Rewinding and unwinding
Art and justice in times of political transition

Eliza Garnsey*

## <A>Abstract [1]

The purpose of this article is to theorise the relationship between art and justice in times of transition so that a broader spectrum of political possibilities and their implications can be imagined. The aim is to offer a way to think about, and to render visible, the web of relationships which constitute this bond. By undertaking a close analysis and narrative investigation of Philip Miller, Gerhard Marx, and Maya Marx's *REwind* 2007-2013, I use the artwork to elucidate four key ideas relating to paradigms, agency, encounters, and space which make art relevant and meaningful to transitional justice. These four ideas frame two central arguments: 1) an account of transitional justice without aesthetic dimensions is insufficient, precisely because transitional justice 'acknowledge[s] itself as a process inseparable from feelings of justice'. Artworks can fill out affective topologies in ways that facilitate or stimulate recognition and a feeling of being there; and, 2) that art plays an important role in animating and activating individual narratives so that they take on collective importance. In doing so, the past can be shared so that a new political future can be imagined.

## <A>Keywords

Transitional justice; art; aesthetics; South Africa.

* Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge. Email: esg35@cam.ac.uk

Fourteen sets of black headphones hang in a row. Inside each earpiece are the sounds of singing, orchestral music, sobbing and spoken testimonies—the sighing of 'verbalised punctuation'.[2] At either end of the line of headphones there is a speaker which projects the distinct screech of a cassette tape rewinding and the sound of a woman's voice lamenting: 'I wish this news could just rewind'. These are the sounds of Philip Miller's operatic cantata, which is based on the testimonies of apartheid survivors given during the public hearings of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In front of the headphones seven flat screen televisions each show a different stop-frame animation. Created by Gerhard and Maja Marx in response to, and in conversation with, Miller's music, these images form the dual component in the collaborative audio-visual installation, *REwind* 2007-2013 (Fig. 1) which was exhibited in *Imaginary Fact* in the South African Pavilion at the 55th International Art Biennale in Venice (the Venice Biennale), Italy in 2013.[3] *REwind* embodies a literal and conceptual meeting point between transitional justice and visual art. The TRC unfolds through *REwind* and *REwind* is given form through the TRC.

---

[2] Brenton Maart, 'Imaginary Fact: Exhibition Catalogue', (Grahamstown, South Africa: National Arts Festival 2013) at 19.

[3] Sections of *REwind* can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzdGruYiTyo ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gya0j3w0PY ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcDBXvKZ6IA hosted by Philip Miller.

Figure 1
Philip Miller, Gerhard Marx, Maja Marx
*REwind* 2007-2013
Audio-visual installation with monitors and headsets; dimensions variable
Photography by Giovanna Zen; Courtesy of the National Arts Festival

While aesthetic turns in relevant fields, particularly international relations (IR), are relatively well established, the specific consideration of transitional justice and aesthetics—the arts specifically—is in its infancy. The overarching argument in the emerging scholarship—from diverse disciplines—is that legalistic transitional justice modes alone 'cannot begin to understand the complex but everyday habitual modes in which the past colours the present'—a position reflected in the normative underpinnings of this article.[4]  Images and artworks, have an afterlife beyond their creation and so offer

---

[4] Quote from Vikki Bell, 'Contemporary Art and Transitional Justice in Northern Ireland: The Consolation of Form', *Journal of Visual Culture,* 10/3 (2011), 324-53 at 327. The diverse disciplines include, socio-legal studies: Clara Ramírez-Barat (ed.), *Transitional Justice, Culture, and Society: Beyond Outreach* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2014); Peter D Rush and Olivera Simić (eds.), *The Arts of Transitional Justice* (Springer, 2014). Sociology: Bell, 'Contemporary Art and Transitional Justice in Northern Ireland'. Literature: Carrol Clarkson, *Drawing the Line* (Oxford University Press, 2013a); Siphiwe Ignatius Dube, 'Transitional Justice Beyond the Normative: Towards a Literary Theory of Political Transitions', *The International Journal of Transitional Justice,* 5 (2011), 177-97. Arts: Erin Mosely, 'Visualizing Apartheid: Re-Framing Truth and Reconciliation through Contemporary South

a way into understanding this complexity; '[i]mages help expand the range of 'what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought' and… what can be done' in times of political transition.[5] This argument draws parallels with the aesthetic turn in IR which establishes that aesthetic insight is central to knowing social and political worlds and aesthetic insight is what is known about these worlds; images function to produce and maintain these worlds, and they also open up spaces for new political thinking, possibilities, and action.[6]

*How* artworks open up these spaces is a key consideration in the emerging scholarship on transitional justice and art. In particular, three paradigms are dominant in this scholarship. The first paradigm relates to the dialectic of memory, where art serves both as witness and as memorial to the past.[7] The concern with memory arises out of transitional justice's deeply embedded commitment to addressing past atrocities and trauma in order to prevent future reoccurrence. The second paradigm is about temporal complexity, where artworks simultaneously reference the past, present, and future.[8] In

---

African Art', in Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E.  Milton, and Monica Eileen Patterson (eds.), *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 128-41; Rosemarie Buikema, 'Performing Dialogical Truth and Restorative Justice: The Role of Art in the Becoming Post-Apartheid of South Africa', *Journal of Memory Studies* 5/3 (2012), 282-93; Yasco Horsman, *Theatres of Justice* (California: Stanford University Press 2011). Film studies: Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie  Van De Peer (eds.), *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film* (IB Tauris, 2013).

[5] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (Verso, 2009) at 103 as quoted in Frank Möller, *Visual Peace* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) at 20.

[6] For an overview of these arguments in IR see Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); Christine Sylvester, *Art/Museums: International Relations Where We Least Expect It* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009); Alex Danchev and Debbie Lisle, 'Art, Politics, Purpose', *Review of International Studies,* 35 (2009), 775-79; Lene Hansen, 'Theorizing the Image for Security Studies', *European Journal of International Relations,* 17/1 (2011), 51-74.

[7] See in particular Fayen D'evie, 'Dispersed Truths and Displaced Memories: Extraterritorial Witnessing and Memorializing by Diaspora through Public Art', in Peter D Rush and Olivera Simić (eds.), *The Arts of Transitional Justice* (Springer, 2014), 63-79; Ksenija Bilbija et al., *The Art of Truth-Telling About Authoritarian Rule* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisonsin Press 2005); Buikema, 'Performing Dialogical Truth and Restorative Justice'; Vikki Bell and Mario Di Paolantonio, 'The Haunted Nomos: Activist-Artists and the (Im)Possible Politics of Memory in Transitional Argentina', *Cultural Politics,* 5/2 (2009), 149-78; Pamela Blotner, 'Art out of the Rubble', in Eric Stover and Harvey M.  Weinstein (eds.), *My Neighbour, My Enemy: Justice and Community in the Aftermath of Mass Atrocity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 268-86.

