulate our present relations. Rather, it is the will that the present be remembered by a possible future community as the moment in which it originated…. Reconciliation necessarily anticipates a future community…. It is this anticipated remembrance that holds together (in the present) the world-rupturing and world-delimiting aspects of constitution, which coincide with the exhilaration of beginning and the concern to establish a lasting institution through promising.[323]

Acting as-though beginning

This triad - spectator, judge, historian - offers an elegant solution to two difficulties: the problem of beginning anew in the face of paralyzing uncertainty, and the problem of beginning anew without prescribing the narrative structure of reconciliation. The first of these problems appears with greater urgency because the threat of uncertainty looms ever larger if reconciliation discloses the contingency of community. To my mind, Schaap's proposal is at its most convincing here. There is a parallel between the deferral of judgment to future historians and Jacques Rancière's account of *dissensus*. Rancière vehemently rejects the notion that equality is necessary for agonistic politics, as equality is a major point of political contestation. Instead, dissensus is *staged* by those who act *as though* they are equal. "Equality," in his view, "is not a given that politics then presses into service, an essence embodied in the law or a goal politics sets itself the task of attaining. It is a mere *assumption* that needs to be discerned within the practices implementing it."[324] The paradoxical assumption of a space for hearing claims of injustice means

city." Pierre Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 235.

[323] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 90.

[324] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 33, emphasis added. Acting as though means "the political act of … building a relationship between … things that have none," such as human rights and limits to workers' hours, or the

a speaker "has to behave *as though* such a stage existed, as though there were a common world of argument - which is eminently reasonable *and* eminently unreasonable, eminently wise and resolutely subversive, since such a world does not exist."[325] Acting *as though* precedes the recognition of these claims, but because these claims have yet to be understood, the assumption that there is a space for such understanding subverts the argument that such space is already implicit within processes of rational argumentation.

Something similar occurs in Schaap's design. Deferring judgment allows political actors to act *as though* they were beginning something new. From the perspective of the actors involved, it doesn't matter whether reconciliation is someday viewed as the beginning of respectful relationships, the dissolution of hegemonic governance, or another neo-colonial evasion. What matters is acting *as though* it marked substantive change - acting so that future historians could (possibly) judge it as such. This assumption of novelty is not paralyzed by contingency. To the contrary, it acknowledges the risks of politics. Moreover it seemingly eschews any prior conditions for democratic contest, since such contest erupts through the assumption of equality, or in this case, of novelty. By waiting to judge the exemplarity of reconciliation until a political community can inscribe it into an eventual narrative, acting *as though* emphasizes novelty as a key characteristic of reconciliation even while replacing *founding* with an imaginative deferral. Not only does this address the problem of paralysis facing contested and contingent reconciliation, but it also evades the difficulty of prescribing ahead of time the national unity reconciliation might be expected to produce.

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acknowledgment of cultural genocide and the prospect for a relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples which could someday be taken as constitutive of a new community. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 40-41.

[325] Rancière, *Disagreement*, 52. Here Rancière takes pains to show how understanding cannot be the basis of consensus, because it implies simultaneously an understanding of a problem and an understanding of a command. Acting as though understood is a way of manifesting the complicity of understanding in the imposition of a relationship of command and obedience. Rancière, *Disagreement*, 43-60.

The second concern is that reconciliation presumes a narrative of unification or economic redress which bypasses the prospects (and risks) of political contestation. Deferring judgment to future historians also addresses this point. Unlike presumptions about the unity of the community to be reconciled, anticipated remembrance bears the risk "that the beginning we seek to enact in the present might not be remembered as such."[326] Internalizing the perspective of "this imagined common future" does not insist upon a *telos*. Rather, it means internalizing the risks of politics in order to understand the actions of the present as an expression of natality.

Schaap contrasts this schema of anticipated remembrance with Arendt's solution to the dilemma of how an agonistic beginning can be preserved without closing down the very contest which enabled it. Arendt's solution, that the beginning itself can be the source of authority for subsequent generations whose privilege is to augment the original foundation, Schaap roundly rejects.[327] In its place, he suggests no such solution be offered, but that political reconciliation instead be construed as a constitutive tension between looking forward to the moment when the present might seem like a beginning, and promising in the present to never repeat the injustices of the past. This follows Rancière's break with Arendt's association of ruling with beginning, with both belonging to "an order of equals who are in possession of the power … to begin anew."[328] Instead, beginning depends on postponing assertions of rule and community.

'Not yet' and 'to come'

In place of a thick narrative of national reunification, acting *as though* we are beginning anew carries the much thinner ethical stipulation that we act so that a future community *could* look backwards and claim our actions as a beginning. This thin requirement that reconciliation defer

[326] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 97.
[327] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 93.
[328] Rancière, *Dissensus*, 29. See also Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006), 38-39.

judgment in order to act so that future communities could take up their own narratives resembles an injunction to act for the sake of the world. But this anticipated remembrance retains a reliance on the authorship of the coming story in which reconciliation can finally appear as a new beginning. By this reliance, the contestatory plurality and natality of expressive politics is diminished: the meaningfulness of expressive action derives from its status as 'not yet' narrative. To begin anew, the perspective of future historians must be enlisted to adjudicate the present as the origin of a potential future community, serving as spectator-judges who articulate the meaning of the disclosures of political actors.

Schaap clarifies that "understanding the present as a point of origin entails a reckoning with time that is more complex than is immediately suggested by the metaphor of 'looking back' while 'reaching forward'."[329] Citing a remark by Emilios Christodoulidis, he suggests "political reconciliation refers to a future anterior, an imagined 'not yet' that is 'brought into the present to become constitutive of the experience of the present'."[330] But this accomplishment comes at the cost of equating, by degrees, spectatorship with disclosure, a move which risks inscribing the capacity to begin anew within the province of the historian, the author, the sovereign. To the extent that reflective judgment requires those committed to reconciliation to imaginatively interpret their actions from the perspective of the historians of a future reconciled community, the plurality and natality of reconciliation seem redeemable only by a narrative structure capable of fixing it as *the* beginning. Schaap calls this "redemptive" narrative.[331]

But anticipated remembrance does not fully escape the problems of the preface, because by basing beginning on the memory of future historians, it entrusts public space for forgiving and

[329] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 91.
[330] Emilios Christodoulidis, "'Truth and Reconciliation' as Risks," *Social & Legal Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 198, as cited in Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 91.
[331] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 139-140.

promising to an imagined 'not yet' narrative structure which could make them meaningful despite their obvious risks. Arendt portrays this danger through her critique of Hegel's attempt to bring willing and thinking together through the dialectical movement of futurity which is nevertheless already susceptible to being thought and remembered. Her description closely parallels Derrida's remarks on the propensity of prefacing to insist on a single author and an essential text which is disclosed to us ahead of time. She writes:

> That there exists such a thing as the *Life* of the mind is due to the mind's organ for the future and its resulting 'restlessness'; that there exists such a thing as the life of the *Mind* is due to death, which, foreseen as an absolute end, halts the will and transforms the future into an anticipated past, the will's projects into objects of thought, and the soul's expectation into an anticipated remembrance.[332]

According to Arendt, Hegel's attempt to have the faculty of thinking colonize the unpredictability of the future rests on his treatment of the future of history like death, transforming an I-shall-become into an I-shall-have-been. The great danger of such an approach is that linear history disclosed dialectically posits only one mind, directing history to a meaningfulness that corresponds with the human wish that the world *be* as it *ought* to be.[333]

Entrusting our capacity for disruptive, contingent action to the hope that they might someday be taken as the beginning of reconciliation always retains this danger, the very danger it postpones in order to make space for present action. Schaap's solution of continued deferral depends upon postponed narrative judgment to keep our remembrances of injury (which are plural and contested) and our promises to begin anew (which can only be contingent) connected to the possibility of community. But perhaps witnessing evokes an alternative site of resistance, sacrificing the unicity and guarantee of reconciliation for its reality as a common object made public through plural spectators, and its natality through the witness of what is to come. Together,

[332] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* vol. 2, 44.
[333] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* vol. 2, 44-49.

these patterns of resistance re-assert the paradoxical relationship between space and disclosure in agonistic reconciliation. What is missing, however, is an account of the space which precedes disclosure to complement the account of internalized future narratives.

