

'Cinema, Glamour, Atrocity': Narratives of Trauma

Lesley Marx

Abstract

Cinematic treatments of trauma have to confront the challenge that every aesthetic choice is also an ethical one. This challenge poses special problems for questions of truth and the representation of victims and perpetrators. Three documentaries made by Mark Kaplan (1996-2004) explore the history of South African student activist Siphiwo Mtinkulu, tortured and murdered by security policemen in the early 1980s, and the subsequent interaction between Gideon Nieuwoudt, one of the perpetrators, and the Mtinkulu family during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Hearings. Ian Gabriel's fiction film, Forgiveness (2004), uses key aspects of this history in his treatment of a repentant perpetrator seeking forgiveness from his victim's family. In my analysis, I argue that respect for a realist aesthetic – the notion that the camera can and does reveal the world to us – may be combined with self-reflexivity, narrative layering and generic innovation to produce a complex representation of truth, victim and perpetrator. I suggest, further, that the initial choice of subject will determine to some extent the degree of complexity with which issues of truth, on the one hand, and the nature of the victim and the perpetrator, on the other, will be developed.

Framing the problem: realism and reality

The Armenian-Canadian director, Atom Egoyan, tells how he received an impassioned e-mail from a Turkish student viewer of his film *Ararat* (2002), which sought to document the Armenian Genocide in a multi-voiced, multi-levelled, reflexive mode. The correspondent had asked, 'So how would I make the movie? I

don't know. I don't know in what mindset I would be if similar things had happened to my people – I wouldn't have the right to make such a movie' (2004: 901). Egoyan comments that what the young man was engaging with was 'the disparity between the horror of man's inhumanity to man, and the uneasy alchemy that occurs when one combines the elements of cinema, glamour, and atrocity' (*ibid*). The terms he brings together propose key ethical, political and aesthetic dilemmas.

It is a truism that cinema, as one of the most powerful forms of representation, shapes our understanding of our world, even as it is shaped by social, historical and ideological forces. The extent to which any instance of cinema acknowledges this dialectic is the extent to which it attempts a critical intervention into, rather than a putative reflection of, the world. The glamour of cinema, on the other hand, casts a spell, seducing the spectator into its sensuous apprehension of the world. The dialectic between the spectator as both consumer and producer of meaning takes its cue from the dangerous and fabulous ability of film both to please and to teach, to appeal viscerally and intellectually. When glamour and cinema combine in the interests of representing atrocity, the negotiation between pleasure, aesthetics, ethics and politics reaches an extreme tension.

Egoyan continues: 'Any act of tyranny or terror involves a dehumanizing of the other. Can a scene that depicts an act of terror ever truly serve to counter this effect? If an act of genocide is only made possible by the abstraction of other human beings, can a film *about* genocide serve to rectify this violence?' (2004: 901-2). He goes on to raise the problem of authenticity and questions the ability of film to tell 'the true story' (*ibid*, 902). His own film is, he says, 'a story about the transmission of trauma' that uses 'every possible tense and mood available to tell its story' (*ibid*, 900). He concludes:

Compassion leads to the revelation and disclosure of truth in all its interconnectedness and devastating elaboration. And compassion certainly cannot exist if one's energies are used to conceal. In making a film that dealt with this history, I was dealing with a legacy of concealment and denial. As a result, I needed to tell this story with *a forest of questions, and the sound of many possible answers*. I needed to present *Ararat* with *pristine complexity, showing how history is often created from the effort to accommodate differing accounts of the same event*. From the stories of survivors passed on to children and grandchildren, to the industrial needs of commercial entertainment, to the private and sacred mythologies of art, the collective human linkage of experience is both the wonder and tragedy of our condition (*ibid*, 903, own emphasis).

This approach to documenting trauma is far removed from what Colin MacCabe defined as classic realism, a term derived from the nineteenth century novel with its emphasis on engagement with the material realities of a contemporary world and, in its more naïve incarnations, its belief that discourse can reproduce the real. For MacCabe, this realist text is composed of a 'hierarchy' of discourses 'defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth' (1993: 54). So, for example, characters in a novel speak dialogue that is contained in inverted commas, suggesting subjective, localised meanings. The prose that surrounds this dialogue, the 'metalanguage,' often written from the point of view of an omniscient narrator, frames the dialogue and presents itself as objective, transparent. In MacCabe's words, '...it is dematerialised to achieve perfect representation - to let the identity of things shine through the window of words' (*ibid*, 54).

In MacCabe's reading, the classic realist film may also dramatise subjective points of view, thus suggesting the plural nature of reality. In their most conventional form, however, such films recuperate contradiction and multiplicity through an overarching narrative, through the events revealed to us by the 'omniscient' camera – exploiting all the manipulative work of shots, editing, music (*ibid*, 56-7), and, one might add, *mise-en-scène* and casting.

The authority invested by classic realism in what the camera shows forms the basis of André Bazin's discussions of the relationship between film and reality. He offers a lyrical paean to the 'irrational power of the photograph to bear away our faith' (1967: 14) and asserts the credibility of what we see through the 'essentially objective character of photography' (*ibid*, 13). These pronouncements are part of a nuanced argument that relates a realist aesthetic to an ethic of representation at odds with MacCabe, for whom realism is a reactionary practice that occludes production by positioning spectators as consumers (1993: 64-5). Bazin, on the contrary, argues for a cinema that displays a love for, and humility before, the real that should be transmitted through the impersonal technology of the camera, the 'instrumentality of a nonliving agent' (1967: 13). He does not, of course, confuse reality with the convention of realism, recognising that the camera mediates reality. In his especially enraptured essay on De Sica, he writes (of *Bicycle Thieves*): '... it has as its paradoxical intention not to produce a spectacle which appears real, but rather to turn reality into a spectacle: a man is walking along the street and the onlooker is amazed at the beauty of the man walking' (1971: 67).

For Bazin there is a tension between what the camera *does* to reality – merely by the pointing of the lens with its concomitant framing and spectating – and the need for the filmmaker to bring an attitude of patient attentiveness to that reality. He argues, for

example, that it is not the use of location shooting or non-professional actors that makes De Sica's work so exemplary, but in looking at reality, 'in not betraying the essence of things, in allowing them first of all to exist for their own sakes, freely; it is in loving them in their singular individuality' (*ibid*, 69). (This humility in the presence of reality had political ramifications, especially for the neo-realists in revolt against the contrivances – effete or bombastic – of cinema under Mussolini.)

The above debates concerning narrative film practice as either self-aware or self-effacing may equally be applied to documentary filmmaking. In her absorbing study of the 'new documentary,' for example, Stella Bruzzi compares documentary with archive and newsreel footage. She argues that a 'documentary, a structured and motivated non-fiction film, does not aspire to convey in as pure a way as possible the real material at its core because this is what newsreel or other comparable forms of amateur, accidental and non-narrative film do' (2000: 22). She puts the case that 'documentaries inevitably fall short of being able to reproduce authentically the actuality they film' and gives attention to documentaries that 'start from the opposite premise that all documentary is circumscribed by its technical and theoretical limitations and can only present a mutable truth – the truth that comes into being as the documentary is being filmed' (*ibid*, 90).