[8] See in particular Bell, 'Contemporary Art and Transitional Justice in Northern Ireland'; Laura Mcleod, Jovana Dimitrijevic, and Biliana  Rakocevic, 'Artistic Activism, Public Debate and Temporal

doing so, they intervene in the complex practices and directionality of transitions. The third paradigm of productive antagonism furthers a commitment to dissensus being valuable in the pursuit of transitional justice and political change, where art contests 'histories' and brings about catharsis.[9]

There is a tendency for these paradigms to be theorised in discrete terms, as separate pursuits. Rarely is art situated across a spectrum of possibilities. This results in a type of partial framing which narrows the value of the complexity and ambiguity of art, and also sits uncomfortably within the commitment to pluralism that underlies much of this scholarship. There is also slippage about agency. Agency is attributed to different subjects, including artworks, artists, viewers, unspecified 'publics', distant observers, and institutions. The differing claims to agency points towards the need for a thicker conception of transitional justice and art which acknowledges these slippages as essential to its dynamism.

There is also a noticeable deficit of spatial considerations—beyond the space of art objects—in discussions about art in the existing literature—largely due to much of the literature being focused on single art forms.  The practice of transitional justice in physical sites of former conflicts (such as the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina which is based in a former prison building), or in mobile spaces (such as the TRC which travelled throughout South Africa), or in community spaces (such as Rwanda's Gacaca courts) has social and political significance. The existing significance of the space of

---

Complexities: Fighting for Transitional Justice in Serbia', in Peter D Rush and Olivera Simić (eds.), *The Arts of Transitional Justice* (Springer, 2014); Mosely, 'Visualizing Apartheid'.
[9] See in particular Rama Mani, 'Women, Art and Post-Conflict Justice', *International Criminal Law Review,* 11 (2011), 543-60; Carrol Clarkson, 'Drawing the Line: Justice and the Art of Reconciliation', in Antje Du  Bois-Pedain and François Du Bois (eds.), *Justice and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Cambridge Cambridge University Press 2008); Robyn Leslie, 'Truth Will Set You Free: Implications of a Creative Narrative for the 'Official' Discourse of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission', in Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie  Van De Peer (eds.), *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film* (IB Tauris, 2013). The phrase 'productive antagonism' is borrowed from Michael J Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013) at 3.

transitional justice takes on even more importance when coupled with the realm of visual art which has its own spatially significant practices, particularly regarding practices of display and exhibition curation. The location and production of justice within specific art spaces needs to be pushed further so that analysis moves beyond the artwork as an object alone.

The purpose of this article is to further theorise the relationship between art and justice in times of transition so that a thicker spectrum of political possibilities and their implications can be imagined. The aim is to offer a way to think about, and to render visible, the web of connections which constitute the relationship between transitional justice and art—to form the beginnings of a broader theoretical framing. By undertaking a close visual analysis and narrative investigation of *REwind* I discursively elucidate four key ideas relating to: 1) the paradigms of memory, time, and emotions; 2) the recognition of agency; 3) aesthetic encounters; and, 4) spatial practices of display, which make art relevant and meaningful to transitional justice.

This theorising frames two central arguments. The first argument arises out of a general meeting of art and transitional justice: an account of transitional justice without aesthetic dimensions is insufficient, precisely because transitional justice 'acknowledge[s] itself as a process inseparable from *feelings* of justice'.[10] Artworks can fill out affective topologies in ways that facilitate or stimulate recognition and a feeling of being there.[11] This recognition is essential in order to comprehend and respond to the diverse claims of individuals and groups affected both directly and indirectly by conflict. The second argument emerges from the specific focus on *REwind*: that art plays an important role in animating and activating the narratives of individuals so that they take

---

[10] Eugene Mcnamee, 'Fields of Opportunity', in Peter D Rush and Olivera Simić (eds.), *The Arts of Transitional Justice* (Springer, 2014), 1-24 at 22.
[11] Jill Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics* (IB Tauris, 2012) at 61.

on collective importance. In doing so, the past can be shared so that a new political future can be imagined. The importance of establishing a shared collective vision of the past has become 'a trope in the discourse of political transition'.[12]

I begin by drawing attention to the methodological approach in which the article is embedded. This introduces a range of ethical concerns which return throughout the article. In Section 2 I examine how paradigms of memory, time, and emotions reverberate in *REwind,* generating an expectation that the process of reconciliation begins with the projection of a past worth remembering. The past is circulated and mediated so that the political present of both individuals and the nation-state can be shaped. In Section 3 I look at how people generate political agency through the re-telling of their stories and through the re-imagining of their testimonies in artistic form. Politics revolves around what is seen and said and who has the ability to see it and say it. The struggle for rights which the struggle against apartheid epitomised, is at its heart a struggle for equal recognition. People—both South African and international audiences—as 'agents of political becoming' make this recognition possible. The fourth section explores how the artwork performs a kind of transitional justice in the openings created by aesthetic encounters. Through these encounters the artwork becomes an artistic intervention in South Africa's transitional justice narrative emerging in the wake of apartheid. In the last section I investigate how the invited and invented spaces of *REwind* shape South Africa's transitional justice narrative. The iteration of *REwind* exhibited in the geo-political space of the Venice Biennale presented an image of South Africa seeking to continue to heal its internal wounds, while offering itself as an archetype of political transition to onlookers.

---

[12] Ruti G. Teitel, *Globalizing Transitional Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) at 14.

## <A>Reflecting on images of troubled histories

Since the inherent subjectivity of art is part of its dynamic complexity and potential, the fundamental epistemological and ontological assumptions of the article are grounded in critical interpretivism, where subjective knowledge is both how the world may be known and what is known of the world. This methodological approach translates into a concern for ethics and reflexivity, which is especially important in the context of transitional justice research—particularly in 'post-apartheid' South Africa—where legacies of violence, discrimination, and vocal dominance are of central concern. South Africa remains scarred by the physical, structural, and ideological violence and trauma generated by apartheid; scars which continue to circumscribe the political and social interactions between the state and its citizens, and between citizens.[13] Studying such troubled 'histories' requires a commitment to the ethical concerns which emerge through the process of interpretation and are, in turn, re-embedded through interpretive research.[14]

The creative process 'is openly complicit, enmeshed in both that which it wishes to interrogate and that which it renders possible.'[15] *REwind* is embedded in the context of 'post-apartheid' South African artists working with the TRC as both an archive of material and a process to be explored, where 'truth' can be problematised and gaps filled or exposed.[16] While this article largely—and intentionally—focuses on the progressive

---

[13] See Richard Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[14] Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (Routledge, 2012) at 22.

[15] Leslie, 'Truth Will Set You Free' at 172.

