

## FINAL DRAFT

### Trauma, authenticity and the Limits of Verbatim Amanda Stuart Fisher, Central School of Speech and Drama

#### Introduction:

In his short essay to accompany the publication of Robin Soans's verbatim play *Talking to Terrorists*, David Hare describes the resurgence of verbatim - or to use Hare's terminology - 'factual' theatre as '[offering] *authentic* news of overlooked thought and feeling' (Hare in Soans 2005:112 my italics). For Hare, like many other practitioners and commentators of verbatim and documentary theatre, the use of the term 'authenticity' in the context of theatre equates to a yearning for greater honesty, truthfulness and importantly, a greater correspondence to reality. The focus on verbatim interviews promises a more direct and *authentic* access to actual lived experience and it is this desire for a more unmediated access to what is 'real' that seems to lie behind Hare's call for a 'return to realism' (Hare in Soans 2005: 112) leading him to ask:

Why can't we just admit that theatre using real people has become a fabulously rich and varied strand which, for many years has been pumping red cells into the dramatic blood stream? (Hare in Soans 2005:113).

While I agree with Hare that theatre derived from real people's stories and actual lived events offers a refreshingly new perspective and insight into 'overlooked' situations, in this article I question whether it is the *truth* claims of this kind of work that guarantees its authenticity. Hare's 'factual theatre' appears to derive its status of authenticity from its faithful adherence to actuality and reality. Yet I would argue that the testimony of traumatised subjects, which verbatim theatre exploits, places great pressure on such literalist construals of truth and authenticity. The 'truth' of the traumatic event is arguably not transparent, knowable or even communicable. Rather, trauma is, by definition, that which 'resists simple comprehension' (Caruth 1996: 6) and can perhaps best be understood as a radical break or rupture in our understanding of what it means to be in the world. To suggest then that the 'authenticity' of verbatim theatre which deals with trauma can be explained simply by its capacity to be truthful, not only overlooks the problem trauma presents to this kind of representational, and dramaturgically literalist form of theatre: it also places limitations on theatre's capacity to respond *authentically* to real stories of trauma.

In what follows, I will argue that to fully comprehend what is at stake, dramaturgically, in the context of 'real life' stories of trauma, we should set aside standard conceptions of truth (such as correspondence theories or adequacy to the facts) and instead consider a more existentially nuanced articulation of truth grasped as 'authenticity'. One such model that provides a possible route to do this is Martin Heidegger's account of being-towards-death. In Heidegger's interpretation of authenticity we find that what is at stake is not factual veracity, but fidelity to the very conditions of our own

existence. Using a Heideggerian-based account of authenticity, then, I hope to consider some possibilities for a testimonial theatre which enables us to comprehend what authenticity and truth might mean in the context of narratives of trauma.

It should be said, however, that this kind of interpretation is not without controversy - and not least because Heidegger's account of authenticity could be seen to invoke highly romantic notions of selfhood which, in abandoning 'truth', would appear to relinquish any critical purchase on the world (see Guignon 2004<sup>i</sup>). Notwithstanding the legitimacy of such objections, there are alternative interpretations to consider. For instance, Taylor Carman argues against this view, by suggesting that for Heidegger authenticity is not about being true to oneself, or about 'self expression', but is instead about coming to terms with my own death and finitude. To live authentically Dasein<sup>ii</sup> must come to terms with its own existence and in doing so, be open to the radical closing down of possibilities that death precipitates. To exist authentically, Dasein must in Carman's terms '[own] *up wholly* - that is, *wholeheartedly* - to itself in its existence.' (Carman 2003:276).

Now, although Soans's play honours the factual 'truth' of the stories that he was told, I would argue that the play represents something of a missed opportunity rather than being a '[revolution] in art' (Hare in Soans 2005: 112). The stories we are told in *Talking to Terrorists* are often horrific, brutal and 'true'. Nevertheless, it is hard to see how these accounts penetrate the act of terrorism itself. Certainly what is clear from the play is that terrorism is a violent, messy and often traumatising affair for all involved. Yet beyond the word-for-word re-telling of personal stories of terrorism, the play seems to struggle to move beyond the simplistic message that: '*all terrorism is bad and therefore we shouldn't do it*'. It neither penetrates the trauma or the act of terrorism; nor does it disclose any insight into the politics of these situations or what motivates someone to commit themselves to act in this way. However, I would suggest that this outcome is hardly surprising. For despite the meticulous research that Soans undertook, *methodologically* verbatim theatre is ultimately self-limiting. The verbatim playwright's pursuance of factual truth and the fidelity to the word-for-word interview ultimately prescribes a *truth* of verbatim theatre where facts legitimate what it means to speak of the truth. This points to the limitation of verbatim theatre because it struggles to take account of other 'truths', truths such as testimonial or traumatic truth that fail to be disclosed by a literal and factual account of 'what happened'.