Modernism and the middle voice

Practices of reflexivity and provisionality proposed in Bruzzi's account of more recent experimental work in documentary filmmaking seem to share common ground with Hayden White's argument that a modernist – as opposed to a realist – approach is needed for the responsible representing of traumatic events in history such as the Holocaust. Modernism may be understood,

here, as a rebuttal of the transparency of language, of words as windows on the world, of 'innocent' representations of reality, either material or psychological. In literary modernism, for example, authors begin to problematise the omniscient narrator by dramatising multiple voices, points of view and extreme subjectivity. White quotes Erich Auerbach's analysis of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* for its summary of modernist features, including the 'employment of such devices as "*erlebte Rede*, stream of consciousness, *monologue intérieur*" for "aesthetic purposes" that "obscure and obliterate the impression of an objective reality completely known to the author..." (1992: 50-51). An increasing meditation on the nature, role and construction of art and the artist within the work of art is also important to modernism.

White proposes that Roland Barthes' concept of the 'middle voice' contains many characteristics of modernism. Barthes' essay, 'To Write: An Intransitive Verb?' explores the shift of the verb from transitivity (to write 'something') to intransitivity (to write 'absolutely') (1986: 18). Barthes approaches his subject through the notion of 'voice': active, passive or middle, summarised by White as follows: 'Whereas in the active and passive voices, the subject of the verb is presumed to be external to the action, as either agent or patient, in the middle voice the subject is presumed to be *interior* to the action' (1992: 48). In Barthes' own words, 'by acting, the subject affects himself, he always remains inside the action, even if that action involves an object...in the modern verb of middle voice *to write*, the subject is constituted as immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it...' (1986: 18-19). For Hayden White, this middle voice may be associated with modernism as a space that breaks down oppositions associated with realism: 'agency and patiency, subjectivity and objectivity, literalness and figurativeness, fact and fiction, history and myth' (1992: 49).

White's article is partly a response to Berel Lang about the representability of events such as the Holocaust. For Lang, Barthes' middle voice or 'intransitive writing' offers an appropriate alternative to realist attempts to write traumatic histories. Realism assumes that such histories can be written about at a distance; they can be the object of discourse. For Lang, such distance between 'writer, text, what is written about, and, finally, the reader' must be broken down so that 'writing becomes itself the means of vision or comprehension, not a mirror of something independent, but an act and commitment – a doing or making rather than a reflection or description' (Lang, 2003: xviii). As White notes, Lang gives as example the Passover ritual of reciting the history of the Exodus 'to enable each reciter, everyone present, to see himself, to *tell* himself.... his voice, the at once literal and metaphorical voice that sounds the words, takes on the shape of its subject, much as a hand does with its grasp. The voice here becomes the expression of its subject, not its source or cause' (Lang, 2003: xviii-xix).

White's exploration of the usefulness of the middle voice when representing traumatic events and histories is part of a larger discussion about the relationship between *chronicling* history (which would be the objective of the TRC report), *narrating* history (which involves storytelling with its concomitant use of point of view and figuration and, thus, interpretation and potential aestheticisation) and the issue of whether or not historical events direct the historian to certain allowable genres: for example, can the Holocaust be told as a comedy? What moral imperatives dictate the choice of genre? (1992: 37-45). The article has important bearing, then, on questions of which voice a narrator (verbal or filmic) should use in trying to access trauma, on what kinds of identification are possible with the actual process of representing, and what genre is best disposed to the ethically responsible representation of atrocity and trauma.

Being effected and affected, being inside the action of writing, denying distance, identifying with the subject – when these acts are performed by the historian, the artist or the interlocutor of trauma and its victims, there are certain risks. White’s deployment of Barthes has been notably taken up by Dominick LaCapra, in his seminal work *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001). Here, he cautions against a too-easy application of the middle voice, with its emphasis on identification. Moral and ethical considerations cannot simply dispense with, at the very least, distinctions between victim and perpetrator (2001: 26). Moreover, if the middle voice may be expressed through *erlebte Rede*, or free indirect style, there are both advantages and problems. The free indirect style may express ‘degrees or modulations of irony and empathy, distance and proximity – at the limit in labile, undecidable fashion’ (*ibid*, 197). It may, thus, be useful ‘in cases in which the narrator is empathically unsettled and able to judge or even to predicate only in a hesitant, tentative fashion. It would not seem to be a vehicle for truth claims or for ethico-political judgements having any significant degree of decisiveness’ (*ibid*, 197).

There are risks of *over* identification, either with the victim or the perpetrator, inherent in the practice of middle-voicedness. In the case of the victim, over-identification can lead to the appropriation of the ‘victim’s voice or subject position’ (*ibid*, 78). In the latter case, the capacity of the middle voice to speak from the place of the perpetrator may create ‘an objectionable (or at best deeply equivocal) kind of discomfort or unease in the reader or viewer by furthering fascination and a confused sense of identification with or involvement in certain figures and their beliefs or actions in a manner that may well subvert judgement and critical response’ (*ibid*, 202-3).

In the light of the above debates, the questions I want to ask of the films under discussion are: What is the relationship between the filmic text and the reality with which it engages? What are the film's voices? How many voices does it allow? What role does genre play in the shaping of the content? How does aesthetic choice suggest and /or complicate the ethical position of the film and of the filmmaker, especially with regard to victim and perpetrator? To what extent does the choice of subject enable a complex truth about victim and perpetrator?

For the purposes of this discussion, I take as my starting point the view that both documentary and fictional films that engage with historical and material reality mediate that reality through narrative, and that the aesthetic choices made will reveal a process of reading, interpreting and *adapting* reality to the medium of film with all its formal, collaborative and financial demands. I also accept that the director never has complete control over the discourse of the film, even as he does not have full control over its reception.

Narratives of South African Trauma I

Mark Kaplan's Documentaries: Exorcising the Perpetrator

In 1995 President Nelson Mandela's Government of National Unity approved the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to uncover abuses of human rights under apartheid (notably through the personal testimony of victims), to grant amnesty to perpetrators where specific criteria were met and to grant reparations to victims. The aim of the TRC was to help ease the country's path from a strife-torn past to a peaceful, democratic future.¹

The innate visual drama of the TRC hearings lent itself well to filmic representation, of which Mark Kaplan's documentaries are among the finest. The two films I want to focus on are versions

of his engagement with the Mtimkulu family of Port Elizabeth.² On 14 April 1982, after being harrassed, tortured and poisoned, Siphiso Mtimkulu, a student activist, disappeared. Nearly fifteen years later, the perpetrators sought amnesty via the TRC. Gideon Nieuwoudt—the Eastern Cape security policeman linked to several apartheid crimes, including the murder of Steve Biko—asked to visit the Mtimkulu family in order to apologise to them. He asked Kaplan to set up the visit. During the course of the interview with the family, Siphiso Mtimkulu’s son, Sikhumbuzo, broke a vase over Nieuwoudt’s head, fracturing his skull. This event marks the climax of the second episode in the trilogy, entitled *Where Truth Lies* (1998). The longer, final version of the Mtimkulu story, *Between Joyce and Remembrance* (2004), traces the aftermath of the interview, especially its effects on Sikhumbuzo.³ A comparison between Kaplan’s films and Ian Gabriel’s narrative film, *Forgiveness* (2004) proves instructive with regard to problems of representing victim and perpetrator and the complex truths of history. Gabriel makes dramatic use of the same climactic event—the wounding of the perpetrator—in a story that radically alters the emphasis, trajectory and meanings of the documentaries.