[16] For discussions of a range of works of art—including Judith Mason's *The man who sang and the woman who kept silent*, Jane Taylor, the Handspring Puppet Company and William Kentridge's production of *Ubu and the Truth Commission*—which address the TRC see Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford University Press, 2005); Buikema, 'Performing Dialogical Truth and Restorative Justice'; Carrol Clarkson, *Drawing the Line: Toward an Aesthetics of Transitional Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2013b); Catherine M Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth*

aspects of this art, it is important to keep in mind that art can equally disrupt conflict resolution; complicating, upsetting narratives of transition.

In translating material from the TRC into *REwind*, the artists face 'ethical questions about what it means to work selectively with stories that have been told at such personal cost'.[17] What does it mean that the artists have selected certain testimonies and not others? What does it mean to reinterpret and perform other people's stories? What does informed consent really mean in the context of the artists seeking it from the people whose testimonies they recreate? What does it mean in a 'post-apartheid' context that these particular artists created this work? Furthermore, what does it mean for me as an author—with my own national and institutional embeddedness—to make a further selection about which artwork I choose to discuss and which stories I choose to highlight? While I cannot hope to do justice to the complex and troubled histories of apartheid in a necessarily succinct manner, the processes of selection, re-imagination, re-interpretation and analysis of traumatic events provoke ethical encounters which must be acknowledged and continually reflected upon if representative violence is not to be re-inscribed. These concerns underpin the article and return throughout.

The article emerges from the intersection of art theory and social sciences 'methods' broadly understood; 'the politics of images is far too complex to be assessed through a single method'.[18] The visual analysis and narrative investigation of the artwork sits alongside a seven-month period of participant observation fieldwork spent 'living'

---

*Commission: Stages of Transition* (Indiana University Press, 2010); Leslie, 'Truth Will Set You Free'; Mosely, 'Visualizing Apartheid'; Cara Moyer-Duncan, 'Truth, Reconciliation and Cinema: Reflections on South Africa's Recent Past in *Ubuntu's Wounds* and *Homecoming*', in Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie Van De Peer (eds.), *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film* (IB Tauris, 2013).

[17] Catherine Cole, 'Reverberations of Testimony: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Art and Media', in Clara Ramirez-Barat (ed.), *Transitional Justice, Culture, and Society: Beyond Outreach* (New York Social Science Research Council, 2014) at 407.

[18] Roland Bleiker, 'Pluralist Methods for Visual Global Politics', *Millennium-Journal of International Studies,* 43/3 (2015), 872-90 at 873.

with *REwind* at the Venice Biennale. While this fieldwork included around 75 semi-structured interviews with artists, exhibition organisers, Biennale staff members, and visitors the Biennale, the theoretically focussed claims made here are informed primarily by visual experience and the attention to looking embedded in art theory. Insight emerges through the processes of looking, theorising, and writing: 'astonishing things happen if one gives oneself over to the process of seeing again and again: aspect after aspect of the picture seems to surface'.[19] This is reflected in the text which deliberately weaves between the narrative attitudes of art theory—highlighted by the descriptive paragraphs which begin each section—and the analytical statements of social sciences in order to ensure the research arrives at the discursive meditation and 'self-reflectiveness required to understand the complexities of visual global politics'.[20]

## <A>Circulating memories, time, and emotions

*… Miller's operatic compositions present an archive of re-imagined voices in an act of remembering.  In front of the headphones, the glossy rectangles of seven flat screen televisions float on a dark wall.  Each of the screens shows a different stop-frame animation.  Time slows down as photographic stills of houses, the text of written testimonies, haunting faces, charred remnants of letter bombs, and domestic scenes, appear and disappear; present and absent.[21]*

---

[19] Timothy J Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (Yale University Press, 2006) at 5.
[20] Bleiker, 'Pluralist Methods for Visual Global Politics',   at 872.
[21] Please note the italics do not indicate that this passage is a quote, it indicates the passage to be a narrative description written by the author.

'The process of reconciliation begins with… the projection… of a past worth remembering'.[22] *REwind* navigates three key paradigms relating to memory, time, and affect so that views of the past are circulated and mediated; creating a discursive impression of 'a past worth remembering'. Memories circulate throughout *REwind*. The dominant voice in *REwind*—as it was exhibited at the Venice Biennale—is that of Eunice Miya. Miya's voice is reimagined by a performer who speaks and sings the sighs, gasps, pauses, and words of her testimony about hearing of her son's—Godfrey Jabulani Miya—death, given at the TRC:

> The reason why I am here again is because… nobody had come to tell me that Jabulani had passed away. First of all, we were listening to the news, with my daughter. One of the children was shown on TV who had a gun on his chest. Only to find out that it was my son, Jabulani. I prayed. I said, "Oh no, Lord!" I wished the news could be rewind.[23]

Jabulani Miya was killed in what later became known as the 'Gugulethu Seven incident', when on 3 March 1986 seven young anti-apartheid activists were killed by members of the South African Police. For a long time, the circumstances surrounding their deaths were clouded in controversy with official narratives contradicting eyewitness testimonies. In 1996 the TRC officer charged with investigating the incident wrote that "it is our view that these young men were led into an ambush by the security forces after they had been infiltrated by askaris [police informants] from Vlakplaas, who participated

---

[22] Clarkson, 'Drawing the Line' at 17.

[23] Maart, 'Imaginary Fact: Exhibition Catalogue', at 74. This section of film can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzdGruYiTyo. It is important to note that the exact words of Eunice Miya's testimony used in *REwind* differ slightly from the official TRC record, see Eunice Miya, 'Testimony of Eunice Miya', http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans%5Cpolls/ct00818.htm, accessed 22 February 2015.

in the training of these men and provided them with weapons."[24] The final report of the TRC details the deaths of the seven men and the involvement of specific police officers:

> …shortly after 07h00, seven men aged between sixteen and twenty three were shot dead in Gugulethu. They were Mr Mandla Simon Mxinwa, Mr Zanisile Zenith Mjobo [CT00116/FLA], Mr Zola Alfred Swelani [CT00700/FLA], Mr Godfrey Jabulani Miya [CT00818/FLA], Mr Christopher Piet, Mr Themba Mlifi [CT00100/FLA] and Mr Zabonke John Konile [CT00108/FLA]. All sustained numerous gunshot wounds to their bodies; all were shot in the head; one had half his face blown away. Police officers involved on the scene or in the investigation thereafter were Warrant Officers Barnard and McMaster, Majors Johan Kleyn, Dolf Odendal and Stephanus Brits, Captains Charles Brazzelle and Leonard Knipe, Sergeants John Sterrenberg, Grobbelaar and Rian Bellingan, and Constable Mbelo.[25]

This matter-of-fact style of reporting stands in contrast to the language Miya uses to convey her grief.