Witnessing and postponement

Albeit couched in different terms, these two accounts by Hirsch and Schaap each depict retrospection as a way to create space for agonistic reconciliation. Each describes retrospection as multi-layered disclosure: recollection which also reveals the agonism of democratic remembering. To Hirsch, this is entailed by the equation of democracy with transitory moments where we remember plurality and its suppression, while for Schaap, deferring retrospection to future historians redeems action from uncertainty and paralysis. But by making retrospection so central to the spaces created for agonistic activity, these accounts occasion two difficulties.

In Hirsch's case, the chief difficulty is that resentful remembering cannot produce sustained spaces for democratic activity because these spaces depend upon a self-awareness of democracy's tenuousness. Democracy is realized only as memorialization, the disruptive re-appearance in memory of the plurality lost to constitutional ordering, the memorialization of differences suppressed to establish a united community. Thus democracy cannot be the *re-collection* of lost plurality, but the sudden recognition of its loss which only its memorialization affords. Fragility appears as the chief characteristic of such fugitive democracy from the perspective of a memorialization which itself cannot be sustained, except as haunting, as a possible disturbance of forgetting. The space for agonistic reconciliation which retrospection proffers, then, is democratic from a perspective in which democracy can only appear retrospectively. This is why fugitive democracy cannot be made a rival order of governance: only from the viewpoint of its tenuous

return is its fugitive character visible. Moreover, this revelation is not *immanent* to remembering. Resentment could equally produce violent antipathy or a yearning for emancipation, though neither would yield the epiphany about democracy's fugitive character.

An eerily similar structure could be read into Schaap's account, at least to a point. If agonistic reconciliation discloses our worldliness as the space of its possibility, then such space is visible only from the perspective of its successful realization, in the twofold sense of our recognition of a common world and the achievement of this recognition through contest. Thus the spaces for agonistic contest are disclosed through retrospective narrative. From a perspective fixed on enduring social antagonisms such as those occasioned by apartheid or colonial oppression, a common world seems either impossible or necessarily prior to reconciliation. Conversely, only from the perspective of a successful public appearance of agonistic contest are the possibility and actuality of a worldly in-between recognizable as such. This perspective is retrospective. Contingency and plurality cease to appear as insurmountable barriers to commonality, understood as the cessation of antagonism within a community; they appear instead as integral conditions to commonality, now understood as perpetual political reconciliation. This is the circularity which I described previously.

However, Schaap's account of projected retrospection adds an intriguing dimension to this portrait. The space for agonism - worldliness - is realized retrospectively as it is disclosed through contest. And yet, the space for such contest comes to depend on the continued deferral of retrospection, the postponement of its tendency to gather up plural views into singular narratives or judgments. The future historian becomes the counterpart to the messy contest of and about reconciliation. The redemptive narrative of community is put off to the future, so as to make action in the present possible without presuming its end. But equating spectators with judges with future

historians folds together a tension between the two organizations of meaning identified by Arendt: the backward-glance of the historian and the organized remembrance of the *polis*.[334] Just as Schaap combines the roles of spectator, judge and historian to produce the postponed narrative necessary for reconciliation to mark a genuine beginning, so too he combines these two models of remembrance, and thus suppresses the tension between them.

Put otherwise, postponement's 'not yet' differs from natality's 'to come' in the delayed retroactive authority assumed by actors who act according to the stipulation that disclosive reconciliation should proffer a new beginning. 'Not yet' implies a coming narrative, and it is through affiliation with this narration that beginning - constituting - receives its impetus. This is not to say political reconciliation presumes its *telos*. But it does presume the possibility of a narrative which can finally disclose worldliness as the opportunity for perpetual contest amid plurality. By contrast, the phrase 'to come' indicates more than the ineradicable risk that the narrative eventually told about reconciliation will not be the story its actors would like to have written; it indicates the *impossibility* of encapsulating contest in narrative, of *comprehending* it, because of the remainders inevitably produced by trying to present it. What story could be told of agonism? Arendt and Hirsch tell only the story of its loss.[335] Conversely, what agonism could be expressed through narrative? Tully's counter-narratives to imperialism disclose past and present alternatives, but necessarily conclude in calls for sustained listening, a listening which cannot have been immanent to the clash of those alternatives.

[334] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.
[335] Perhaps for this reason, as Schaap points out, Arendt's notion of history is episodic and monumental rather than linear, dwelling on the unprecedented pockets of briefly sustained freedom rather than on a march of progress or an inevitable decline. See Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 140-142.

Conclusion

Though always in tension with retrospection, witnessing might be taken as the counterpart of agonistic expression. In place of an imperative to seek closure through remembrance and to defer it for the sake of expressive action, perhaps witnessing affords space for natality and exemplarity as features of enduring contest, despite the temptation to inscribe truths into new meta-narratives about healed or reunited community. Instead of postponing narration's tendency to closure, witnessing makes present retrospection public, both (re)telling it and leaving traces of the care for natality which exceed such reiteration. This provides an alternative account of how judgment could be suspended for the sake of new relationships. Narrative is not forgotten, but the closure of the historian's backward glance is always contested by the trace left by witnessing's anticipation of disconcerting truths made public. Schaap acknowledges this possibility but not its tension, noting: "A redemptive remembrance requires not just the narration of actions and events but their public articulation and witnessing, which establishes enough distance between the agent and what he has done and suffered for him to be reconciled to what has irrevocably happened."[336]

Assessing witnessing as the public-making which precedes and depends on agonism breaks with the circularity occasioned by an insistence on retrospection as the (postponed) space for contest. This break means interpreting witnessing as itself a distinctive democratic practice of public-making which complements the disclosive practices of agonistic reconciliation, but is neither immanent to nor produced by them. By consequence, portraying agonistic reconciliation as the parallel practices of witnessing and disclosure leads to a *doubling* of closure, trace and aversion articulated as the pattern of radical democracy. In the final chapter, I take up the possibility of witnessing as a cooperative practice of public-making which complements the

[336] Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 139.

exemplary courage of survivors, through an encounter with Rancière's depiction of public-making as juxtaposition, and conclude by exploring the question of whether witnessing can extend beyond the TRC's selection of public figures.

Chapter Eight: Democratic Practices of Public-Making

Introduction

The rigorous public-making activity of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was characterized by efforts to research, publish, commemorate and archive the histories of residential schools, but also by efforts to provide a forum where survivors could appear and share their experiences publicly, if they chose. This cultivation of space marked by the reflective awareness of respectful local and international audiences attests to the commission's desire to honour survivors, and to respect their courage. The listening furnished by commissioners, witnesses and participants in the process was not merely instrumental to greater media attention or propagation of knowledge about the schools; it was conducted in contradistinction to hostile or indifferent receptions of survivors' stories.[337] These stories were told through private statements, sharing circles, and most visibly, at Commissioners' Sharing Panels, with a commissioner seated across from survivors and their family and friends on raised stages. Sharing sessions would conclude with the commissioner offering a succinct account of what they had heard, paraphrasing and repeating portions of what survivors had told them.[338]

During the final day of the Vancouver Event, Commissioner Murray Sinclair twice delivered a powerful rhetorical summary of the commissioners' deliberate listening. Following a Sharing Panel, Sinclair told the audience what it was the commission was trying to tell survivors:

[337] Many students who reported abuse in the schools were not believed. See The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The Inuit and Northern Experience*, 142; The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *The History, Part 2, 1939 to 2000*, 459.