The documentaries, with the Eastern Cape as their focus, carry the weighty sub-text of that region, summarised by Desmond Tutu as the place where the first wars were fought between settlers and indigenous peoples for control of the territory, as well as the birthplace of black resistance, black learning and many black leaders. He adds: ‘And precisely for this reason it seemed to have attracted some of the most notorious servants to implement apartheid’s viciousness’ (2000: 115).⁴

Where Truth Lies is thirty minutes long, a densely compacted treatment of Siphiso’s story, that focuses primarily on the interviews with his mother, Joyce, and Gideon Nieuwoudt, and introduces a key representational strategy—the

reconstruction of scenes of torture based on Siphiwo's affidavits, his words read in voice-over. These scenes are contained within the first half of the film, and, I suggest, have the power that Bazin ascribes to the cinematic image, *even though* we are told that these are dramatisations. Against this investment in the truth of Siphiwo's affidavits, giving images and voice to his written words, is the relatively distancing effect of the voice-over that guides us through the narrative. The voice belongs to an educated South African woman, a female voice which may, following Bruzzi (2002: 51), be seen as subversive of the documentary convention of male voice-overs.⁵ Given the findings of the TRC that hardly any women were perpetrators of violence, but were frequently its victims, either directly or through the loss of their menfolk (Foster *et al*, 2005: 17), this privileging of the woman's voice has a distinctly political role, giving verbal shape to the narrative of trauma. Nevertheless, by comparison with Kaplan's follow-up version, *Between Joyce and Remembrance*, the voice-over gives a measure of objectivity.

Where Truth Lies opens with a reconstruction of Siphiwo's capture, using the conventions of the thriller – low-key lighting, jagged hand-held camera, atmospheric music.⁶ We cut to a photograph of Siphiwo – which will become a leitmotif of the film -- and the voice-over summarising his story. We then cut to his mother, telling how she hopes that the TRC will tell her what happened to her son and why. Finally, we are introduced to Gideon Nieuwoudt, standing on the site of Siphiwo's murder and describing in measured terms how the young activist, together with his friend, Topsy Madaka, was killed, thrown on a pile of wood and burned. Nieuwoudt's impassive expression and laborious attempt at precision, his formal correction of 'Mr Mtimkulu' to 'the late Mr Mtimkulu,' indeed the bizarre courtesy of his reference to Siphiwo create an effect both nauseating and chilling. It is at this moment that the title of the film appears over

the background of the farmhouse—an image forever tainted by the horrors of Vlakplaas, the location of Eugene de Kock’s death squad.⁷ Later in the film, Joyce will visit the farm and will try to imagine where her son is—perhaps they did not take his bones to the Fish River; perhaps they dug his grave somewhere on this farm and buried him. All she knows for certain is that ‘Siphiwo died in this place. May God bless his soul. That is all I can say.’ The lack of a body to bury becomes one of the most poignant obstacles to the process of mourning.

On a tour through the Sanlam building, location of imprisonment and torture, Nieuwoudt will tell how he was known as ‘notorious Nieuwoudt’ by activists, ‘due,’ he says, ‘to the fact that I was loyal to my country, my people, my government.’ The note of pride, even boasting becomes more pronounced, accompanied by a glimmer of a smile, as he adds, ‘If these walls could speak at this moment, there’s no words to explain the situation, of what effect this special branch were at this stage, how effective we were....It’s true that we had powers, but we were the cream of the crop. Nothing could actually transpire here without me knowing about a detainee, because my office was next door.’⁸ The sequence cross-cuts between Nieuwoudt and the reconstructions of Siphiwo’s torture, a male voice-over reading from the affidavit. In this earlier version of the film, then, the reconstructions illustrate both Siphiwo’s experiences as victim, and confirm Nieuwoudt’s testimony, of whose self-damning horror he seems utterly unaware—and, indeed, he will steadfastly refuse to admit that he had anything to do with torturing Siphiwo.⁹

As the TRC closes in on him, Nieuwoudt asks to visit the Mtimkulu family. His motive, he says, is his conviction that God wishes him to do this: ‘I reconciled with Christ. I do believe in the objective of the Truth Commission, ‘cause even God commands

that if I've committed a sin, if I've done my brother wrong, I must ask God forgiveness for the sin and then go to my brother and said to him, "Listen, I've done you wrong.'" When he is finally seated opposite Siphwo's parents in their tiny township home, he reiterates this Christian rhetoric: 'With truth and sincerity, I come here today. This is where reconciliation started, where the Lord is being honoured and his name be glorified and we seek wisdom and knowledge through him.' He goes on to imply his own magnanimity: 'As a matter of fact, I never eliminated Siphwo [he killed Topsy; his fellow security policeman, Nick van Rensburg, shot Siphwo], but here I'm here and asking you people forgiveness.'

When Hannah Arendt describes the 'banality of evil' which she sees in Adolf Eichmann, she enumerates not only the efficient bureaucratisation of violence, of which Eichmann is proud, but his proclivity for cliché and officialese. She proposes that 'officialese became his language because he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché' (1965: 48). She continues: 'The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else' (*ibid*, 49). So, too, Nieuwoudt's terminology ('elimination'), his use of received Christian phrases that make no sense (how, for example, can he ask his brother's forgiveness, when his brother has been shot, burned and thrown away?), his blank repetition of words like 'honour,' emptied of all meaning, point to his inability to imagine himself into the position of those whose lives he's violated.¹⁰

What is notable about the visit is the dignity and strength with which the Mtimkulu's hear him out, as well as the firmness with which they reject his apology – it is fifteen years too late. It may not be too late for God, Joyce tells him, but it is much too late

for them. At this point their verbal rejection of him is dramatised by a crash, a cry, a camera leaping and Nieuwoudt's head covered in blood. Sikhumbuzo tells Kaplan he had had enough of the man's lying and needed to express his anger. Sikhumbuzo's young face, with its remarkable resemblance to the father he never knew, is calm and steady as he speaks, and, given how the film has carefully contextualised his life and the absence of his father (whose fate he discovers at the TRC hearing, resulting in his agonised collapse), we can but empathise with his action.