The official narrative of the TRC—one grounded in fact-finding and reportage—is complicated by a creative, and an emotive, narrative in *REwind*.[26] The sound recording in *REwind* draws out emotion through the repetitive lament of one phrase: 'I wish this news could just rewind', followed by the distinct sound of an analogue cassette tape rewinding, which permeates the sonic register of the exhibition. In doing so, it gives voice to memories: the individual memory of Eunice Miya recalling her grief when she

---

[24] Zenzile Khoisan as quoted in Alejandro Castillejo-Cuéllar, 'Knowledge, Experience, and South Africa's Scenarios of Forgiveness', *Radical History Review,* 97 (2007), 11. Also see this source for an overview of how the Gugulethu Seven incident resurfaced through the TRC.

[25] 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report', (2; South Africa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998) at 261.

[26] For a discussion of how 'creative narratives' intervene in the 'official narrative' of the TRC, see Leslie, 'Truth Will Set You Free'.

found out her son had been killed; and, a collective memory where an individual story 'takes the emotion of traumatic incident and expands it (at least psychologically) into a collective incident of infinite proportions'.[27] An incident which became a discursive event in the struggle against apartheid and one later inscribed into the TRC's efforts to reveal the 'truth' of the past which turned it into an 'emblem of reconciliation'.[28]

*REwind* is both a memorial to past trauma and a memorial to the TRC. It was created to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the TRC: 'Its timing, intention and execution was, in effect, an attempt at monumentalising the monument that was the TRC'.[29] This memorialising is also haunting. Miya's testimony haunts the exhibition space. The ghosts of apartheid are preserved through the re-imagining of her testimony in both musical and visual form. One of the television screens shows the text of Miya's testimony projected onto a domestic scene; the outline of lace curtains and windowpanes, and the silhouette of an armchair, lamp, and pot plant frame the written words. These words float across the screen, passing by the uncannily familiar objects. The film for Miya's testimony 'was made by projecting her testimony onto the curtains of [the artists'] neighbour's house, from the inside. The filming, in turn, was done from the outside, seeing the interior world projected onto the veiled window'.[30] Here the political past has seeped into the domestic and private domain. The ghosts of the past remain linked to the present through their visual connection with everyday domestic objects. In this way memory is condensed; it oscillates between a past remembered

---

[27] Maart, 'Imaginary Fact: Exhibition Catalogue', at 19.
[28] Castillejo-Cuéllar, 'Knowledge, Experience, and South Africa's Scenarios of Forgiveness', at 2. See also the documentary, *A Long Night's Journey into Day* directed by Deborah Hoffman and Frances Reid.
[29] Maart, 'Imaginary Fact: Exhibition Catalogue', at 19.
[30] Marx and Marx in Maart, 'Imaginary Fact: Exhibition Catalogue', at 75.

(Miya's testimony), a past re-imagined (the performing and filming of Miya's words), and a present re-created (the testimony screened and projected in the exhibition space).[31]

In working with memories, questions around processes of selection become particularly important. Marx and Marx talk about their responsibility in translating and transcribing the visual spectacle of the TRC in order to merge one person's past reality with another's present reality.[32] Miller describes how when listening to hours of TRC audio recordings he questioned whether he was listening for his own absolution in place perhaps of his own confession—being implicated in the structures and everyday modes of apartheid.[33] Miller sought written permission to re-imagine these testimonies.[34] This question of informed consent is especially pertinent. What are the implications of re-imagining such personal testimonies given during the public hearings of the TRC? How can these testimonies continue be treated justly? What responsibility do the artists have to the people whose testimonies they reimagine? There is an onus on the artists to work respectfully and productively with such personal stories. Especially when there is an expectation that the artwork will give-back or return something to the people who testified, as in the case of Miya who believes *REwind* will play a didactic role: '*REwind* gives me hope for the future, for our grandchildren. They will be able to see what happened in the past. It would be great for our grandchildren to learn something from our history.'[35] The idea that the artwork might return something to survivors, positions it as a kind of 'symbolic reparation' which acknowledges the harm suffered under apartheid and shares this recognition with others. [36]  The artists take on ethical

---

[31] Bell raises the evocative idea that time oscillates in artworks in Bell, 'Contemporary Art and Transitional Justice in Northern Ireland'.
[32] Marx and Marx in Maart, 'Imaginary Fact: Exhibition Catalogue',  at 75.
[33] Miller in Maart, 'Imaginary Fact: Exhibition Catalogue',  at 74.
[34] Miller in ibid.
[35] 'Giving Voice to the Past, Hope to the Future', *City Press,* 19 May 2008.
[36] For a discussion of symbolic reparations, see Olivera Simic and Zala Volcic, 'In the Land of Wartime Rape: Bosnia, Cinema and Reparation', *Griffith Journal of Law & Human Dignity,* 2/2 (2014).

accountability for the creative reworking of the past; this process of creation is circumscribed by responsibility, as is the display and dissemination of the artwork.

Each musical and visual story in *REwind* communicates, and intervenes in, a conception of the past so that the ghosts remain and can be treated justly 'in order that they might inform, abstractly (normatively, ethically), the worlds we wish to create and inhabit'.[37] The seven screens in the installation each depict different stories which respond to the music played in the pairs of headphones. One screen shows a close-up shot of an envelope; the envelope appears to be smoking. What looks like black smoke slowly fills the screen, engulfing the envelope. The film is actually of an envelope which has been impregnated with black dye submerged in water; slowly the dye bleeds into the surrounding water. This film refers to the testimony of Father Michael Lapsley and is accompanied by a musical piece played through pairs of headphones. At the TRC Lapsley testified about the moment when he opened a letter bomb:

> So I came upon this [indistinct] envelope that had been among the accumulated mail. I opened it and it was addressed to me and inside where two religious magazines and they - the magazines were - were wrapped in plastic - sealed in plastic. So I ripped open the plastic and took out the magazines both religious - one in Afrikaans one in English. I put aside the Afrikaans one because my Afrikaans is not very good and I opened the English magazine and the act of opening the magazine was the detonating devise for a bomb. I - one of the extraordinary things was that I, and the doctors don't know why, I didn't become unconscious - I didn't go into shock. The ceiling of three rooms blew out and

---

[37] Bell and Paolantonio, 'The Haunted Nomos', at 159.

there was a hole in the floor and I can still remember what happened - the actual

explosion it still - it's still - it's still something with me.[38]

While the music makes specific reference to Lapsely's testimony, the film is more

symbolic. Without knowing Lapsley's story, the visual imagery of a letter bomb brings

out references to acts of terrorism which pervade many conflicts. Overarching 'lines of

connection' can be drawn between what is seen, what may be known, and what is

remembered.[39]

By drawing on emotive sounds and symbols *REwind* engages the 'moral

imagination'; the gasps of crying, the screech of a tape rewinding, the silhouette of a

chair, the image of an envelope.[40] The artwork creates an affective topology which

mediates how it is viewed and how the stories within it reverberate. It reconfigures

memory by representing multiple memories and encouraging multiple interpretations.