[338] The commissioners varied in the summary comments they would give at the conclusion of Sharing Panels. As I observed, Commissioner Littlechild generally paraphrased or quoted the survivors without addendum, preceding each paraphrase with the remark "we have heard …", whereas Commissioner Sinclair would add more commentary about the significance and context of what was shared.

"We want to assure them that we have seen them, we have heard them - and we *believe* them."[339] Towards the conclusion of the day's events, he reiterated this message to survivors: "As commissioners, we promised you that we would hear you, see you, believe you. And we would make sure that Canada has heard what you have told us."[340]

Something similar to this promise, I believe, is implicit in acts of listening which accord publicity and respect ahead of time to survivors and their families. However, some critics have vociferously attacked the commission and its audiences for precisely this willingness to believe what survivors told them of their experiences in the schools. In particular, critics have charged that the TRC failed in its mandate to establish the truth about residential schools. Their accusations rest partly on the proposition that the commission ought to have followed "contemporary Western juridical and objective social science standards", including random sampling and cross-examinations, to arrive at a truth "equally known, recognized, understood and shared by all parties."[341] These critics advance an alternate view of the history of residential schools as "established on the well-founded and altruistic notion" that indigenous worldviews and "pathologies" were incompatible with "a rapidly developing and modernizing country."[342] The point of interest in this criticism is not the alternative history it posits, but the accusation that the testimony of survivors provides "little credible empirical evidence to support the charge - let alone conviction - of cultural genocide."[343] Instead, they accuse academic supporters of the TRC of

[339] Murray Sinclair, Vancouver Event, September 21, 2013.
[340] Murray Sinclair, Vancouver Event, September 21, 2013. Andy Scott, one of the commission's honorary witnesses, concluded that such belief was a central part of his work of witnessing: "Reconciliation is about Survivors speaking about their experiences, being heard, and being believed…." The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 175.
[341] Hymie Rubenstein and Rodney Clifton, "Rubenstein & Clifton: Truth and Reconciliation report tells a 'skewed and partial story' of residential schools," *National Post*, June 22, 2015, http://news.nationalpost.com; see also Rodney Clifton and Hymie Rubenstein, "Clifton & Rubenstein: Debunking the half-truths and exaggerations in the Truth and Reconciliation report," *National Post*, June 04, 2015, http://news.nationalpost.com.
[342] Hymie Rubenstein and Rodney Clifton, "Cultural Genocide and the Indian Residential Schools," *C2C Journal*, November 09, 2015, http://www.c2cjournal.ca.
[343] Rubenstein and Clifton, "Cultural Genocide and the Indian Residential Schools".

urging "all Canadians to uncritically accept the 388-page Truth and Reconciliation report as a kind of sacred text, each holy word the revealed, immutable and unchallengeable Truth about aboriginal residential schools."[344] Buried in this vitriol is the ironic accusation that the TRC report establishes a truth beyond contestation by failing to adhere to Western juridical and scientific standards (which would establish a truth beyond contestation).[345]

Nonetheless, these two poles of belief and incredulity act as a microcosm of the problem of prior space for agonistic expression. The arguments advanced in Canada's conservative press maintain that the experiences of survivors must meet a certain threshold of truth to be accepted publicly. This threshold at once marks the boundary between public and private and a line drawn antagonistically: these (Western) requirements, and no other, qualify truth for public acceptance. Conversely, insofar as respectful spaces precede survivors' claims, whether through honorary witnessing or through the *promise* to believe, they raise the question of whether prior spaces do not also close down contestation of the expressive action they permit. Two parallel problems emerge. The first concerns what counts as argument, a debate to which agonistic theory is oriented via its critique of Rawls and Habermas. This is the concern that reconciliation necessarily posits standards or narratives which determine what counts as truth-telling. These standards must be contested, but perhaps the possibility of such contest likewise requires prior delineations of public space.

The second problem attends to agonistic theory applied to Canada's settler colonialism: disagreement voiced as part of the *solution* to the colonial legacy of residential schools can assume

[344] Rubenstein and Clifton, "Rubenstein & Clifton: Truth and Reconciliation report tells a 'skewed and partial story' of residential schools."
[345] The TRC noted that "few former residential school staff" spoke at events, remarking: "some staff are deceased, others are now elderly or ill, and a small minority refused to admit, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that the schools were destructive." The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 168.

agreement (and conceal this assumption) about the *problem* of how we think about settler colonialism. If settler colonialism is a problem extending all the way down to our epistemological and ontological assumptions, then criticism of the TRC's truth-telling cannot rely on Western epistemology or juridical standards. However, the respectful listening accorded to survivors is also couched in a reversal of imperialistic attitudes which deny the legitimacy of indigenous voices and epistemologies.[346] The heart of the difficulty is this: how can public-space be created for so deep a contest, when making-public seems to imply one or the other assumption - either a foundational consensus rooted in Western epistemologies and an account of settler colonialism as pathology and healing, or a respect immanent to contest and expressed as a willingness to believe?

Two practices of public-making

I have proposed to read this dilemma through the paradox of prefatory witnessing. Rather than take public space as a prior requirement or as immanent to contest, this reading interprets public-making as two parallel practices: exemplary disclosures which open new horizons of possibility, and practices of listening for such exemplarity. In this concluding chapter, I want to clarify how these two practices of public-making suggest an account of agonistic reconciliation as not only contest within and about public spaces, but also practices of cooperation which paradoxically precede yet depend on expressive and courageous action such as that exemplified by residential school survivors. Witnessing is a form of space-making which is not disclosed by contest, yet in its two moments of anticipation and summary witnessing echoes a pattern of closure, remainder and postponement. To clarify this *doubling* of public-making, I will read Norval's account of responsiveness to exemplarity alongside Jacques Rancière's concept of juxtaposing two

[346] For a succinct account by the commission linking colonization and residential schools, see The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 45-53.

worlds. I will conclude with a foray into the question of whether agonistic practices of witnessing could extend beyond the work of selected honorary figures, through Paulette Regan's hope that truth commissions might create pedagogical spaces for decolonizing.

Co-operative agonism

Emphasizing the disclosive attributes of truth-telling risks retaining a problematic conception of public spaces for agonism as either an *a priori* condition or as the outcome of contest. The possibility that respect is immanent to and disclosed by perpetual contest is also inadequate. As Hirsch points out, there is a danger that the immanence of respect will translate into the passivity of an already-achieved ethical stance. In Schaap's review of reconciliation, it would seem as though the worldliness which already makes contest possible makes further achievement unnecessary, as though agonistic reconciliation could only disclose its own success. This conclusion follows from the compression of worldliness as both the durable possibility of performativity and the fragile alternative (as worldliness realized, worldliness made public through contest) to the quest for closure.

But the listening orchestrated by the TRC of Canada suggests how the receptivity necessary for agonistic expression is dependent on the process of closure and the remainders it produces, yet is neither immanent to nor produced by this process. Like a preface, spaces of respectful listening precede and make room for expressive disclosure. But only by virtue of the exemplary claims and unprecedented courage expressed does this respectful listening garner its meaning as the condition of possibility for performative action. Such an analogy preserves Arendt's insistence that the promise of natality inherent to the human condition requires public spaces of appearance for its full realization. But these public spaces no longer represent a pre-political condition imposed upon

democratic disagreement. Instead, public-making is bifurcated into twin practices of exemplary claims-making and the witnessing which sees, hears and believes it.