Between Joyce and Remembrance is sixty-eight minutes long and was completed in 2004, after seven years of working with the Mtimkulu family. This film is not merely an extended version of the former. It is a substantially reconceptualised documentary in which Kaplan foregrounds, not only his role as filmmaker, but his own political history. He appears in the film; his is the voice-over that describes events; he also comments on and interprets them. His own imprisonment in 1982 (the year of Sphiwo's imprisonment) suggests a tentative identification with his subject, although he is careful to mark the differences: he was released and deported, eventually returning to South Africa. His life went on. The newsclippings of himself and his mother and the heartrending recording of his mother's voice, full of relief that his deportation will mean an end to his own imprisonment (even as she acknowledges the many mothers who cannot experience this relief and will continue to suffer) give a legitimacy to Kaplan's role as filmmaker telling this particular story.

The film starts with Kaplan's voice-over announcing a kind of manifesto: 'I firmly believe that we must strive to keep certain memories alive and the camera is a way of keeping things from disappearing.' This foregrounding of the act of making the film stresses the act of recording as testimony, as witness. It also implies the constructedness of the documentary with its own

point of view and narrative shape. Kaplan's visual and aural presence throughout the film (we hear him interview Aluta, Siphiso's daughter, and Sikhumbuzo after he has thrown the vase; we see him arrive at the Mtimkulu home and hug Joyce and her husband; we see him looking anxiously off to the rear of the house after Sikhumbuzo has thrown the vase and, apparently, run out) alerts us to the level of reflexivity in making the film and – in retrospect and by comparison with *Where Truth Lies* – to the ways in which he will manipulate the editing of this version to tell an even stronger story, here condemning Nieuwoudt as a liar.

The question of what kind of truth a film can tell takes us back to the set of problems Egoyan set himself to solve in telling the truth of the Armenian Genocide. While Egoyan's task of recovery (in all its senses) is a different category of endeavour, given the decades-old denial by the Turks of systematic genocide, the questions and aesthetic answers he proposes are suggestive for my current purposes, especially as they pertain to the vexed issue of truth and, indeed, to the contested ability of the TRC to reveal truth. Antje Krog asks the question: 'Will a Commission be sensitive to the word "truth"?' and suggests that 'If [the TRC's] interest in truth is linked only to amnesty and compensation, then it will have chosen not truth, but justice. If it sees truth as the widest possible compilation of people's perceptions, stories, myths and experiences, it will have chosen to restore memory and foster a new humanity, and perhaps that is justice in its deepest sense' (1998: 16).

Kaplan's two takes on the story of Gideon Nieuwoudt's involvement with the death of Siphiso Mtimkulu dramatise the problem of kinds of truth and justice. In *Between Joyce and Remembrance*, the first frames are devoted to the bright pink boots and the beating drum of a group of cheerleaders. The vibrant rhythm and colours of the opening may be disorientating for the

viewer, if we know that this is the final episode of Kaplan's trilogy. In what festivity are we to participate? The occasion unfolds as the three-day burial ceremony for Siphiso, which bookends the film. There will be praise singers, communal singing, speeches, feasting, the ceremonial slaughter of sheep, and, in an unbearably moving sequence at the end of the film, the burying of a tiny casket containing Siphiso's hair—all that the family have left of his body. Kaplan thus sets up sharp contrasts of emotion, challenging any simplistic or sentimental response to the final act in Siphiso's tragedy, any reductive truth to be read off his life and his death. Joyce's question at the start of this film is not to know where her son is, but to know what reconciliation is: 'I have no idea what reconciliation is,' she says. 'I need a teacher.' The burial ceremony suggests, perhaps, reconciliation with her own grief. The film makes it clear that reconciliation with Nieuwoudt is impossible.

This documentary has much more footage of interviews with a wider range of family and colleagues who knew Siphiso. A sense of what kind of person he was is more fully developed and we get to see and hear more of both his children. Our introduction to his persecutor happens eight minutes into the film (as opposed to one-and-a-half minutes into the earlier film). Also included are interviews with Di Bishop and scenes of her visiting Joyce Mtimkulu, the two weeping over their terrible losses.¹¹ These scenes, along with Kaplan's presence, serve to remind the viewer that the country's history was not simply one of black against white and that moments of cross-racial bonding and support have been important to the possibility of building a non-racial society. The film accomplishes this without muddying the definition of perpetrator and victim, however (a muddying which Gabriel's film seems set on accomplishing).

One of the most interesting revisions of the earlier film relates to the interview between Nieuwoudt and Joyce Mtimkulu. Notably, Kaplan breaks the convention of the objective voice-over and interprets Nieuwoudt's motives (he wanted the interview solely to strengthen his claim for amnesty), and his psychological state at the time: 'Looking at him, I see no signs of remorse. What strikes me most is how remote he seems, but perhaps this is merely the outward sign of someone suddenly powerless now trying to hold things together, while living a nightmare.' As Nieuwoudt's interview with the family progresses, *they* interrogate *him*. He persists in his story that he had nothing to do with poisoning or torturing Siphwiwo. Where the earlier film used the dramatic reconstructions of Nieuwoudt's torture of Siphwiwo as ironic confirmation of Nieuwoudt's smug assurances of his notoriety, in this final part of the trilogy the reconstructions are relocated to the interview. Each time Nieuwoudt denies that he tortured Siphwiwo, Kaplan cuts to the reconstructed footage drawn from Siphwiwo's affidavit. Again, even though the scenes of torture are reconstructions, they carry the force of the cinematic image to 'bear our faith away,' to generate a powerful emotional and visceral response. Given this Bazinian authority of the image in film, these edits have the effect of flatly contradicting Nieuwoudt: he is judged a liar. We might argue that Sikhumbuzo's action of flinging the vase becomes a cathartic release for the audience, as much as for him, in this dramatic reconstruction, not only of the affidavit, but, through the revised editing, of the interview itself. Moreover, the Old Testament narrative of the God of vengeance supersedes the New Testament urging forgiveness. The moment of the crashing vase—an image of literal fissure—throws into disarray the mandate (and the official 'miracle' narrative) of the TRC.

Kaplan's voice-over keeps pace with the scene, describing the vase-throwing as an 'unexpected turn of events'—a phrase

that recalls Stella Bruzzi's analysis of the performative documentary: 'A documentary is deemed performative if it formally illustrates the notion that a documentary is an unpredictable act' (2000: 178). Earlier in her analysis, she argues that 'the interventionist documentary filmmaker is a fluid entity defined and redefined by every context in which he or she appears' (164), or, as Barthes might say, is 'effected and affected by' the filmmaking process.