This attention to subjectivity activates an affective register. Archives of familiar sounds

and objects offer the potential for the viewer to connect with a past worth remembering;

a past remembered so that it is not repeated.

The curatorial narrative of *Imaginary Fact*—like that of *REwind*—emphasised

the importance of memory and emotion in coming to terms with the grievances of

apartheid. Affects, feelings, and sense impressions flow between artworks. Paradigms

are not easily anchored by a single artwork or object. They may be 'expressed, activated

or incited by an image; but at the same time, [they do] not always come from a single

image'.[41] In *Imaginary Fact*, *REwind* was exhibited alongside several artworks, each of

which was intended to examine the use of archives in imagining contemporary South

---

[38] Michael Lapsley, 'Testimony by Father Michael Lapsley', 2015.
[39] Clarkson positions artworks as having 'lines of forces' in Clarkson, *Drawing the Line*.
[40] The term 'moral imagination' emerges from John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxon: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[41] Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics* at 21.

Africa.[42] Opposite *REwind* hung Sue Williamson's 49 photographic panels entitled *For thirty years next to his heart* (1990). Each panel showed two pages from John Ngesi's *dompas* (passbook) which '[b]y law, every black South African had to carry… at all times [during Apartheid], ready for inspection on demand'.[43] To the left hung David Koloane's *The Journey* (1998)—a series of 19 drawings reconstructing the events which lead to the death of the leader of the black consciousness movement and anti-apartheid activist, Steve Biko, in 1977. The way in which the artworks are hung in the exhibition creates conversations and generates associations. Perspectives are shaped and negotiated by the conversation between artworks and the audience who views them. Paradigms journey back and forth, in the eyes and minds of viewers, in the contact between artworks, and in the curatorial narrative of the artworks; this is the process of circulation and mediation.

<A>People as agents of political becoming

*At either end of the line of headphones there is a speaker which projects the distinct screech of a cassette tape rewinding and the sound of a woman's voice lamenting, 'I wish this news could just rewind'.*

'Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak'.[44] People become visible through the re-telling of their stories and through the re-imagining of their testimonies in *REwind*. The emphasis on people—individual stories, testimonies, and experiences—takes on heightened

---

[42] Maart, 'Imaginary Fact: Exhibition Catalogue'.
[43] Williamson in ibid., at 163.
[44] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2006) at 13.

significance in the context of transitional justice. Apartheid epitomised a struggle for rights; a struggle which is at its heart a struggle for equal recognition. *REwind* uses stories of individuals to impart a larger story about humanity—a sharing of personal stories to imagine new political possibilities, a kind of 'politics of becoming'.[45] New shared identities are formed out of past differences.

Although viewers familiar with modern South African history will invariably draw different connections with the artwork than those who are encountering the subject of apartheid and the TRC for the first time, the musical and visual utterances of *REwind* allow viewers to connect empathetically; to engage the unimaginable. That is, the artwork conveys a sense of shared humanity so that the post-apartheid present becomes accessible for different people with different experiences. *REwind* does this by emphasising people; each soundtrack, each film, tells individual stories. Take for example one screen which shows a loaf of bread slowly crumbling, and a glass containing milk slowly disappearing.[46] The first image on this screen lists the origin of the testimony—*Interview with Ethel Nobantu Plaatjies, Mother of Luthando, Killed, 1986* [from the book] *A Human Being Dies that Night* by Pumla G Madikizela. When the film is viewed while listening to the music in the headphones, the words on the screen connect with the words being sung; the words appear in text in the same rhythmic scansion in which they are heard. The words of the woman singing are directed at the viewer. It is as if Ethel Nobantu Plaatjies is speaking to the viewer: 'At ten o'clock I was sitting, right there where you are sitting'.

The first person narrative emphasises a personal connection. The performer sing-speaks Plaatjies story:

---

[45] William E. Connolly, 'Suffering, Justice, and the Politics of Becoming', in David Campbell and Michael J Shapiro (eds.), *Moral Spaces* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 125-53.
[46] This section of film can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gya0j3w0PY.

My son was eleven. He came home during school break. At ten o'clock I was sitting, right there were you are sitting. Sitting in that very chair. He walked in dressed in his school uniform. Went to the cupboard, over there. Cut himself a slice of bread. He's doing all this in a rush. He's like that when he comes home during break. He spreads the peanut butter. And then puts the rest of the bread back, leaving the crumbs all over the cupboard. And the knife still smudged with peanut butter. He ran out he's still chewing his bread and holding it in his hand. It wasn't long, I heard shots outside. Some commotion and shouts. Then I am hearing, 'Luthando!' 'Luthando!' 'Nanku Thando!' 'Bamdubele!' Then someone calling out for me, 'Ma Ka Luthando!' Ma Ka Luthando!' I went flying out of this house. Now I am dazed. I ran, not thinking. My eyes are on the crowd that has gathered. Here is my son, my only child. I felt his last breath leave him. Leaving the crumbs all over the cupboard.

As these words are sung, the milk slowly drains from the glass. The glass is empty by the time the words 'Leaving the crumbs all over the cupboard' are heard. In the same way that the visuals mirror the words, the music emphasises the text. The film and music are punctuated by affective cues which enable the listener-viewer to access the story being told. As in the film of Miya's testimony everyday objects, such as a loaf of bread and glass of milk, become markers of the story; familiar points of access. These objects bear witness to the testimony being recounted but they also help to render these testimonies accessible and memorable.

The 'subjects' of these testimonies are never directly represented, their presence becomes known through narration and through the ghostly embodiment of objects being moved, food being eaten. The body is withheld as a way to resist representational

injustice.[47] Reimagining these testimonies raises ethical questions about representation: do 'those who give testimony in public formats before truth commissions fully realize what putting their words into circulation in the public domain means'.[48] Although the artists sought written consent to re-imagine people's testimonies in *REwind*, what does it mean when these testimonies are truncated; paraphrased; or selectively displayed? Do the performances of these testimonies give them a life beyond their owners? Further still, what does it mean for us as viewers to receive these testimonies in different forms?

