

Interessant sind solche Texte besonders deshalb, weil sie an eine zentrale Schnittstelle von Wissen und Gesellschaft führen, an einen vielgestaltigen Ort, an dem am Verhältnis von Körper und Seele, von Körper und Psyche experimentiert wird. Sie beleuchten die Bedeutung von im 18. Jahrhundert neuen Therapien, die mit Elektrizität oder dem tierischen Magnetismus operieren, verweisen auf die im Entstehen begriffene Kategorie der Hysterie und machen deutlich, wie über das Körperspektakel Geschlechterverhältnisse, gesellschaftliche Hierarchie und Machttechniken in unterschiedlichen sozialen Räumen über Wort und Geste verhandelt werden.

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Catherine M. Cole, **Performing South Africa's Truth Commission. Stages of Transition**, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2010, 227 pp., EUR 20,99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-253-22145-2.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has been studied extensively and very critically from a diversity of disciplinary and thematic angles. Legal and human rights specialists, anthropologists, historians, linguists, literary scholars, religion scholars and philosophers of ethics are but some of the experts who have contributed to the growing body of scholarship on this complex South African process of dealing with a fraught apartheid past.¹ With a background in theatre studies, Catherine M. Cole contributes to this growing field of enquiry by reading and studying the TRC as the “performed enactment of transition” (160). Although comparable interpretations of the TRC as theatre or ritual, for example, have been carried out before, Cole’s contribution lies in specifically employing the notion of performance in order to analyse and interpret aspects of the public hearings of the TRC’s Human Rights Violations Committee (HRVC). In doing so, she contributes to a growing number of studies that focus on the bearing witness aspect of the TRC.²

By viewing these public hearings as performances, Cole sets out to find new layers of meaning through which to read and understand them. In the course of this project she also argues that a specific kind of methodological approach to this archive can yield rich and complex meanings that transcend limited, morally-based categorical

1 Cf. for example Christine Anthonissen and Jan Blommaert eds., *Discourse and Human Rights Violations*, Philadelphia 2007; Shane Graham, *South African Literature after the Truth Commission*, Scottsville 2011; Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson eds., *Commissioning the Past*, Johannesburg 2002; Hugo van der Merwe and Audrey R. Chapman eds., *Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, Philadelphia 2008; Megan Shore, *Religion and Conflict Resolution*, Farnham 2009; Richard Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, Cambridge 2001.

2 Antjie Krog, Nosisi Mpolweni and Kopano Ratele, *There was this Goat*, Scottsville 2009; Fiona Ross, *Bearing Witness*, London 2003; Mark Sanders, *Ambiguities of Witnessing*, Stanford 2007.

results obtained by means of quantitative and empirical-based approaches. This hermeneutic approach, which Cole herself refers to as one located within the humanities, enables ethical and interpretive considerations of the TRC as a complex process and defies attempts at evaluating it through simplistic good/bad judgements.

The problem of dealing with a past in which severe human rights abuses took place was tackled in South Africa by means of a process of transitional justice, which set out to restore a sense of shared humanity among South African citizens in a manner that recognised the limits of conventional juridical concepts and the prevailing legal system. The hearings of the two TRC committees (HRVC and Amnesty Committee) granted victims, witnesses and perpetrators the chance to narrativise their experiences under apartheid, with the result, as Cole contends, that the hearings ultimately became a form of theatre and performance and thereby placed the audience – ultimately the nation at large – in the role of implicated witness.

In a second step, this performance was mediated by various means: it was translated into a number of different languages, recorded as written testimony in English, transmitted live and in edited fragments via various news media (notably radio and television) and reworked into aesthetic, artistic reflections in the form of various works of art. All of this, together with the seven-volume report by the TRC, initial research conducted by the TRC, as well as the extensive scholarship on the process, constitutes the TRC archive: those “objects that seem ‘real,’ concrete, and able to transmit memory over space and time” (29). However, Cole is interested in the “embodied memory” (ibid.) of the TRC hearings, and therefore takes recourse to Diana Taylor’s concept of *repertoire* as an alternative to that of *archive*. This repertoire is “the embodied expressions that stand in relation to historical traces left behind in transcripts, documents, and recordings in the archive” (29). It is specifically the inaptitude of the archive to capture, contain and preserve the embodied aspects of witness testimonies that Cole problematises in this study.