Interestingly, Shoshana Felman describes unpredictability as a central factor in testimony. Writing of Celan's poetry, she suggests that 'both the mystery and the complexity of the endeavor of the testimony and of its compelling power derive, precisely, from this element of unpredictability, from what is unpredictable, specifically, in the effects of the exchange and the degree of interaction between the historical, the clinical and the poetic dimensions of the testimony' (1992: 42). Kaplan's filming is a witness to unpredictability, to the multiple testimonies, the risky exchange of voices of Nieuwoudt and the Mtimkulu family (mother, father, son, daughter), as history is refigured.

At one level, the camera 'merely' documents reality; the filmmaker is humble before what the real world presents to him. However, the narrative will be ideologically reconceptualised in the editing room. When Kaplan re-edits the sequence in the ways described above, he effectively narrativises history to generate unequivocal loathing for the perpetrator and empathy for his victims, even in their own moment of violence.¹² If justice went astray in the granting of amnesty to Nieuwoudt for this particular atrocity then, in the film, we see a kind of punishment, both in the judgement the film makes and in the crashing vase. We might recall Jann Turner's frank remark, in *Long Night's Journey into Day*, that surely the more human response to cruelty is to want to hurt the perpetrator, not sit down with him and seek reconciliation in

what she describes as the Kafkaesque world of the TRC. In a more theorised vein, using Freud's discussion of group psychology and the primal patricide proposed in *Totem and Taboo*, Mark Sanders has analysed the attempt by Nieuwoudt to enter into mourning and condolence with the family and the subsequent attack by Sikhumbuzo (whose name means 'remembrance'): 'The policeman is a rival in remembrance, and thus in, and for, love [of the dead father]. When he is driven off, he is denied the right to mourn, to condole, to love, to be loved. If this is his punishment, common sense about retributive justice allows us little quarrel with it (or with the letting of some blood from the ex-policeman's head)' (2002: 78). Punishment trumps amnesty.

Narratives of South African Trauma II

Ian Gabriel's Forgiveness: Sanctifying the Perpetrator

The ineradicability of the desire for revenge appears to be a subliminal message in Ian Gabriel's film (despite his observation to Nicole Temkin in a 2004 interview that 'South Africa is the biggest proof that the miracle of forgiveness is possible,' and despite the religious transmutation so problematically imposed on the encounter between perpetrator and victim).

As mentioned above, the key link between Gabriel's film and Kaplan's is the story of a policeman asking forgiveness of the family of his victim, here named Daniel, and the moment when a young man (in this case, the brother of the victim) throws (in this case) a tea pot at the policeman's head. Although Gabriel states that he and Greg Latter, the screenwriter, wanted to 'distill the thousands of different stories that come out of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings' (Director's Q&A, Press Pack, 2004), the specific resonances with Kaplan's documentary tempt one to

compare the treatment of perpetrator and victim, and the use of genre.

Gabriel describes the protagonist, Tertius Coetzee, as ‘someone who did the wrong thing in the wrong moment’ for whom we should ‘feel empathy’ as we do for the family (Temkin interview). Beyond that, Coetzee is described as ‘the archetypal drifter and condemned outsider. He arrives in the small town of “Paternoster” on the South African Atlantic West Coast. His character is reminiscent of classical Western-themed anti-heroes: he’s made his trip through Babylon and he’s returned to repent in the hope of finding redemption’ (Director’s Q&A, Press Pack). The synopses in the Press Pack add that this ‘classic “Western”-genre, damaged anti-hero draws all who confront him into a morally ambiguous universe where murder offers release and betrayal points the way to freedom,’ while the murder of Coetzee is seen as ‘poetic justice.’¹³ In keeping with this declared generic affiliation, the film deploys an extremely seductive visual style, for which it has been much praised, but which points to the risks of aestheticising a narrative of atrocity.¹⁴

The film starts with Coetzee’s point of view as he drives along the road to Paternoster. We see a St Christopher charm hanging from the rear view mirror, the first of many, increasingly laboured religious references that construct Coetzee as both pilgrim and saviour, a willed reading of the perpetrator as focus of empathy. Vosloo’s performance is monotone: a perpetually wounded expression, a drooping, bloodshot eye—filmed in dramatic close-up—furrowed brow, repeated pill-popping and heavily lumbering gait (except when we see him jump from his bedroom window in the *de rigueur* semi-nude scene associated with Arnold Vosloo, whether he is Boetie on the Border or the Mummy). Clearly this man is filled with agony and torment, the focaliser of the film, the bird in the cage (another heavily symbolic

motif). Moreover, this is a man who has already received amnesty. Thus the questionable motives presumably driving Nieuwoudt are specifically discounted. Coetzee really does want forgiveness; he cannot live with himself; he does come to the Grootbooms with 'truth and sincerity' (Nieuwoudt's words). How he arrived at this desire is undisclosed, in an apparently deliberate refusal of the film to engage with Coetzee's past, to attempt to understand the forces that created him.

When he finally meets the family, the contrast with the documentary version is startling. We have been introduced to a massively dysfunctional family. Their backstory emerges through the accusations cast at the father by his two children: a conservative coloured man who saved for his son to go to University, who bought him a car, who apparently sets great store by material goods, Hendrik Grootboom refuses to accept that his son was not a 'good boy,' was in fact a freedom fighter, hiding explosives in his room destined for Koeberg Nuclear Power Station. He was not killed in a car highjacking but was detained, tortured and murdered by the police. The scandal, according to his daughter Sannie, is what kept them from hearing these things at the TRC. The plausibility of this account is in question, given that we are told, not shown. The story is not dramatised; we have to take the children's interpretation on trust. All we see of Hendrik (Zane Meas) and his wife, Magda (Denise Newman), are two kindly, grieving parents, Magda almost to the point of catatonia, emerging only to watch *7de Laan*.¹⁵ The son (Christo Davids) and daughter (Quanita Adams) play their roles with an overwrought, unmodulated energy that is a relief from the ponderous misery of Coetzee, but makes it very difficult to register them as complex and multi-levelled.

Moreover, Coetzee's encounter with the Grootboom family is intercut with the development of the sub-plot: Daniel's sister,

Sannie, phones three of her brother's erstwhile friends to tell them of Coetzee's arrival. They set out across the Karoo on a mission of vengeance. This creation of narrative suspense serves further to militate against a nuanced development of the psychological dynamics of the interaction between perpetrator and victim. (I am not insensitive to the needs of the box-office, but want to put the question of what sacrifices are made when conventions of genre dictate the unfolding of narrative, character and moral universe, especially when the stakes are as high as in films that seek to deal with traumatic histories).