Through these acts of interpretation different agencies come to be known. In *REwind* people are visible and become visible through the processes by which the artwork came to be created and exhibited, through the experience of the artwork, and through the associations the artwork sends out into the world. Plaatjies' words are given voice by a female singer who recites the music composed by Miller; a chorus of singers and musicians share in the performance. This music is given visual form by Marx and Marx who draw connections between words and objects in order to highlight Plaatjies' experience and make it accessible to viewers both familiar and unfamiliar with the experience of apartheid. The music and film combined share a story with the viewer. This story, and the viewers' experience, is curated by the team responsible for creating and hosting the exhibition; they have selected how the artwork will be displayed and what information—such as labels and accompanying explanatory text—will be imparted. Both named and unnamed people become visible, their effect on the artwork being recognisable in the stages of translation and experience. While the chain of agency could be extended further to include everyone involved in the production of the

---

[47] Mark Reinhardt raises the idea of that the refusal to display the body is a way to avoid compounding oppression in 'Picturing Violence: Aesthetics and the anxiety of critique' in Mark Reinhardt, *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain;[Issued in Conjunction with the Exhibition Beautiful Suffering..., Held at the Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, January 28-April 30, 2006]* (University of Chicago Press, 2007) at 20.
[48] Cole in Ramirez-Barat (ed.), Transitional Justice, Culture, and Society at 425.

artwork—from funding bodies to arts institutions—as well as everyone involved in the events the artwork is referencing—from atrocities committed under apartheid to the TRC—what remains key is the recognition of people and their agency in the processes and experience of the artwork. *REwind* shows how people can generate political agency through the re-telling of their stories and through the re-imagining of their testimonies in artistic form. Personal narratives become connected with personal experiences so that shared agency plays an important role in shaping new political possibilities and futures; a political becoming which ripples between people.

## <A>The sights and sounds of political encounters

*The headphones gently twist out of line with the movement of people passing by; picking them up; putting them on.  Inside each earpiece are the sounds of singing; orchestral music; sobbing; spoken testimonies; the sighing of 'verbalised punctuation'.*

*REwind* performs its own kind of transitional justice in the openings generated by aesthetic encounters: 'Insight through aesthetic engagement comes through making (creating, producing) connections'.[49] The TRC is aesthetically reworked; its visual spectacle is evoked through the hanging line of headphones at the same time it is questioned through the way testimonies are selectively transposed and received. The artwork embodies a series of critical encounters. It is an encounter between audio and vision; it is an encounter about sight and sound; it is an encounter with individual and shared stories; and, it is an encounter between domestic and international narratives.

Through these encounters the artwork becomes an artistic intervention in

---

[49] Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics* at 74.

South Africa's transitional justice narrative emerging in the wake of apartheid. As an audio-visual installation *REwind* is sensorially rich. The artwork is an encounter between two artistic mediums under the auspices of a visual art installation. *REwind* requires viewers to engage with the sight of films streaming across the seven television screens, as well as the sound of the music playing from the individual headsets and two loud speakers on either side of the screens. It is difficult to bypass the moving images on the screens and hard to resist picking up the headphones to hear what is playing inside. The repetitive screech of the analogue cassette tape from the loudspeakers dominates other peripheral sounds in the exhibition space. These audio and visual registers facilitate an experiential opening, allowing the possibility of engagement with the artwork and its content.

Viewers are not only encouraged to physically engage with the artwork through seeing and hearing it, but they are also confronted by the idea that seeing, speaking, and listening are important actions in transitional justice processes. Just as the physical experience of the artwork is mediated by sight and sound, so too is the conceptual experience of *REwind*. In one film excerpts from multiple testimonies—the 'Testimony of Tony Yengeni, political activist, tortured by Jeffrey Benzien 1987', the 'Testimony of Lucas Baba Sikwapere, Tortured in Detention 1985-1987', and, the 'Testimony of Mlandeli Walter Mqikela, tortured by police, Cape Town – 1985'—draw attention to acts of seeing, speaking, and listening.[50] Towards the beginning of the film text begins to roll across the screen: 'Yes Mr Yengeni, when you say 'demonstration', has he not described it satisfactorily to you?' 'I also want to see it with my own eyes what he did to me'. This testimony is heard spoken by two different male voices; one

---

[50] see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcDBXvKZ6IA, Philip Miller, Gerhard Marx, and Maja Marx, 'Rewind', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzdGruYiTyo, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gya0j3w0PY, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcDBXvKZ6IA, accessed 5 March 2015.

emphasises the act of describing, the other the act of seeing. As the words continue to roll across the screen a woman's voice says 'When I close my eyes, somebody that looked me straight in the eyes.' Another voice follows with 'Apartheid, I don't even want to see it anywhere I go.' A voice then follows saying, 'I feel what, what has brought my sight back, my eye sight back is to come back here and tell this story. But I feel what has been making me sick all the time is the fact that I couldn't tell my story'. Eyes and seeing are recurring motifs throughout these testimonies.

The emphasis on sight unexpectedly occurs through written and spoken words. The linguistic elements of the testimonial excerpts are privileged over the representation of the people whose words and stories they narrate.[51] Text journeys across the screens as it does on the sound waves. Language both mediates the visual experience and is the visual experience. There seems to be a lurking anxiety about the direct representation of the person speaking. Instead, text and objects become proxies for people; the body is withheld but remains implicated in the visual access points of the first person narratives. Even the passport style photographs which fade in and out of one of the screens, are inverted so that images of people are transformed into the shadows of ghosts.[52] This has the effect of stripping down the individuality of the images, dulling personal characteristics, instead emphasising similarities in the shapes and silhouettes; the face of one becomes the face of many. The individual voice becomes implicated in a collective vision.

Towards the end of the film the emphasis shifts from seeing to speaking and listening. A voice repeats, 'Yes I am ready to tell you. I'd like to tell you what happened'. A chorus of voices can be heard layered over one another, speaking in different

---

[51] This idea of linguistic privileging comes from Reinhardt, *Beautiful Suffering* at 24.
[52] This section of film can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcDBXvKZ6IA>.

languages. The choir begins to sing as stringed instruments play music that pulses. A voice says 'Listen to your stories and make the whole world to know about your stories'. Another voice can be heard saying 'But we are doing this because we believe that if, if people repeat again all their hurt that they had, as they repeat the stories again, as they repeat the stories again, as they repeat the stories again…'. The same text rolls across the screen. It is as if the words on the screen are read in real time by the people whose voices can be heard in the headphones. The film ends with the image of a 'snow-plagued' television screen—an image which has punctuated the film throughout—switching off; the light goes out. The stories have been told.

The excerpts of testimony emphasise sight and sound as restorative actions in the aftermath of apartheid trauma. The journey from sight to sound is made on the screen and in the music; seeing leads to speaking and speaking leads to listening. Each of the three testimonies pertains to acts of torture committed by the apartheid state. Each of the three testimonies talk about seeing in the process of coming to terms with these acts. Each of the three testimonies relays the importance of repeating their stories, speaking their former silences. Testimonial experiences and records are connected in *REwind* to produce a reading of transitional justice based on cathartic and collective communication—a direct echo to the TRC.