However, if we dig deep into testimonies of trauma it is often precisely at the point where language and explication fails that the subject gains profound - even revelatory - insight not only into the situation that has been lived through but also existentially into what it means to *be* in the world. Indeed, I would argue that trauma has the capacity to throw the subject into what we might describe as the *liminal* space of survival. For the survivor of trauma bears witness not only to what has been lived through and what has been endured but also to the possibility of their own *non-*

*survival*, and therefore to the potential structural closure of their own finite possibilities. It is this liminality that can precipitate what following Heidegger we might call an authentic seizing of one's own existence. In this way I agree with Robert Stolorow who suggests that:

Trauma ... [plunges] the traumatized person, in Heidegger's terms, into a form of authentic Being-toward-death....through which authentic Being-toward-death is disclosed (Stolorow 2007: 41).

Of course arguably verbatim theatre is not necessarily concerned with existential questions about existence and there is validity in a journalistic verbatim theatre which draws attention to the factual truths of a situation that were hitherto hidden from us by the media. Yet the question trauma poses to this kind of theatre is by no means obviated by verbatim theatre's fidelity to fact - so we still need to ask: how can dramaturgy engage with the aporia of an experience which is irreducible to the facts of a situation? And in what way can theatre stand as an authentic examination of the existential crisis of trauma? To answer these questions we need to first look more closely at the problem trauma poses to a dramaturgical strategy that is constituted upon the re-performance of personal accounts of actual events.

### **Trauma: its challenge to dramaturgy and the possibility of the disclosure of authenticity**

The term 'trauma', deriving from the Greek meaning 'wound' is often confused with the situation that has precipitated trauma, for example conflict, mass murder, genocide<sup>iii</sup>. In other words, the concept of trauma does not define a concrete situation, however horrific it is. Rather, it speaks of the subject's struggle to come to terms with events that have been lived through, but which can not be fully processed or absorbed into experience. Trauma then can be understood as a 'breach' in the processes of cognition with which we ordinarily experience and make sense of the world. Cathy Caruth, following Freud, for instance, has defined trauma as a 'wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind [...] a breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world' (Caruth 1996: 3 - 4). It is because of this inassimilability into experience that trauma can thereby be said to stand radically *beyond* language and communicability. In Lacan's terms it is an encounter with the real that is always already a 'missed encounter' (Lacan 1994:55), for trauma ruptures the symbolic and the imaginary structures that assimilate me to the world; that is, the traumatic, for Lacan, is ultimately always already postponed and unknowable, refusing cognition and the absorption into experience. However, even this is misleading for what is at stake in trauma is not just the relatively prosaic psychological point that concerns my incapacity to come to terms with something bad that has happened to me. Seen in Heideggerian terms, the rupture of the symbolic and the failure of language also discloses that which is radically 'mine' - specifically, what 'trauma' reveals, is the certainty of my own death. In doing so, trauma brings the conditions of my (in)existence

into sharp relief and, to pursue the Heideggerian thought further, opens up the possibility of authentically being in the world, as Stolorow's elucidates:

'Trauma shatters the absolutisms of everyday life [...] the illusions [that allow us to] evade and cover up the finitude, contingency, and embeddedness of our existence and the indefiniteness of its certain extinction.( Stolorow 2007: 41).

Trauma is therefore best conceived as a *limit* experience, since it can neither be articulated nor comprehended *within experience*. On the contrary, it is the point at which experience confronts its ownmost impossibility.<sup>iv</sup>

Nevertheless, I would also add the following caveat: despite the general agreement amongst commentators that in Leigh Gilmore's terms 'language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks languages and confronts it with its insufficiency' (Gilmore 2001: 6) - what *remains* after the event of trauma, are those who have witnessed it. This is the paradox of trauma: for even though trauma might elude language and communicability, many survivors of trauma speak of the *need* or indeed the compulsion to testify and to make other people aware of what has been lived through. The challenge trauma places upon verbatim theatre, then, concerns the problem of how a dramaturgical strategy, constituted on the promise of direct communicable experience, can *authentically* engage with that which stands radically beyond language - that is to say, it is the problem of how theatre can respond to stories of trauma without being 'mocked' for its 'insufficiency' ( Gilmore 2001:6).

In the following section I will look at two case studies that use different dramaturgical approaches to explore two real events of trauma. The first text uses verbatim theatre techniques whilst the second the dramaturgy of testimonial theatre. I acknowledge that both plays are informed by very different artistic intentions and methodologies, but by looking at these texts in this way I hope to show how the dramaturgy of testimonial theatre can enable the testifying subject to penetrate the 'truth' of trauma and potentially open up the possibility of revelation and insight. Furthermore, through this examination of these two plays I hope to show how a re-articulation of authenticity, informed by Heidegger's account of being-towards death, can allow us to understand how the truth of trauma can be disclosed by a dramaturgy that is less concerned with factual truth and instead embraces the poetic and the metaphoric.