When the interview with Coetzee takes place, we are treated, largely, to his pained monologue on the one hand and the family's helplessness on the other. As the family did not go to the TRC hearings, this is the first time that they hear all the ghastly details of their son's torture and death. Coetzee does not spare them. That a scene like this would take place in the privacy of their home, with no mediating presence except that of the ineffectual priest, Father Dalton, and none of the ritual of the TRC, seems very implausible, and also at odds with the fact that actual perpetrators seldom acknowledged torturing their victims (see endnote no. 9). As Coetzee is allowed to tell the story of torture, we, ironically, have a mimicry of the torture itself, especially as described by Elaine Scarry (1985, chapter 1) – the torturer's voice extends itself into the world, filling the world, while the bodies and voices of his victims are disempowered, ground down by his determination to tell the truth, the whole truth. The children make an effort to interrogate and challenge him, but Magda offers him tea and Hendrik insists that his daughter fetch the man an aspirin. When Ernest throws the tea pot at him, we do have a cathartic moment – but this gesture acts more as a precursor to the final sacrifice of Coetzee by the three avengers than a way of engaging fully with Ernest and what it meant to him to lose his brother. Indeed, the script makes it clear that Ernest and his brother were

rivals for Magda's approval – Daniel was the perfect son in whose shadow Ernest grew up. Daniel himself is the absent figure around whom myths are built, the occasion, merely, for Coetzee's story of redemption.

There are two moments that open up important gaps in the portrayal of Coetzee as a tormented man in search of forgiveness and that suggest, instead, a mix of sadism and masochism at the heart of his desire. After the interview, the priest challenges his right to put the family through such suffering as he has just perpetrated with his testimony. Later, when Sannie has been won over to Coetzee after his act of placing shells on her brother's grave, she begs him to leave, to escape the avengers. When he refuses, she shouts at him, 'You don't want forgiveness. You just want to be punished.' Both moments are, however, subsumed by the overarching narrative of Coetzee's redemption, to which end he must stay and must die, his dead body covering Daniel's grave.

To some extent, Coetzee is figured as the scapegoat, the outsider who is only tangentially connected to the community and upon whom, thus, may be inflicted the violence that will ensure the healing of that community and its protection from its own violence. René Girard (1977) writes of the necessity for a substitute to be found for the actual aggressor in order to stem the repetition of violence in the form of vengeance. In so far as 'forgiveness' becomes the mantra of the film, with a crescendo of forgiving of all by all leading to its climax, it is clear that this community has buried violence against itself. Into this scenario comes Coetzee who, in one of the most hyperbolic moments, is thanked by Magda for bringing the fish back, in effect for being their saviour.

In her meditation on the meanings of forgiveness, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela proposes that '[t]he victim in a sense *needs* forgiveness as part of the process of becoming rehumanized....It

is part of the process of reclaiming self-efficacy' (2003: 128). This moment 'usually occurs,' however, 'when there has been a change in the way the victim relates to his or her trauma. Forgiveness is not simply meant to relieve victimizers of their guilt, to make things easy for them' (*ibid*, 97). Gabriel's film fails to give full subjectivity to the Grootboom's, or to focalise the narrative at least as fully through their gaze as through that of Coetzee – especially through Magda's as she is the one who will urge forgiveness of Coetzee. Their own relationship to their trauma is generalised through the melodramatic patterns of familial rage, guilt and recrimination. If forgiving Coetzee does allow for the final scenes of tentative recovery of the family, they speak less of 'reclaiming self-efficacy' than of the *gift* of efficacy bestowed by Coetzee's egregious martyrdom.¹⁶

Moreover, the film is careful not to give him a backstory: although he wears a wedding ring and his car has an EC number plate, we hear hardly anything about his family or his private history.¹⁷ This vagueness fits him for the role of scapegoat as described by Girard, connected yet on the margins (1977: 12), in whom violence may finally be stopped, as there is no fear of repercussion. That he is killed after the family's memorial service for Daniel lends a further ritualised quality to his death. The flaw in this scenario is that Coetzee is, of course, the culprit. He is the aggressor. Therefore, in Girard's schema, vengeance has taken place. It might be suggested that the film sets up a sub-plot of private vengeance that is metamorphosed, through the pattern of symbolism, into a plot of sacrifice. The sub-plot poses renewed violence, however, as the three avengers, replete with black Cortina, discover betrayal amongst themselves. The final vision in terms of the TRC mandate is bleak indeed.

The film's promise of recurrent vengeance may, ironically, be read as a sober rewriting of the TRC's narrative of restoration, a recognition of the desire for revenge that ruptures the dream of healing. Michael Ignatieff, for example, challenges Desmond Tutu, quoting his description of the aim of the TRC: 'the promotion of national unity and reconciliation' and 'the healing of a traumatized, divided, wounded, polarized people.' 'Laudable aims,' comments Ignatieff, 'but are they coherent? Look at the assumptions he makes: that a nation has one psyche, not many; that the truth is certain, not contestable; and that, when the truth is known by all, it has the capacity to heal and reconcile. These are not so much epistemological assumptions as articles of faith about human nature: that the truth is one and, if we know it, it will make us free' (1999: 170).

Later, he notes that '[w]hen it comes to healing, one is faced with the most mysterious process of all. For what seems apparent in the former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda, and in South Africa is that the past continues to torment because it is *not* past. These places are not living in a serial order of time but in a simultaneous one, in which the past and the present are a continuous, agglutinated mass of fantasies, distortions, myths and lies' (*ibid*, 186). Out of this simultaneity, the need for closure could just as easily be satisfied by revenge, 'a possibility wholly excluded and deemed outside the acceptable range of discourse of the South African TRC' (Hamber and Wilson, 2000: 3).

The controversial amnesty clause, which counters the desire for Old Testament justice and/or revenge, has been stoutly and repeatedly defended, notably by Desmond Tutu in his eloquent and moving book, significantly titled *No Future Without Forgiveness*, but the real act of violence by the victim in Kaplan's documentaries and the imagined act in Gabriel's film speak another story, a different truth. Where Mark Sanders' reading of

Sikhumbuzo's throwing of the vase inscribes the moment into a Freudian narrative, Gabriel's film inscribes the trio of avengers into a popular Hollywood genre, that of the Western. Both inscriptions may carry psychological truth. The problem with Gabriel's film, though, is that the avengers are kept at a distance. They are two-dimensional characters, whose own post-apartheid lives appear to be profoundly unsatisfactory (the white man still lives with his mother; the coloured man seems to have very poor marital relations and the black man turns out to have been Daniel's betrayer).

In acceding to generic coding, the film thus compromises the possibilities of a multivalent treatment of trauma. The perpetrator is imagined as genuinely damaged by his actions and as capable of remorse, repentance and moral regeneration. This in itself is not suspect and in a more thoughtful, innovative script may have yielded the complex drama of redemption apparently desired by the filmmakers. In this film, however, Coetzee's regeneration as a repentant seeker of forgiveness happens off screen, and his transfiguration into a West Coast Christ comes at the expense of a fully developed representation of the victims. Choosing the western (and its fellow traveller, the gangster film) runs the risk of a melodramatic moral structure where, as Linda Williams (following Peter Brooks) has pointed out, 'moral legibility' is crucial; villain and victim need to be clearly demarcated (1998: 59). If Coetzee is the individualised anti-hero who becomes the sacrificial hero, then what room is there for the family to be collective heroes in the way that the Mtinkulu family clearly are? In its over-identification with the perpetrator and its failure to complicate the avengers, the film fails, also, to engage provocatively with the fissures in the healing vision of the TRC.