This complicates the portrait of closure and remembrance as the work of reconciliation. Attempts to close down deep disagreement in the name of the self-evident authority of community inevitably engender resistances. Recognizing this process prompts an abandonment of the pursuit of closure. This abandonment is not emancipation, but perpetual postponement which opens up space for novelty, exemplarity, excess. For instance, Norval insists the failure of apartheid (itself a system predicated on authoritative closure through racist segregation) illustrates this pattern. In the aftermath of apartheid's end (the closure of closure), reconciliation did not produce a post-apartheid emancipation, but instead drew attention to the impossibility of closure through its publication of multiple perspectives. The claims made to and through the commission thus lend themselves to interpretation as a commitment to democracy which can only be expressed as aversion to closure, as a space opened up between the closure of memory and the possibility of futurity.

But incorporating witnessing into this account as a parallel ethical practice occasions a doubling. Two doublings, actually. First, this pattern of effacement and remainders is doubled in the sense that it applies to witnessing as well as to disclosure. The two moments of witnessing suggest how the summation of what was heard at the TRC tends to occlude the prior anticipation of hearing that marks the implicit honour of witnesses prepared to listen. But subsequent testifying cannot express the honour of a willingness to believe, remember, and share, which is secured *prior* to the stories witnessed. Disclosure and witnessing, then, and even reconciliation itself, all follow this pattern of narrative eclipse which nevertheless leaves remainders which cannot be expressed in narrative but instead return to unsettle the reiterated story.

However, the priority of witnessing occasions a second doubling. Contest requires the visibility secured by the paradoxical priority of space-making. Agonism requires two sets of relationships - the relation between actors, and the relation between actors and spectators. As a result, agonism describes a parallel pattern of cooperation signalled by the willingness to make contest public, to affirm its reality and significance. Tully calls this combination the "politics of reasonable non-violent cooperation and agonistics" which stands in contrast to the assumption that "institutional conditions must be in place and humans must be subject to them before it is possible to engage in non-violent reasoning together (cooperating and contesting forms of cooperation)."[347] The TRC's program of Honorary Witnessing illustrates on a large scale what is obvious in the relationship between listening and speaking - listening is a form of cooperation which precedes and yet depends on disclosure. Agonistic reconciliation, then, expresses the hope that cooperation and disruption can together foment a space of democratic action which resists settler colonial narratives in the name of futures to come.

As with the metaphorical appropriation of Nora's relationship to Torvald, however, the metaphor of listening and speaking does not represent an encounter between monolithic settler and indigenous communities, or between perpetrators and victims. Rather, it indicates a public-making amid plurality. Official apology and responsiveness on the part of governments, churches, or perpetrators can contribute to survivors' sense of visibility, verifying "the credibility of victims whose claims have been disbelieved."[348] But as John Ralston Saul notes, cooperative listening can be practiced by many others. Cultivating reflective visibility through cooperative listening addresses one of the barriers to reconciliation he identifies - the need for those who have suffered "to hear themselves being listened to." As he puts it, survivors "need to hear others hearing them.

[347] Tully, "Dialogue," 157.
[348] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 82, 98.

Which others? Their families and communities, the population as a whole, the religious and civil organizations that had overseen the wrongdoing, and the governments that are ultimately responsible."[349] To the extent that listening for exemplarity opens spaces for natality, this need to listen extends also to a Canadian society struggling with the significance of a colonial past that threatens to prevent new possibilities from appearing.

Witnessing as democratic practice

Invoking the term 'cooperation' threatens to undo the careful distinction between agonism and disagreement premised on consensus, so it might be useful at this juncture to contrast this doubling of contest and cooperation, disclosure and listening, with a doubling drawn from Rancière's conception of juxtaposed worlds. Rancière holds that spaces for dissent are made public through the interposition of one world on top of another. I have already discussed the strategy of acting *as though* there was a stage for understanding counter-hegemonic claims. But as Arendt might note, acting *as though* could only produce stages for dissensus to the extent that it surpassed subjective inclination and was a business actually carried on with many others whose different perspectives would lend it reality. Acting as though would be meaningless alone. But unlike Arendt, Rancière is not interested in privileging the "brightness of the political sphere" against the subjective experience of private stories and lives; instead, he posits politics as a juxtaposition and blurring of twos: man *and* citizen, police *and* politics.[350]

Rancière suspects that attempts to delineate the political sphere also attempt to purify and evict politics from its stage, a delimiting function he ascribes to organizations of space which deny

[349] John Ralston Saul, "Reconciliation: Four Barriers to Paradigm Shifting," in Younging, Dewar and DeGagné, *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal*, 313.
[350] Rancière, *Dissensus*, 55-56. Rancière's contrast cuts right through Arendt's identification of household matters with a sphere of privacy, while retaining her critique of a public occupied only with the circulation of the economy.

its gaps and supplements.[351] This denial is effectuated by what he calls a logic of the police, which "consists, before all else, in recalling the obviousness of what there is, or rather what there is not, and its slogan is: 'Move along! There's nothing to see here!' The police is that which says that here, on this street, there's nothing to see and so nothing to do but move along."[352] Both the survivors of residential schools who speak with courage from the privacy of their lives, and those who linger to witness their evocations, resist the call to move along. Rancière's juxtaposed worlds create space *for* and *about* political disputes through the assumption that there *is* something to see. The practice of listening to those asserting such claims interrupts circulation and stages expressive contest.

Speaking of Derrida's concept of democracy to come, Rancière remarks:

> I cannot but agree with this principle. Derrida contrasts another democracy to so-called liberal democracy, placing two temporalities in the same time and two spaces in the same space. However, the precise nature of the problem lies in the way in which the two democracies are set in opposition. Derrida places liberal democracy as a form of government, on one side, and the infinite openness to the newcomer and wait for the event that evades all expectation, on the other. In my view something gets lost in this opposition between an *institution* and a *transcendental horizon*. What disappears is democracy as a practice….
>
> In my own work, I have tried to conceptualize democratic practice as the inscription of the part of those who have no part - which does not mean the 'excluded' but anybody whoever. Such an inscription is made by subjects who are 'newcomers', who allow new objects to appear as common concerns, and new voices to appear and to be heard."[353]

I have been describing the pattern of witnessing evinced by the TRC as a practice of public-making. By so doing, I have tried to put the question of democratic practices to those accounts of agonistic reconciliation that privilege disclosive contest as both the unsettling multiplication of counter-hegemonic narratives, and the further revelation of politics itself as an uncertain,

[351] Rancière, *Dissensus*, 54; 36.
[352] Rancière, *Dissensus*, 37.
[353] Rancière, *Dissensus*, 59-60.

expressive performance of memory, community and political identity. To my mind, agonistic reconciliation requires an engagement with the ethical practices of listening which are neither immanent to, presumed by, nor proceeding from adversarial relationships. Likewise, spaces for appearance are not produced by ontological reflection prompted by contest. Instead, parallel practices of making public space for disclosure paradoxically precede and yet depend upon the unprecedented appearances of exemplary claims which evoke alternative narratives of political community.