*The Exonerated* (Blank and Jensen: 2006) and *He Left Quietly* (Farber: 2008) are two plays which tell the story of what might be defined as the encounter with a *missed* death since in both plays we meet real individuals who were sentenced to death for crimes they did not commit. *The Exonerated* tells six such stories and is a verbatim play which is constructed solely by using transcribed interviews and other factual material. *He Left Quietly* by contrast is testimonial theatre and was created in 2003 by Farber in collaboration with Duma Kumalo, whose story the play tells. However,

unlike Blank and Jensen's approach, Farber does not make use of transcribed interviews or factual material, nor does the play's staging seek to evidence an objective, factual truth. Instead as we shall later see Farber's approach is collaborative and processual, focussing more on an exploration of the subjectivity of Kumalo's testimonial truth than on the representation of the facts of the case. Both plays are connected by the same theme of the trauma of wrongful arrest and the eventual death sentence that followed. In this way, the individuals in both these plays undertake what Cathy Caruth describes as the 'impossible and necessary double telling' (Caruth 1996: 9) of the 'oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*' (7). The subjects who stand before us not only speak of the traumatic encounter with the imminence of their own death but also, following reprieve - albeit in different ways and so to different dramatic effect - address what Cathy Caruth describes as 'the unbearable nature of [...] survival' (7), testifying to that which has to be endured and what has been irrevocably lost as a result.

### ***The Exonerated (Blank and Jensen 2006)***

*The Exonerated* is a verbatim play generated from a series of sixty interviews undertaken with 'exonerated' people from across the United States who were sentenced to death for murders they didn't commit. In the play we encounter six individual accounts of the trauma of incarceration and eventual exoneration and release. Playwrights Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen present us with a text generated from interviews and supplemented with other material gathered from 'court transcripts and case files' (Blank and Jensen 2006: 8).

In the introduction to *The Exonerated*, the playwrights inform us that 'With a few exceptions, each word spoken in this play comes from public record - legal documents, court transcripts, letters - or from an interview with an exonerated person' (Blank and Jensen 2006: 8 - 9). Certainly, from the moment the play commences everything about the choice of staging and the performance style of the actors seems designed to remind us that what we are hearing is the literal 'truth'. Throughout the play the actors remain seated behind lecterns which hold the script to the play. A device which leads one reviewer for the New York Times to speak of 'readers' rather than 'actors' and to comment on the line-learning capacity of the cast, he writes: 'Many of the readers have obviously memorized their roles, to which they bring a hypnotic and seemingly ego-free focus' (Brantley 2002). This 'performance' of script reading seems intended to signify that the actors are not really acting, or rather that they are not adopting a character as such. Instead we are invited to perceive these non-actorly actors as 'intermediaries' for the voice of the person they are speaking on behalf of. Of course from a pragmatic perspective the material presence of the script also allows for a quick change over of cast. Certainly, the actors who play each of the exonerated people change regularly, and in productions of the play both in the UK and the United States many 'celebrity' actors such as Catherine Tate, Alanis Morissette and Robin Williams have stepped in to play

a role. These different strategies combine to generate a curiously detached mode of performance and convinces reviewer Terry Stoller of the play's claims of actuality and veracity. For Stoller the presence of celebrity actors 'creates a distance between performer and character so that the audience is always aware that the actor is giving voice to the testimony of real people' (Stoller 2003: 346-347).

Certainly, it seems that a sense of 'distance' between those who are enacted and the actors who enact is also of great importance to the playwrights. In the introduction to the playtext future directors and actors of the play are advised not to be 'didactic' and to 'avoid overemotionalizing' (Blank and Jensen 2006: 11). Here Blank and Jensen remind us that the characters in the play 'have been exonerated for a numbers of years' and 'are *telling* their stories, not *reliving* them' (11 their italics). The distinction between *telling* rather than *reliving* a story is an interesting one, especially in the context of a theatrical representation of an event of trauma. This 'note' of direction to the actor seems to be an attempt to fix the temporality of the events that the stories depict as taking place firmly in the past. This of course becomes problematic in the context of trauma, for theorists in this area such as psychiatrist Dori Laub, describe how trauma refuses to be confined neatly to the past and resists 'the parameters of "normal" reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time' (Laub in Felman and Laub 1992: 69). Trauma could be said to collapse the usual chronological boundaries of time. It returns unbidden to disrupt the present while also radically re-aligning the subject's vision of the future. Indeed, the individuals that we meet in *The Exonerated* tell us that the trauma of death row has stayed with them and has unalterably changed them forever. To give an example: for 'David' it has taken away 'that-spark for life' (Blank and Jensen 2006: 71) and for 'Kerry' it returns him regularly to the horror of imminent death, Kerry says:

The state of Texas executed me over a thousand times, man, and it just keeps on doin' it. I get nightmares - sometimes I forget I'm really here (72).