After a consideration of the phenomenon of transitional justice, she shows that the repertoire staged before the TRC has a particular performance genealogy, which she locates in three previous trials between 1956 and 1964: the Treason Trial, the “Incitement” Trial and the Rivonia Trial. By studying the extralinguistic aspects, such as “the costume” of witnesses and the accused, and the linguistic performativity of statements (in the Austinian sense) made by Nelson Mandela, for example, Cole traces the origins of the unique and specific process of the TRC. The TRC, she claims, can only be understood in a manner that does justice to its complexity, if this process is understood as embodied performance.

After this consideration of the precursors of the TRC, Cole proceeds with an enquiry into the effects that presenting the hearings in a specific form had on the interpretation and understanding of the TRC as a special type of transitional justice in South Africa. Cole achieves this in three steps. First, she considers the effects of the particular theatrical characteristics of the TRC, notably the fact that the hearings were staged publically and the decision to use interpreters rather than translators to make the

statements of witnesses and victims available in other languages. An important part of Cole's argument in this study centres on the evidence that she provides in this part. The TRC's archive, especially the transcribed records of the TRC hearings, does not sufficiently represent the performative, embodied aspect of the TRC, as Cole shows with fascinating case studies. For example, the fact that witness statements were archived as the transcribed/interpreted English-version of the original statements, "collapses nuance and privileges so-called factual truth over narrative truth," she maintains (69). Through convincing analysis and interpretation of witness statements, she shows, with recourse to a careful translation of an original statement, taken not from the published transcripts in English, but from audio and video recordings of the hearings, that the archived version clearly lacks the subjectiveness of the witness's original testimony, which entails obvious problems for the functioning of transitional justice.

Secondly, she considers the TRC hearings as a media event and investigates how the nation at large became the implicated witness of the TRC due to the insightful analysis in the 87 episodes of a special weekly, current affairs TV programme on the TRC, "TRC Special Report".

Thirdly, Cole sets out to consider how the TRC continues to live on after the completion of the work of the Commission. Linking this section with the previous by examining the problem of creating and sustaining collective memory, Cole makes a strong case here for the need for living memorials that are not static and inanimate. For this purpose she finds it necessary to take a look at the "afterlife" of the TRC, and more specifically a musical composition, "REwind: A Cantata for Voice, Tape, and Testimony" (2006) by Philip Miller. Cole's discussion of this work of art adds another dimension to her study of the TRC as an entity that gave (embodied) voice to testimonies of human rights violations, and the associated problems that a process of this kind may entail.

Following Roland Barthes's notion of the "trap of scription", "Performing South Africa's Truth Commission" is a plea against more interpretations of the TRC where text becomes "embalmed" (139) into something lifeless and static. Ultimately, this study is a plea for methodological revision; a call to tap into the more problematic and less easily accessible audio and visual archives of the TRC hearings rather than re-using (once again) the more easily available, but problematic – as she convincingly argues – transcripts in English of the public TRC hearings, or even, as some scholars do, the already interpreted transcripts published in fragments in the works of other scholars (notably Antjie Krog's partially fictionalised account of the TRC³).

Although this reviewer found the text very stimulating and thought-provoking to read, a number of critical notes could be placed in the margins. Given that Cole was

3 Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull*, Johannesburg 1998.

the editor of a study on the issue of gender in Africa,⁴ the lack of a pronounced gender aspect is puzzling, even though her argument on methodological revision clearly takes into account the role of gender in constituting meaning of TRC testimonies (see for example p. 139 and pp. 144–145). Readers familiar with Afrikaans might be slightly annoyed with the seeming carelessness of a number of misspelled Afrikaans words and names, in a publication which is otherwise very satisfying, especially in terms of the interesting visual material incorporated into the text. Experts of African philosophy may challenge Cole on her uncritical incorporation of the concept *Ubuntu* as one of the intended effects of the TRC. *Ubuntu* is a Xhosa/Zulu word, which as a concept denotes personhood or humanity in a personal and collective sense. The concept has become vastly popular in post-apartheid South Africa as a buzzword in many different contexts ranging from business ethics to South African tourism, all utilising the mystical, spiritual and ethnic connotations of the concept. Finally, the apparent or potential conflation or overlap at times between the terms of performativity and performance, evoked but not resolved in the text, also offers space for critical consideration by readers of this study.

Nevertheless, this multifaceted work on the TRC as a performed enactment of transition from apartheid to democracy offers a stimulating interpretation of the process by a scholar with a convincing interest in and profound understanding of the complexities of the South African process of transformation.

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4 Catherine M. Cole, Manuh Takyiwaa and Stephan Miescher eds., *Africa after Gender?*, Bloomington 2007.