I have dwelt at length on the accounts of reconciliation proffered by Schaap and Norval. Through their varying engagements with Arendt, Derrida, Mouffe and others, each posits an optimism that truth-telling about state injustices can foment a further realization of the impossibility of a (re)united community, and the discovery of an injunction to postpone closure in order to make space for democratic participation as a perpetual process of contested reconciliation. This pattern of realization, impossibility and postponement finds expression through Derrida's figure of the preface as the impossible demand for an announced narrative which cannot need announcing, a figure well suited to the dangerous proposition of reconciliation as a logic of re-established unity. This pattern is also a useful device for explaining the two moments of witnessing as the respectful anticipation of disclosure and the effacement of this anticipation through the subsequent summary and testimony of high-profile figures. It is repeated in Schaap's insistence that only through an imaginative postponement can beginning be achieved in the present without constraining politics within an overarching supposition of community. But witnessing does not merely follow this pattern of disclosure, impossibility and postponement. Instead, as I have tried to show, it doubles it, forming a parallel practice which is neither reducible to disclosure nor occasioned by it.

Witnessing alleviates the concern that the spaces for expressive action necessarily restrict the boundaries of contest by fixing the terms of civic relationships ahead of time. Although the TRC's honorary witnessing symbolically and actually preceded the specificity of survivors' claims, witnessing as a condition of possibility appears so only by virtue of the unprecedented courage of survivors who appear in public and share their stories. What remains of Arendt's assertion of public space as intrinsically linked to action is the injunction to *make public* spaces available for disruptive and contingent expression, and the possibility of actually doing so, albeit only briefly and evanescently. This injunction cannot be made in the name of a community broken by its colonial hubris, nor in the name of the community assumed to be healed presently; it must be made instead in the name of democracy 'to come' and the natality of the newcomer. The responsibility to witness is thus neither the call to solidarity nor the imposition of a standard of judgment. It is the call to listen for what exceeds present horizons of democratic sensibility and justice. Prefatory listening parallels the practices of disjuncture which Rancière illustrates through the juxtaposition of worlds. As a public-making practice it exclaims 'there is something to see here!' This is the conclusion which Jill Scott borrows from Michael Ignatieff's summary of South Africa's TRC. As Ignatieff noted, "all who attended the hearings, 'even the harshest critics […] would concede that *something happened*".[354]

In the Canadian context, Jennifer Henderson distinguishes between the spectatorship of settler-society as the imposition of distance, impartiality, and disconnection, and spectatorship as the pledge to bear witness as an assumption of responsibility. For an example of such a pledge, she points to the "I am a witness" campaign orchestrated by the First Nations Child & Family

[354] Jill Scott, "*Forgifting*: Poetic and Performative Forgiveness in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," in Gobodo-Madikizela and Van Der Merwe, eds., *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness*, 213, emphasis in the original. Scott is citing Michael Ignatieff, Introduction to *Truth and lies: Stories from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa*, ed. J. Edelstein (Milpark: M&G Books, 2001), 20.

Caring Society of Canada. This campaign calls for witnesses to follow, in person or through local media, a lengthy legal dispute about discriminatory and unequal education funding for First Nations children on reserves.[355] Following Rancière, Henderson suggests this campaign tenders witnessing as a way to make public a disruption, a dislocation. It is a "collective effort to make visible a contest over the right to equality as a starting point, a confrontation of egalitarian and police logics."[356]

Catherine Cole suggests one contribution of South Africa's TRC was its designation of the public as *implicated* witnesses.[357] The commission intertwined the relationship between "the one who provides testimony and the one who bears witness to that testimony."[358] Of this relationship, she writes:

> The personalization of testimony at the TRC and its embodiment before an audience gave a sense of reality to a cascade of narratives that were *hard to believe*. These stories were fantastic in their gruesomeness, in the elaborate webs of intrigue, corruption, and depravity they revealed. Yet hearing the stories in the first person by direct witnesses gave some sense of individuation and humanity, drawing attention to the fact that the deeds being narrated were done by *people* to other *people*.[359]

The stories told by residential school survivors are also, though for different reasons, *hard to believe*. They are hard to believe because of the dislocations they engender in hegemonic narratives of Canada as a benevolent society and national community. I want to suggest that witnessing as a democratic practice of public-making touches on both these aspects: witnessing helps publish dislocations *through* its prefatory promise to believe what would otherwise be hard to believe. Cole suggests that implicated witnesses are invited to act as judges, participants, and performers.[360]

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[355] "i am a witness," First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, accessed July 02, 2016, https://fncaringsociety.com/i-am-witness.
[356] Henderson, "Transparency, Spectatorship, Accountability: Indigenous Families in Settler-State 'Postdemocracies'," 326.
[357] This phrase was also used by Commissioner Wilson. Marie Wilson, Edmonton Event, March 27, 2014.
[358] Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, 91-92.
[359] Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, 92, emphasis in the original.
[360] Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, 91.

In what follows, I want to suggest how prefatory witnessing might perform the public-making of disruptions *not* (only) through judgment and performative reiteration, but through an attendance to exemplarity which *forgoes* judgment. This form of witnessing may also involve the uptake of responsibility, as many have urged. Perhaps the possibility of extending witnessing beyond the work of honorary figures would require an assumption of responsibility as the publication of dislocations *within* witnesses themselves.

Can witnessing be extended?

The TRC commissioners urged the audiences at national events to take up practices of witnessing. At an induction ceremony in Vancouver, Marie Wilson remarked to the crowd, "These are our honorary witnesses, but you are all our honorable witnesses, and we need the help of all of you."[361] Designated witnesses were described as "public figures who take on a special responsibility for sharing the TRC's message of truth-telling and reconciliation", but event program brochures also noted: "we are all invited to be witnesses – to listen carefully to the truths that are shared and to share them with those that we know when we return to our own homes and communities."[362] Yet the prospect of witnessing by broader audiences, such as a non-indigenous settler society, immediately encounters a difficulty: how could those who have been so good at *not knowing* be good witnesses, when the regard of indifferent or hostile settlers and other onlookers might well be disrespectful towards the stories told by residential school survivors?

The success of witnessing as a decolonizing practice cannot depend on its adoption by all without replicating the presumption that public space is created through agreement on what is

[361] Marie Wilson, Vancouver Event, September 21, 2013.
[362] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *It's Time for Reconciliation: TRC Closing Event Program, Ottawa-Gatineau*, *May 31-June 3, 2015*, http://myrobust.com/growwithamp/TRC/Ottawa_2015/program/trc-program-web.pdf.

worth public debate. However, the suspicion in this question is warranted. An extended invitation to witness also extends the risks of appearing in public. As Gillian Whitlock argues, these include the risks particular to telling stories which contradict prevalent narratives of settler colonialism. "Indigenous writers and speakers are canny in their assessment of the risks they take when releasing indigenous testimony into the wider community," she suggests, "for what they have to say frequently calls the settler community to account."[363] Similarly, both Susan Dion and Paulette Regan reflect on the importance of invitation and the appropriate selection of stories as precursors of effective pedagogical spaces for these stories to be shared.[364] This is reflected in the TRC's distinction between public and private spaces where survivors could share as they chose. An extended witnessing would likewise be shaped by the selection of stories, silences, and the methods of conveying them chosen by indigenous storytellers and communities, though this would not fully abrogate the danger of disrespect accompanying such an extension.[365]

But the question of extending witnessing might also be posed as the hopeful prospect of facilitating widespread decolonizing transformations. In the remainder of this chapter, I consider these hopes and risks together, first through a discussion of witnessing as a form of responsiveness governed by acknowledgment rather than judgment, and second through a discussion of witnessing as the creation of pedagogical spaces for the publication of dissonance, including dissonance within the subject positions of witnesses themselves. This organization loosely mimics the odd

[363] Gillian Whitlock, "Active remembrance: testimony, memoir and the work of reconciliation," in *Rethinking settler colonialism: history and memory in Australia, Canada, Aotearoa New Zealand and South Africa*, ed. Annie E. Coombes (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 34.
[364] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 211; Dion, *Braiding Histories*, 46-47.
[365] Drawing on research from a settler community near my own, Elizabeth Furniss argues that silence can be both a strategic and principled response to settler colonial narratives. See Elizabeth Furniss, "Challenging the myth of indigenous peoples' 'last stand' in Canada and Australia: public discourse and the conditions of silence," in Coombes, *Rethinking settler colonialism*, 172-192.

temporality of witnessing as both a response to unprecedented claims, and as public-making which precedes them.