In more sophisticated hands, melodrama may provide a structure for complex moral investigation, as seen, for example, in

Roman Polanski's adaptation of Ariel Dorfman's *Death and The Maiden* (the play is used by Tutu [2000: 29-30] to illustrate his argument about the efficacy of truth-telling as a means to healing). But this is not the direction chosen by *Forgiveness*.¹⁸

The Middle Voice, the Third Space and the Case of Eugene de Kock

One model for navigating the difficult terrain of empathy in traumatic narratives is Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's compelling account of her interviews with Eugene de Kock, epitomised in the South African consciousness as 'Prime Evil' (not least through the very watchable if turgid series of documentaries produced by Jacques Pauw).¹⁹

As Kaplan tells his own story in *Between Joyce and Remembrance*, so, too, does Gobodo-Madikizela recount key moments of her experience under apartheid, moments that embrace both victimhood and shame. Her frame narrative leads into the account of her meetings with de Kock whom we come to see as a complex human being, driven by his personal history as much as by forces more difficult to define – it is one of the many strengths of the book that, like Egoyan's film, it asks a 'forest of questions' and allows us to hear the 'sound of many possible answers.' No simple psychological model will explain de Kock to us.

We are drawn into the labyrinth of the man's moral universe, but Gobodo-Madikizela never lets us forget the reality of those victimised by him. About two thirds of the way through the book lies a key chapter, 'The Language of Trauma.' In cinematic terms, we cut from de Kock to the lives of those who suffered, those who forgave and, in a powerfully reflexive move, the author's own attempts to deal with the pain of listening to the language of trauma and to negotiate the apparently mutually exclusive forms of empathy – on the one hand with the perpetrator; on the other, with the victim.

Neither Kaplan's documentaries nor Gabriel's narrative film give us much in the way of personal background to the perpetrator (Nieuwoudt eventually allowed himself to be filmed in his sitting room - an imposing, chilly-looking space of high facebrick walls). If Kaplan's films are denied empathy for the perpetrator and Gabriel's film overbalances in its empathy for its increasingly mythicised portrayal of the perpetrator, we find in Gobodo-Madikizela's book a paradigm of how to be open to a critical empathy that is imaginative enough to delineate the spectral outline of the 'human being [that] died that night' in one of the murder operations that appears to have traumatised de Kock (2003: 51), but that is also fully conscious of, and candid about, the risks of feeling empathy for him (*ibid*, 116, 120). Her responses are subjected to minute scrutiny even as she allows de Kock his humanity (*ibid*, 127). Importantly, forty-six hours spent listening to him generates a growing understanding of the depths of his psychic damage. Hers is an 'empathic unsettlement' in the presence of the perpetrator that never succumbs to the sentimentality so speciously evoked in the film *Forgiveness*.

It is, perhaps, also worth noting that de Kock wins forgiveness from two of the women whom he has wronged, widows of the black officers killed in the 1989 Motherwell car bombing, for fear that they would expose Security Branch activities.²⁰ Gobodo-Madikizela is moved by this act of forgiveness and recounts her meeting with one of the widows, Pearl Faku: "'I was profoundly touched by him,'" Mrs Faku said of her encounter with de Kock. Both women felt that de Kock had communicated to them something he felt deeply and had acknowledged their pain' (2003: 14). The book that follows is partly a quest to find out how such forgiveness may happen - what, in the perpetrator, may evoke such a gift from the victim? What is the journey that the victim must travel to be able to offer such a gift?

In contrast, the Mtimkulus make it quite clear that Nieuwoudt—whose inner life remains opaque to us—has not convinced them that he has recognised their pain; there is nothing in him that touches them as de Kock touches Pearl Faku. The fictional Tertius Coetzee, as argued above, offers us the two-dimensionality of a character whose confession to the family has no context, in terms of either personal history or psychology. De Kock, on the other hand, emerges as a very particular kind of perpetrator, one who allows himself to be interviewed at length (in 1998, he told his story to Jeremy Gordin). During the TRC hearings, the construction of de Kock as scapegoat started replacing his construction as Prime Evil. Foster *et al*, in *The Theatre of Violence* (2005), describe the perpetrator hearings through the metaphor of flickering lights, as glimpses of the truth about security force activities flickered on and off. But with the trial of de Kock, ‘at last, lights were switched on and the public received insights into the machinations of the top layers of the security police....At the close of his trial the media reported on De Kock’s life. The public at last had a clear picture of one of those responsible. This ‘clarity’ –and the brutality of the acts to which he confessed – is why he is held in memory’ (2005: 41-42).

The Theatre of Violence explores the ‘tricky endeavour’ of ‘understanding perpetrators’ and concludes that a third way, ‘the relational approach,’ might offer a route out of the impasse of binary oppositions (*ibid*, 92):

We argue that those responsible for violence should be regarded as potentially both victim and perpetrator, as well as both subject to circumstances/influences and active initiators. Human activity, we suggest, occurs in the ‘third space’ between active positioning and the passive concept of being positioned. The theoretical concept of ‘subjectivity’ attempts to capture a ‘third

space' between the passive subject-of-the-Queen and the active agent as subject-of-a-sentence. (*ibid*, 322)

The writers propose, finally, the replacement of the term perpetrator by the 'more ambiguous and dramaturgical term of "protagonist,"' who acts, takes up positions 'in a field, arena or theatre of conflict' (*ibid*).²¹

The nature of the 'perpetrator' is all-important in making a film (or writing a book) that seeks to tell the story of trauma. Kaplan chose Siphiwo Mtimkulu as his subject and had Nieuwoudt thrust upon him, a perpetrator who appears to have been irredeemable as a subject for the 'middle voice' or the 'third space,' not least perhaps because he was a closed book to himself, epitomising the banality of evil. The creation of Tertius Coetzee is a willed choice in the direction, it seems, of justifying the amnesty clause: not only does Coetzee make a full disclosure, but he clearly *is* repentant. That he does not make the disclosure in 'the full glare of television lights' (Tutu, 2000: 51) compromises a key factor in Tutu's vindication of the amnesty hearings. That he feels remorse (not required by the amnesty process) encourages us to identify with him as sincere. The *excess* of his sacrificial victimhood, however, merely inverts the binary opposition of victim and perpetrator, instead of deconstructing it through the third space of the relational model.