However, by bringing together these excerpts into the one visible and audible space the artists provoke a questioning; they use fragments to generate a deliberately open reading of events, experiences, and memories. Ambiguities, anxieties, and uncertainties emerge through the process of creative interrogation. This highlights an inherent paradox within *REwind*. At the same time fragments of testimony are brought together to create a larger narrative—a narrative made up of individual stories which come to stand in for a larger whole—they are pulled apart into their constituent elements.

In other words, the claims to individuality which are emphasised by the careful labelling of testimonial origins at the beginning of the films sits in tension with the larger cosmopolitan narrative about shared humanity being offered up by the artwork.

The openings created by the aesthetic encounters in *REwind* are potentially transformative, facilitating the emergence of different and subjective interpretations in South Africa's transitional justice narrative. One encounter leads to another. The encounter between artistic mediums highlights the substantive encounter between seeing and speaking present within the excerpts of testimonies. In turn, the testimonial encounters underscore the meeting and tension between individual and collective stories. What emerges is that these encounters are not simply representative of political change, but they help to construct the political transformation and shifting identity of South Africa.

## <A>Inventing and inviting spaces of transitional justice

*Fourteen sets of black headphones hang in a row. Suspended from a great height by long cables, their plastic spines cast haunting shadows on the dusty wooden floor below… The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission unfolds through REwind and REwind is given form through the TRC.*

*REwind* invites and invents physical, symbolic, and affective spaces which shape and reflect how South Africa's transitional justice narrative is performed. It does this through its intrinsic connection to spatial practices of display. *REwind* inhabits the physical space of an art exhibition while evoking the quasi-legal space of the TRC hearings. The invented space of *REwind* is physically and symbolically connected to the transitional

justice mechanism it is exploring. The sights, sounds, and symbols of the TRC are referenced in the artwork. The distinct shape of the headphones, the television screens, and the overlapping sounds of language translations, transpose the hearing rooms of the TRC into the exhibition space. Voices impart sung and spoken testimonies, at the same time the words appear written on the screens. The audience bear witness to these testimonies; testimonies which have travelled from personal depths to public acknowledgement. By creating a physical space in which the symbolic space of the TRC is evoked it is as if the artwork becomes an extension of the original TRC process.

The artwork functions as an alternative archive, 'one based on the 'missing' aspects where an inflection is as much a form of communication as an accusation, or a repentance'.[53] Partial testimonies are repeatedly re-performed throughout the artwork so that the idea of justice being achieved through testimonial representation is called into question. In doing so *REwind* raises questions about legitimacy. Did the TRC process provide a legitimate process for justice to be served? Is it legitimate for the artists to re-frame the testimonies of others? Does the physical and symbolic connection to the TRC confer a sense of legitimacy onto the artwork? Marx, Marx and Miller become key interlocutors between the TRC and viewers—taking on the responsibility for doing justice to the deeply personal material with which they are working.

The artwork negotiates the in-between spaces—the imaginative and affective spaces—in order to convey different feelings of justice. *REwind* invites emotive responses from viewers: on the screens 'mundane household objects become emotional anchors in the emotional turmoil of the [testimonial] moment'.[54] While in the music the gasps, sighs, wails, and pauses punctuate the testimonial sound. Through these emotive

---

[53] Maart, 'Imaginary Fact: Exhibition Catalogue', at 19.
[54] Marx and Marx in ibid., at 75.

sparks *REwind* presents a view of the past that is indebted to the present. That is, the past is unimaginable, unknowable without the present experience of the artwork; an experience which is affectively rich. The films are intended to explore these in-between spaces:

> … the space between the text (testimony) and the context (the space in which the testimony is received) [i]s a means of negotiating the space between confessor and listener, and the political past and the contemporary (the private present of a post-democratic South Africa).[55]

*REwind* invites these in-between spaces; spaces which go beyond the physical and symbolic spaces of the artwork, into affective and subjective spaces. In doing this, *REwind* opens up a space in which the political possibilities of 'post-apartheid' South Africa can be explored; in which alternative narratives can be imagined and new identities tried out.

The invented physical and symbolic space of *REwind*, coupled with the invited imaginative and affective space of the artwork, performs its own kind of transitional justice in which modalities reconstitute a shared vision of the past. At the same time that focus is given to individual stories and individual testimonies, attention is shifted to the commonalities and similarities between these stories, creating a sense of connection and attempt at a balance of representation. The repetition of like images encourages these connections; reflection on what is seen and unseen, heard and unheard; what is similar, what is different; what is remembered and what is forgotten; what is present, what is absent. The stop-frame animations shown on the seven screens slow down time, forcing the viewer to see details which might normally flash by unnoticed. A chair disintegrates, a loaf of bread crumbles, black ink bleeds through water. On one screen the facades of

---

[55] Marx and Marx in ibid.

different houses pulse past. The front doors and windows of these houses show striking similarities. The architectural features begin to blur together so that the lives of the people imagined to be living in these houses take on a collective appearance. Again the tension between individual and collective is activated.

Each time *REwind* is performed or exhibited its content is re-presented, re-interpreted, and re-inscribed. Each incarnation of the artwork brings with it different expectations and possibilities unique to particular artistic mediums, but more importantly each incarnation reinscribes the personal stories and collective transitional justice narrative of South Africa—one that imposes a kind of forgetting of certain stories as much as it does a remembering of others. At the 2013 Venice Biennale *REwind* was exhibited as an audio-visual installation, showing images on television screens, and playing recorded music through speakers and headphones. In this installation the images and sounds played over one another. Viewers could enter in and out of the artwork, switching between headphones which played different parts of the cantata; glancing at the screens which showed moving images relating to different parts of the music. The installation was interactive. The audience participation was selective. In other incarnations the work has been performed live with vocal soloists, chorus, musical instruments, and images being projected onto the stage. In these instances the work follows a narrative progression. The music is performed sequentially. The images are projected at specific moments. The audience absorbs the work in linear concert format. In yet further iterations the work can be found in digital form; excerpts are viewable on YouTube and the entire cantata (without images) can be purchased on iTunes. The specific spatial locations in which *REwind* is installed, exhibited, performed, and witnessed are of central importance to the way in which the work re-inscribes a vision of transitional justice in South Africa.

As it travels between different sites *REwind* is responsive to, and constitutive of, a vision of transitional justice in South Africa. The TRC inhabits a unique 'glocal' (global-local) narrative. The TRC is inherently connected to the South African context, inwardly focused on reconciling the deep cleavages of exclusion and trauma generated by apartheid. The TRC is also internationally upheld as a model for how to perform transitional justice, whereby its truth-seeking framework is transplanted into other contexts.[56] *REwind* exemplifies this 'glocal' positioning. *REwind* is inward-looking, addressing individual cases of suffering experienced by South African citizens. At the same time *REwind* is outwardly focused, projecting a collective narrative of a country coming to terms with its past—an important focus in the context of the Venice Biennale.