Witnessing is not a new starting-place for decolonizing transformations. Instead, it implies responsiveness to disruptive storytelling which provokes and invites acknowledgment. Even extended beyond the purview of select dignitaries, witnessing would remain dependent upon the courage of those sharing their stories, and upon the power of stories to provoke astonishment and evoke a sense of responsibility on the part of the listener and re-teller.[366] For instance, Dion describes her (re)telling of stories as a reply to "a call to take up an entrusted responsibility," adding that "the narratives make a claim on us and we are charged with passing them on."[367]

The curious priority of witnessing also affords it a second role in facilitating decolonizing transformations. This is its public-making function, which through Rancière's notion of juxtaposition I have suggested is also the publication of dissonance, contest, and plurality. This might well include the publication of 'cognitive dissonance' experienced by settler listeners eager to inscribe survivors' stories into familiar patterns of judgment. Interpreting witnessing as the creation of space for dissonance does not evade the prospect of disrespect or judgment, but it might reconfigure elements of those risks. Specifically, rather than presuming the respectfulness and solidarity of settler witnesses, through the publication of dissonance such witnessing continuously calls these into question. However, this does not eliminate the risk of witnessing itself as a potential strategy of closure, where attempts to bear witness to stories told by survivors "play out yet again that fraught relationality and desire for the closure of belonging which is the irreconcilable legacy of invasion and settlement."[368] To mitigate against this danger, witnessing can be distinguished

[366] Dion, *Braiding Histories*, 51-52.
[367] Dion, *Braiding Histories*, 31.
[368] Whitlock, "Active remembrance," 42.

from acts of solidarity which fulfil perceived settler obligations, or acts of judgment which elucidate common standards, possibilities to which I turn next.

Forgoing judgment

Witnessing complements - yet differs from - aversion and postponement in its relationship to judgment. One way to clarify the complementary relationship between exemplarity and its reception is through the question of how the judgments which close down contest might be suspended. To the accusation that the TRC naively believed survivors, the response could be given that the desire for juridical procedures effaces an understanding of witnessing as a deliberate relinquishment of judgment so as not to end contest by recourse to hegemonic norms. The political judgments enacted through truth-telling cannot amount to a regulative standard by which either a reconciled community or reconciliation itself is adjudicated, in part because truth commissions publish unprecedented political dilemmas and exemplary responses to them. These exemplary responses disclose new vocabularies of judgment and expose the inadequacy of existing standards and narratives long associated with state violence. These include the epistemological privileging of Western standards of objectivity. Survivors' stories do not (only) impugn settler colonialism by reference to hegemonic standards of truth and justice. They are unprecedented acts of judgment and imagination which exemplify characteristics worthy of admiration. These stories are agonistic and expressive in the sense that they proffer the possibility of transforming - in place of deriving - civic relationships characterized by settler colonial power structures. They also demonstrate the courage to appear in public which remains integral to political action.

This relinquishment might be construed as an alternative form of judgment - *political* judgment. In place of a pattern whereby particular conclusions are derived from universal standards, Norval's depiction of exemplarity asserts that distinctively political judgments *begin*

from particulars. Three considerations follow. First, as an ethical and political practice, witnessing differs from ontological argument as a catalyst for change. Second, the need for political judgments arise under conditions of unprecedentedness, either when previous judgments no longer seem suitable or when the terrain for judgment is new. Such unprecedentedness "typically takes the form of a reconsideration of the criteria guiding our actions, where the lines no longer intimate to us the way we are to go."[369] Unprecedentedness characterizes both the sense of being beyond the guidance of previous judgments, and also the claims made under such conditions. Exemplars emerge from dislocations of our ordinary ways of thinking and acting, such as the dislocations arising as memories clash publicly through truth commissions. From these dislocations, exemplars make available "an alternative imaginary horizon, something transcending the here and now, disclosing at least the possibility of new worlds."[370]

Honorary witnessing accords publicity to the varied narratives of loss, struggle, anger, personal triumph, and bewilderment told by survivors. But although this respectful anticipation of unknown narrative may be overshadowed by subsequent testifying and representing, its priority *remains*. It remains because the respect and publicity accorded to survivors cannot have been derived from the concordance of their narratives with an overarching logic of reconciliation. Witnessing is not a postponement or an aversion, so much as an evanescent precursor to public contest (which, by virtue of its appearance, such contest appears not to have needed) which takes courageous claims-making as its own precondition. For Schaap, judgment is suspended by the anticipation of retrospection. This retrospection is actual, as reconciliation engenders narratives of the past which displace alternatives. But it is also an imaginative deferral which can never quite

[369] Norval, "A Democratic Politics of Acknowledgment," 60. This metaphor of guiding lines is reminiscent of Arendt's quip that we must learn to think without a banister.
[370] Norval, "A Democratic Politics of Acknowledgment," 71.

resolve itself into retrospection: the community which might someday look back on reconciliation as its beginning will always be contested, and the space for novel action will require acting *as though* continuing to begin. Or, as Marie Wilson noted concerning the opening of the archival space at the University of Manitoba which would outlast the TRC, "this is just the beginning of the continuation."[371]

In this sense, witnessing complements commitments to aversion or postponement. First, it forgoes judgment without appealing to the retrospective unity of a (someday) reconciled community, an appeal which can only turn out to be the perspective of a (someday) reconciling community. Meaningful action requires spectators because the correlate of the freedom to act amid contingency is the impossibility of dictating ahead of time what our actions will mean, how they will be remembered. But instead of projecting such remembrance to the future, witnessing creates fragile public spaces in which narratives are brought into contest with each other. Finally, witnessing suggests a form of engagement with unsettling claims which might broadly extend agonistic cooperation. Perhaps an engagement with exemplary claims can exceed participation in such claims-making itself, extending witnessing beyond the purview of a handful of public figures.

Witnessing prompts and responds to the unprecedentedness of exemplarity. This unprecedentedness is not an utter novelty, an utter strangeness. Norval takes Nietzsche's point that exemplarity is a species of genius both familiar to and different from us. In its difference it makes *demands* upon us, a call to *follow* which we can nevertheless, because of its familiarity, interpret not as an emulation of a stranger but as an emulation of a possible self.[372] If following an exemplar meant imitation, this would tend towards a model of deriving judgments from universals, with the

[371] Marie Wilson, Ottawa Event, June 02, 2015.
[372] Norval, "A Democratic Politics of Acknowledgment," 73; Aletta Norval, "'Writing a Name in the Sky': Rancière, Cavell, and the Possibility of Egalitarian Inscription," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 4 (2012): 823.

pattern set by an exemplar the functional equivalent of national or rational postulates. However, Norval locates the specifically *democratic* impetus of exemplarity in the responsiveness it enjoins upon others who hear unprecedented claims. Following Linda Zerilli, Norval asks whether *acknowledgment* rather than agreement is the democratic modality of responsiveness to exemplary claims. This acknowledgement means responding to exemplarity by saying "go ahead", which can only be done by also acknowledging a dislocation in our way of seeing the world, occasioned by the unprecedentedness of both an exemplar's claims and the situation calling for revised judgment.[373] Such acknowledgment unites the democratic commitment of exemplary dissent with a similar commitment by those urging exemplars to go ahead.