With Eugene de Kock as the subject of representation, and the use of the nuanced middle voice that we sense operating in her account of him, Gobodo-Madikizela's book proposes a rich and difficult way to tell the story of perpetrators, victims and the different traumas that they both enact and endure 'with pristine complexity, showing how history is often created from the effort to accommodate differing accounts of the same event' (Egoyan, 903). She has, of course, written a non-fiction narrative and not a screenplay, but its power of storytelling, characterisation and

visualisation, as well as the deft shifts in point of view and the superlative concision with which it manages its vast scope suggest tantalising possibilities for a new kind of 'TRC film.'²²

Notes

- ¹ For the full text of Act no. 34 of 1995 see <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/legal/act9534.htm>.
- ² Kaplan made a trilogy of films devoted to Sphiwo Mtimkulu's story. The first, *If Truth Be Told* (1996) focuses on Sphiwo's activism and the lead-up to the TRC hearings. The voice of the father, Spho Mtimkulu, is strongly present in this film and a male voice-over is used. My article focuses on the second and third films, where the perpetrator, Gideon Nieuwoudt, makes his appearance.
- ³ For the *chronicle* of Sphiwo Mtimkulu's experiences, see the TRC report, volume 2 (p. 225) and Volume 3 (pp. 74-77). See also the transcription of Nieuwoudt's amnesty hearing in the case of Sphiwo Mtimkulu and Topsy Madaka: <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/amntrans/am1997.htm>
- ⁴ For fuller histories of the centrality of the region to the formation of South Africa, see Noël Mostert's magisterial *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* (1992), Les Switzer's *Power and Resistance in an African Society: The Ciskei Xhosa and the Making of South Africa* (1993) and, for a chronicle of the region's suffering under apartheid, see Volume Three of the TRC Report, 34-154.
- ⁵ Interestingly, the voice-over for Reid and Hoffmann's *Long Night's Journey into Day* (2000) is also female, specifically the celebrity voice of Helen Mirren.
- ⁶ I use first names for the Mtimkulu family, partly to identify them clearly, but am aware that this usage also mimes the sympathy for the family which the films convey. Referring to Gideon Nieuwoudt by means of his surname has, of course, a much more distancing effect.
- ⁷ I touch on the role and representation of Eugene de Kock in the final section of this article.
- ⁸ Nieuwoudt's English is flawed and heavily accented. It would have been interesting to see what effect the use of Afrikaans with subtitles would have had on the image he projects. In a personal communication, the director told me that they had tried this method, but it did not produce any change to the sense of Nieuwoudt's implausibility and opportunism in his quest for forgiveness. Nieuwoudt's apparent self-satisfaction is also noted by Michael Ignatieff when he describes Jillian Edelstein's photograph of him, 'remarkable... because of the directness of Nieuwoudt's gaze, the casual male way he holds his cigarette, the hand in his pocket, and above all, the hint of a smile' (2001: 18).

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- 9 Foster *et al* note the TRC Report’s observation that perpetrators ‘seldom seem to have regarded torture as a major violation’ or as a ‘human rights violation in its own right.’ They ‘came forward as part of wider applications for killing and abduction’ (2005: 16).
- 10 In the longer *Between Joyce and Remembrance*, we also find out that he ‘gave his heart to the Lord’ in 1972. Joyce tells him that he has failed as a Christian and goes on to describe the suffering he has caused her and her family. His wholly inadequate response is to tell her that he has ‘done his duty’: she turns her face away with an uncharacteristic expression of extreme impatience and exasperation.
- 11 Di Bishop (now Oliver) was a key figure in the activist women’s organisation, The Black Sash. She was wounded and her husband, Brian, and sister, Molly Blackburn, killed in a car accident in 1985.
- 12 It is possible to imagine a very different kind of editing that would posit Nieuwoudt as the well-meaning ex-cop who has realised the evil of his past actions, yet whose overtures are brutally rejected by a wild youth insensitive to the dream of reconciliation in the new South Africa. This is, in effect, what Gabriel’s film will offer.
- 13 I have compared *Forgiveness to Paris, Texas* – Wim Wenders’ film is referenced in the Press Pack –in an article entitled ‘Parys, Texas or, The Afflictions of Genre’ (2006), where I propose its inadequacy to the complex rewriting of the western that Wim Wenders accomplishes.
- 14 See, for example, Doug Cummings’ thrilled response: ‘Adopting a burnished, high-contrast and desaturated visual style, this extremely immersive and philosophical thriller is a festival highlight—I don’t think it takes a false step from beginning to end. ...Forgiveness has been described as setting oneself free from injustice rather than forgetting it, and this film exemplifies that notion with such stylistic and narrative grace. ... A major festival standout, it deserves substantial US distribution, especially given that it alternates between South African and English dialogue.’ [sic] www.filmjourney_org_PSIFF_diary_3.htm
- 15 A popular South Africa soap opera.
- 16 Unsurprisingly, Mark Kaplan expresses astonishment at this take on reconciliation: ‘In the documentary our empathy lies with the victims even when one of them, a teenager, is driven to violence. In the fictional film you are supposed to feel the pain of the victim turned perpetrator and yet, simultaneously and increasingly as the film unfolds, the focus is with the pain and sensitivity of the perpetrator turned victim!’ (2005).
- 17 The EC number plate cues us to the historical meanings of the Eastern Cape, but relocating the story to the West Coast serves the topographical and photogenic needs of the Western much more effectively. The Last Supper at the Paternoster Hotel does yield the information that Coetzee’s children like fishing for elf. Mark Kaplan (2005) has also noted the omission of a backstory for Coetzee.
- 18 Melodrama may, arguably, preclude the kind of attention to reality that the politically engaged, aesthetically exquisite (and, often, symbolically charged) films of early neo-realism accomplished. I am thinking especially of the early films of Rossellini, Fellini, de Sica and, perhaps especially, Visconti’s *La Terra Trema* (1948). The realist intimations of Gabriel’s treatment of the Paternoster community have been praised by

David Philips in 'Looking the Beast in the Fictional Eye: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Film' (forthcoming in [eds] Richard Mendelsohn and Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Black and White in Colour. African History on Screen*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2006) and suggest that subscribing more fully to the neo-realist model might have worked well for the film, given the filmmakers' choice not to subscribe to 'modernist' innovation of the kind explored by Egoyan and Kaplan (or in his theoretical ruminations, by Hayden White, as outlined above).

¹⁹ He also documented the death squads and their leaders in two books, *In the Heart of the Whore: The Story of Apartheid's Death Squads* (1991) and *Into the Heart of Darkness: Confessions of Apartheid's Assassins* (1997). I treated of these texts in an article entitled 'The Art of Lying: From Kurtz to De Kock' (2001).

See David Herman's acerbic account in 'The Lady and the Tiger...But Not the Truth,' <http://www.gowanusbooks.com/lady.htm>

²¹ This quest for a third space is akin to Philip Frankel's challenge to dichotomous readings of victim and perpetrator in his analysis of the Sharpeville massacre (*An Ordinary Atrocity: Sharpeville and its Massacre*, 2001).

²² A now-accepted genre of film that includes *In My Country* (d/John Boorman), *Red Dust* (d/ Tom Hooper) and *Zulu Love Letter* (d/Ramadan Suleiman), all made in 2004.

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“ ‘Cinema, Glamour, Atrocity’: Narratives of Trauma.” *Social Dynamics*. 32: 2 (2006): 22-49.