The Venice Biennale brings together pavilions from around 85 countries in a goliath exhibition that is meant to take the pulse of contemporary art—to capture a global artistic moment. Under the guise of contemporary art, the Biennale is a highly networked exercise in cultural diplomacy. It serves as a meeting place where states come to exhibit their art and 'share' themselves with the international community. How a state displays itself at the Biennale can effect how that state is perceived on the world stage. Between 1968 and 1994 South Africa was banned from exhibiting in the Venice Biennale as part of a widespread cultural boycott protesting apartheid.[57] It was not until 1995 that South Africa was invited to again exhibit in the Venice Biennale, and 2011 was the first year South Africa had its own national pavilion.

The 2013 exhibition—*Imaginary Fact*—marked the beginning of a semi-permanent space for South Africa in Venice, with the Government signing a 20-year

---

[56] see P.B. Hayner, *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (Taylor & Francis, 2010).
[57] For an overview of the cultural boycott, see Michael C. Beaubien, 'The Cultural Boycott of South Africa', *Africa Today,* 29/4 (1982), 5-16.

lease on the exhibition space.[58] *Imaginary Fact* consisted of works by 17 artists and was intended to give an overview of the artistic output of South Africa since the end of apartheid; in a sense to show the art world what they had been missing.[59] Hung in a former military arsenal—the surrounding buildings are still an active naval base—the contemporary art exhibition stood in strong contrast to the centuries old sandstone warehouse. The high-tech installation of *REwind*—which included long cables hanging from ancient rafters, sound looping through speakers, and seven television screens—was exhibited alongside photographic works, sculptural works constructed from ceramics and carved out of books, works on paper, video artworks, and live performance pieces.

In Venice, the spatial organisation of the Biennale raises questions about the political organisation and priorities of the countries which exhibit in this global exposition. In this iteration, *REwind* encountered an international space in which national narratives are embedded into international relations, becoming shaped by artistic and political tensions. The South African Pavilion shared a space with the Pavilion of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The grouping of South Africa and the UAE in the one open exhibition space provided marked contrasts between these nations. The contrasts were both visual and conceptual. Visually, the UAE's exhibition was streamline and direct. Entitled *Walking on Water* by Mohammed Kazem, the exhibition consisted of a high-tech dome structure which visitors entered to be immersed in a 360 degree film of the sea.[60] The installation's sci-fi-esque set-up was between two worlds: the world of hyper-modernity and primordial sea forces; a metaphor for the state at a crossroads between technological transformation and cultural tradition. In contrast, South Africa's exhibition was full and drawn-out. Visitors were led through the South

---

[58] National Arts Festival, 'Imaginary Fact', <http://www.imaginaryfact.co.za>, accessed 20 November 2013.
[59] Maart, 'Imaginary Fact: Exhibition Catalogue'.
[60] See Reem Fadda (ed.), *Mohammed Kazem* (Bologna: Damiani, 2013).

African Pavilion, down corridors into specially constructed rooms and viewing corners. Each artwork crossed into the next, competing for sight and sound.

The density of artworks in *Imaginary Fact* coupled with their competition for space can be seen as a metaphor for South Africa's struggle to accommodate the competing voices within its borders. By presenting a large-scale group exhibition the South African Pavilion moved away from the conventional pavilion model where one artist stands in for the nation. This approach arguably reflects South Africa's newly democratic system which is concerned with equal representation, or at least the appearance of equal representation. In this sense, political objectives about representation were privileged over aesthetic considerations. *REwind* becomes embedded in this wider politics of display.

In the context of the Venice Biennale the tension between politics and aesthetics is doubly significant. In the case of *REwind* it is inwardly focused on the specific experience of the TRC in addressing the legacy of apartheid. At the Venice Biennale this specific focus is projected outward becoming a collective narrative of a country coming to terms with its past. Being exhibited in the Venice Biennale, *REwind* inhabits an international platform in which its emphasis is transferred from a domestic transitional justice narrative to an international one. At the same time that *REwind* internally addresses the journey from personal to shared narratives, it is externally characterised by both domestic and international projections of the country's liberalising transformation. The artwork lends itself to being an unusual case of cultural diplomacy; an emerging spatial frontier in transitional justice which needs to be further explored.[61]

---

[61] An area of research I am pursuing, see papers on 'The cultural diplomacy of transitional justice' presented at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, Atlanta, March 2016 and the European Consortium for Political Research Joint Sessions, Pisa, April 2016.

## <A>Unwinding a conclusion

*REwind* expands the range of 'what can be seen, what can be said, what can be thought, and what can be done' in times of political transition. The discursive exploration of *REwind* exposes a web of—at times competing—relationships which constitute the bond between art and transitional justice. The four ideas about paradigms, agency, encounters, and space, offered in the article point towards a framing of art and transitional justice that finds it roots in the spectrum of complexities and possibilities that underlie this meeting.

Examining *REwind* offers aesthetic insight that is both central to understanding South Africa's transition and constitutive of that transition. The artwork functions to produce and maintain the country's transitional justice narrative, but it also opens up spaces for new political thinking, possibilities, and actions in this narrative. Paradigms relating to memory, time, and emotion reverberate in *REwind.* The ways in which these paradigms inhabit, and oscillate within, the artwork generates a vision which colours the past and exposes the complexity of the present. There is an expectation that reconciliation begins with this vision. *REwind* uses individual stories to impart a larger story about humanity. The artwork generates a productive tension between individual and collective agencies so that new shared identities are formed out of past differences. The openings created by these encounters produce connections that are potentially transformative, facilitating the emergence of different and subjective interpretations in South Africa's transitional justice narrative; confronting viewers with ideas about important actions—such as seeing, speaking, listening—in the aftermath of conflict. The narratives that emerge from *REwind* are shaped by spatial practices of display; practices unique to artistic mediums and curated exhibitions. The invited and invented physical,

symbolic, and affective spaces of *REwind* shape how South Africa's transitional justice narrative takes on domestic and international significance.

In coming to terms with past conflict and building and strengthening democratic institutions in the aftermath of state sanctioned violence, art plays an important role in communicating and creating affective topologies of justice in order to recognise diverse and often competing claims for recognition. This recognition is essential in order to comprehend, and respond to, the claims of people *affected*—both individually and collectively, directly and indirectly—by conflict, particularly when conflict has been centred on struggles for equal rights and acknowledgement as in the context of South Africa. *REwind* exemplifies how narratives of individuals can be activated to take on collective significance, so that shared visions of the past open up possibilities to imagine a new political future. While transitional justice policies and practices have become fundamental to the ways in which countries emerging from conflict engage with international institutions and international norm compliance, artistic production and participation has become a radical form of political representation in times of political transition.