But if claims-making commits the *claimant* to a democratic identification, it is the facilitating and encouraging 'go ahead', which extends this commitment to their audiences. Such a commitment does not incur because exemplars are *right*, in the sense of revealing a binding universal which demands our agreement in particulars. Instead it stems from the possibility that there is a *need* for unprecedentedness in our judgments, that the disruptions of our former patterns of judgment brought about by exemplars not only reveals the baselessness of political foundations, but commits us (as a matter of action) to responsiveness and aversion.[374] This reveals similarities and differences between witnessing and acknowledgment. The first similarity is of course the resistance proffered by the pattern of witnessing to the supposition that political judgment means soliciting agreement by applying universal principles to particular situations. Both tactics criticize the damaging prospects of approaching reconciliation through an insistence on 'objective' criteria for judgment, because such criteria would be unable to disrupt hegemonic ways of thinking and acting.

[373] Norval, "A Democratic Politics of Acknowledgment," 73-74.
[374] Norval, "A Democratic Politics of Acknowledgment," 63.

The responsibility which Norval attributes to exemplary claims-making is a responsibility to act in the name of democracy against its present configuration. The responsiveness appropriate to these claims also engenders a commitment, to bear the disruption and encourage exemplars to continue. It is therefore a paradoxical responsiveness, because it prompts rather than responds. Acknowledgment thus performs a similar role to witnessing, with its encouragement of exemplarity prompted by the irascible presence of remainders which resist closure. Like prefatory witnessing, acknowledgment resists the pattern of call and response, problem (settler colonialism) and judgment (reconciliation) in its formulation of responsiveness as a willingness to hear new claims. But perhaps witnessing retains its distinction from suspended judgment and the encouragement to 'go on' through its willingness to forgo (to go before and thereby relinquish) judgment, by a commitment to believe, remember and make public the stories of survivors.

Pedagogical spaces for decolonization

Two questions remain, pressed by the notion of a *responsibility* to acknowledge. First, is there a comparable responsibility to witness? Second, can a responsibility appropriate to witnessing be extended beyond the work of honorary public figures who undertake the commitment to prepare to listen? As to the first question, clear descriptions of responsibility were advanced by both the TRC and by witnesses themselves. Said one: "as a witness I committed to … carry the stories of school survivors with me".[375] The brochure for one National Event put it succinctly: "A highlight of TRC National Events is the induction of Honourary Witnesses, prominent public figures who undertake to bear witness to the truths of the residential school Survivors and share what they have heard and learned with others." The pamphlet adds:

> The TRC's mandate calls for 'ongoing reconciliation' involving survivors, governments, churches and 'the people of Canada'. Many prominent citizens are taking up the challenge as TRC 'Honourary Witnesses'. They join Survivors and

[375] David Langtree, Ottawa Event, June 01, 2015.

> others to exchange personal experiences of facing and sharing residential school truths.[376]

Alongside the emphasis on sharing what was seen and heard, two standout points emerge from this description. First, this is a responsibility *taken up*, *carried* by witnesses (whom Marie Wilson also called *champions*), and second, witnesses *join* with survivors.[377]

There is a close similarity between this twofold call - to take up responsibility and to join with survivors - and Paulette Regan's portrait of witnessing as a response to two injunctions. Regan casts witnessing as first, the assumption of responsibility appropriate to settlers as *beneficiaries* of colonial legacies, and second, as a pledge of solidarity appropriate to settlers as *allies* of indigenous peoples. There are three points of Regan's argument I wish to extract: her notion of pedagogical spaces, the transformations they might effect, and the perpetual uncertainty of taking up responsibility from within conflicting subject positions. This brief reading of her text is intended to draw lines of congruence between decolonizing transformations and the responsiveness of settler-witnesses, including myself. Such congruence features the possibility that the responsibility taken up through witnessing denotes more than personal transformation, but also functions as a responsibility to juxtapose, and so make public, the contrasting subject positions accompanying witnessing. While relatively few Honorary Witnesses contributed to the spaces for survivors to tell their stories, this reading of Regan's arguments advances the uncertain possibility of an extended pattern of witnessing as a pedagogical space-making which might belong to decolonizing practices.

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[376] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Québec National Event Program*, *April 24-27, 2013*, http://www.myrobust.com/websites/montreal/File/TRC-070%2005%20QNEprogramfinal-english.pdf.

[377] To her rhetorical question, "What will it take for us to shout loud enough for the whole country to hear us?" Wilson replied: "Ça va prendre plusieurs voix. Ça va prendre toutes nos voix. Et heureusement on a déjà des… champions … et nous les nommes les témoins honoraires". Marie Wilson, Québec National Event, 24 April 2013.

To Regan, pedagogical spaces capable of facilitating decolonizing transformations among settlers are established in part through witnessing plurality. There is more than a passing resemblance between the hope Regan invests in encounters with plurality and James Tully's excavations of the resistances and alternatives to hegemonic narratives of citizenship. Like Tully, Regan expects dialogue to destabilize frequently perpetuated myths. Her primary example is the myth of the settler as peacemaker, and the potential to re-imagine such myths through encounters hosted in sacred spaces. She charts this transformative potential through her own experience of an encounter between church representatives and Indigenous hosts within a Gitxsan feast hall in northern B.C. Encounters in sacred spaces where "Indigenous diplomacy, law, and peacemaking have been enacted since time immemorial" expose witnesses to multiple perspectives.[378] Borrowing Natalie Oman's description of witnessing, Regan explains how such an encounter exposes "witnesses to diverse perspectives on the same incidents," a process "designed to inspire reflection on … the multiplicity of their truths."[379] "Truth telling from multiple perspectives," Regan claims, "creates space for dialogue."[380] This witness of plurality is necessary, but insufficient to foster decolonizing spaces, which must also be characterized by resurgent attentiveness to indigenous law.[381] Concerning reconciliation, Regan argues the truth commission "must provide critical pedagogical space wherein Indigenous peoples reclaim and revitalize the cultures, laws, and histories that colonizers attempted to destroy in residential schools."[382]

The transformations facilitated by pedagogical spaces require Canadian bystanders - not just perpetrators - to assume a responsibility which is at once "decolonizing and rebalancing".[383]

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[378] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 211.
[379] Natalie Oman, as cited in Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 198-199.
[380] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 64.
[381] See also The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Reconciliation*, 45.
[382] Regan, *Unsetting the Settler Within*, 147.
[383] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 211.

By this, Regan indicates a moral responsibility, arguing that "a Canadian society of perpetrators and bystanders must remember itself not as 'innocent' but as complicit."[384] Both Regan and the TRC acknowledge the difficulty of this proposition, with Regan noting "many are reluctant to take up the burden of responsibility."[385] Likewise, Wilton Littlechild suggested that "there are many who will put on blinders" to the TRC's findings, but added: "we're not calling on you to accept the full brunt of blame … we're calling on you to open your minds".[386] Crucially, for Regan this assumption of responsibility accompanies and is expressed by witnessing. "We bear witness," she writes, "and in doing so, we accept responsibility for making change in the world."[387] Sharing and witnessing the multiplicity of memories before a truth commissions can have two effects: it can transform survivors into warriors, and settler-listeners into allies. Regan asks two questions: What if a survivor came before the commission and walked out a warrior? "What if a settler came before the commission as a colonizer and walked out an Indigenous ally?"[388]

Unsettling experiences prompt a *taking-up* of settler subjectivity as complicit, as bystander or as beneficiary of settler colonialism. Grammatically, Regan expresses this through the term "as settlers", set off with a comma.[389] Through encounters within pedagogical spaces, this identification can shift to "as allies".[390] But this is not the terminus of the decolonizing experience. Instead, decolonization is "a lifelong struggle filled with uncertainty and risk taking," characterized by continued participation in *both* settler and ally identifications.[391] Thus the terminus is instead the hybrid term, settler-ally. "As a settler ally," Regan writes, "I must

[384] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 177.
[385] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 178.
[386] Wilton Littlechild, Ottawa Event, June 02, 2015.
[387] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 230.
[388] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 229.
[389] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 196, 197, 200, 203.
[390] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 230.
[391] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 217-218.

continuously confront the colonizer-perpetrator in myself, interrogating my own position as a beneficiary of colonial injustice. Exploring the epistemological tensions of working between these two identities means embracing persistent uncertainty and vulnerability."[392] I have discussed at length how witnessing makes space for an expressive contest about reconciliation as a complementary democratic practice of public-making, rather than as an immanent respect or ontological realization. Perhaps this public-making faculty includes publishing the unsettling tension between witnessing as settler, and witnessing as ally. Perhaps making space for agonistic contest would require listening both as settlers and as allies. Witnessing exemplarity might be "jarring" not merely in the new identifications it makes possible, but in this experience of juxtaposed subject positions.[393] Thinking with Rancière suggests how such a juxtaposition of identifications could provide political space by overlaying a world of settler colonialism with a world of allies of indigenous peoples.

However, it is worth asking to what extent the transformative assumption of responsibility remains at odds with witnessing as a preparatory public-making. Although disturbing settler identities may engender recognition of settler dysfunction and prompt closer alliance with indigenous peoples, solidarity and transformation differ from the creation of public space for contest and natality. For instance, Sonali Chakravarti portrays listening as a critical responsiveness with a close affinity to agonistic action. To her, listening to *anger* is an interpretive exercise allowing commissioners and listeners to participate with testifiers in sharing the *risks* of upheaval and transition, specifically "the risk of being ignored, rejected, and forgotten."[394] This process of sharing risk, she argues, is the basis for mutual trust. Because truth commissions afford many

[392] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 230, 236.
[393] Norval, "'Writing a Name in the Sky'," 823.
[394] Chakravarti, *Sing the Rage*, 16.

opportunities to listen to anger and thus to cultivate this trust, they are nurseries or schools providing "an opportunity for citizen relationships to emerge and set a precedent that will outlast the truth commission."[395] Moreover, this pedagogical repetition of risk-sharing depends on trust which is advanced *prior* to judgment. Chakravarti writes:

> Intuitively, the expression of anger seems to go against any audience pre-disposition to trust the witness. Precisely for this reason, the decision to trust the witness at the outset of testimony establishes a different affective landscape for the communication that makes up testimony. An attitude of trusting the witness is only the beginning, however, of a process that is grounded in the expression of anger and the response to it as a model for the work of citizenship.[396]

However, the chief difficulty of incorporating these insights within a framework of agonistic reconciliation is whether witnessing affords only temporary spaces for public-making, or whether it is a pedagogical practice to be modeled as a form of communicative citizenship. This invokes the question of whether witnessing could be employed in permanent educational spaces as a species of training. Of the TRC's ninety-four Calls to Action, eleven deal directly with education policy, with many others containing various training or education provisions. These include calls for newly developed curriculum concerning the history and legacy of residential schools, and increased "student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect."[397] In the context of Regan's claims about the pedagogical potential of spaces created for encounters with plurality, this suggests the intriguing possibility of witnessing within educational settings - as related practices of learning, public-making, and perhaps most significantly, space for the appearance of natality.

[395] Chakravarti, *Sing the Rage*, 23.
[396] Chakravarti, *Sing the Rage*, 22. By 'witness', Chakravarti refers to those sharing their experiences with injustice.
[397] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, 7.

I will only advance a tentative response to this possibility. Regan's account countenances an interpretation of witnessing which includes the responsibility to publish the complex juxtaposition of settler and beneficiary subject positions of witnesses. The "dissonances, gaps and fissures" made public by a truth commission might also extend to those who witness survivors' stories. [398] This interpretation aligns pedagogical spaces with public-making practices that sustain natality, rather than with a responsibility to witness generated from procedural precepts of communicative rationality which structure encounters with anger ahead of time. Taken as a means of bypassing the risks of public appearance, a model of citizenship-training predicated on shared risk between listener and storyteller neglects the sustained uncertainty accompanying the juxtaposition of complicity and respect by settler witnesses. Conversely, sharing risk might indicate the creation of spaces for expressive contest in which witnesses endure irresolution and risk for the sake of welcoming astonishing narratives.

Conclusion

In its excessive attentiveness to what remains to come, witnessing is a democratic practice of public-making. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's use of Honorary Witnesses to assure survivors they would be heard and remembered provokes theoretical reflection about agonistic reconciliation as an expressive contest about past and future civic relationships. In particular, this technique of creating public spaces for expression prompts an interpretation of agonism as not only disclosive claims-making which draws attention to plural memories and the concomitant impossibility of closure, but also the accompanying practice of listening *for* exemplarity which is neither a product nor immanent ethos of contest. Alongside promising and

[398] Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, 160.

forgiving as faculties which sustain spaces in which courageous truth-telling can be remembered and made real, witnessing is an agonistic excess for the sake of natality. It is a commitment to the 'who' revealed through expressive action, because this aspect of forthcoming disclosure is intimated prior to the content of the stories enacted through contest. In this anticipation, the 'who' revealed behind the backs of actors through their words and deeds is not only appreciable in retrospect, but is the condition of possibility of a witnessing willing to make public the storytellers who may yet appear.

This makes witnessing a terrible risk to reconciliation. It is a risk because it necessarily forgoes judgment, necessarily makes *contest* public by its reception of narratives which can unsettle foundational assumptions about the places and spaces appropriate to democratic disagreement. This risk is not mitigated by the prospect of later rendering judgment in the (re)telling afforded to witnesses, because the public-making task of witnessing will already have been accomplished; what was witnessed will have duly entered into the contestatory, organized remembrance of the *polis* and perhaps will have disrupted it. Practices of witnessing thus embrace the risk Schaap identified: granting publicity to plural narratives of past injustices might unsettle the very constructions of the public community held as both assumption and ambition of reconciliation. The risk of witnessing the 'to come' is that although reconciliation can be announced, commemorated, and made public, it cannot be pre-scribed.

Like the rented halls in which survivors shared their stories, the spaces for agonistic reconciliation are fragile. There is a temptation to look to practices of witnessing to recuperate something lasting out of the transitory, tentative and temporary spaces of truth commissions. It seems more likely, however, that witnessing resembles exemplarity in this respect: repeatable, but never a model for civic relationships which would do away with contest and its risks. It is

repeatable because of the natality of newcomers entering the world, and because new exemplary narratives might provoke witnessing as a response. As a paradoxical preparation for and responsiveness to the courage exemplified by those who tell unsettling stories about Canada's settler colonial perplexities, perhaps democratic practices of witnessing might address the threat of apathy hanging over the truth commission's recommendations and the survivors' truth-telling, the threat that agonistic expressiveness might fall on deaf ears. It is too early to tell what narratives will be told about reconciliation in Canada; but perhaps the untimely priority of witnessing is required for precisely such a moment.

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