Yet dramaturgically the play draws on a classical structure of beginning, middle and end and as such the stories we encounter are framed by the foreclosing of the end of the narrative which focuses on their eventual exoneration and release. Of course it is likely that this structure was utilised in the interviews undertaken by the playwrights with the individuals and within the other personal statements and juridical document that were used to generate the text. Certainly the basis for any interview about a significant experience is usually framed by the request to 'tell me what happened, by starting at the beginning'. Perhaps then the reason Blank and Jensen remind us that the characters in the play are *retelling* rather than reliving these stories is because the material they used to generate the play could only ever produce a chronological, factual and therefore somewhat 'distanced' retelling of these events. After all, without access to a non-literal mode of expression such as metaphor or poetry, how could the individuals who lived through this kind of life-shattering trauma ever hope

to authentically account for what has been lived through? If trauma is to be understood as Caruth describes as ‘not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature... returns to haunt the survivor’ (Caruth 1996: 4) how could any account of trauma be rendered ‘authentically’ by relying solely on the explicable, chronological language of a timebound interview?

The character of Sonny is an interesting case in point. The facts of Jacobs’ story circulate around a series of traumatic events yet the account that is presented within the text struggles to move beyond a merely prosaic and factual retelling of it. Jacobs’s children were aged just 10 months and nine years old at the moment of her arrest. She was incarcerated for seventeen years. During this time her husband, who was also wrongly arrested at the same time as Jacobs, was electrocuted in the most brutal manner, as Jacobs explains in the play:

The chair malfunctioned and made a mess of it. And ... they had to pull the switch three times [...] It took *thirteen and a half* minutes for Jesse to die [...] Until finally flames shot out from his head (Blank and Jensen 2006: 76).

During her incarceration her parents, who were the primary carers for her children, died suddenly in a plane crash, leading Jacobs to remark in an interview for *The Telegraph*: ‘The day my parents died was the worst day of my life. I reached the depths of despair’ (Bryne 2006). Yet whilst it is clear from the details of Jacobs’s narrative that the loss of seventeen years of her life was profoundly disturbing, the ‘storied’ Sonny Jacobs, as presented in the play, struggles to speak of the magnitude of this loss or the impact of this on her life. Instead much of the playtext is concerned with eliciting the factual details both of the alleged crimes and the other events that led to her arrest. Certainly there are moments where we encounter glimpses of the existential crisis precipitated by these events but on the whole, for the storied Jacobs, language seems inadequate to what she seems to wish to communicate. For example, she says:

They tell you exactly how they’re gonna do it. They’re gonna send twenty-two hundred volts of electricity through your body until you’re dead. And then they ask you if you have anything to say to that, and really it’s kind of dumbfounding. So after the judge read the sentence, I just said, ‘Are you finished?’ I didn’t have anything to say. What do you say? How can you say anything to that? (Blank and Jensen 2006: 52).

The moment when Jacobs came face to face with the brutal and factual imminence of her own death is clearly profoundly disturbing. Yet in Blank and Jensen’s retelling of this the storied Jacobs is afforded little possibility of poetic insight or reflection and is confined to relating a literal account of what took place. Ultimately, Blank and Jensen’s text simply replays Jacob’s sense of loss and bewilderment. If the ‘real’ Sonny Jacobs felt speechless and unable to express herself in the face of her executioners, similarly the

storied Jacobs seems to stand somewhat 'dumbfounded' before her audience. Of course, following the structural methodology of verbatim theatre, the playwrights had little option here. For their 'promise' to their verbatim subjects and their audience was to tell the truth and to re-iterate only what they were told or what they retrieved from the documents they read<sup>v</sup>. However, although the play draws our attention to the injustice of wrongful arrest and incarceration on death, there are limits to the extent to which the play fully penetrates these issues. For example, whilst the play is clear in its condemnation of the treatment of those who were innocent and incarcerated, it is not clear where the play stands in relation to those who are guilty and sentenced to death. In other words, the play fails to address the existential brutality of death row per se; instead it is limited to the factual stories of those who are exonerated. The stories we are told are used as evidence of a system's failure rather than its inherent brutality and the detail of each individual's account provides the proof or verification for how this injustice can happen. Certainly the self-professed aim of Blank and Jensen is for the play to speak for all those who have been exonerated, in the introduction of to they write:

At the time we conducted these interviews, there were eighty-nine people who had been exonerated from death row [...] We consider every one of their stories to be part of this play. (9)

In this way, the characters we are presented with in the play become emblematic of all those who have been exonerated - but the price it must pay is that of ultimately betraying the singularity of the stories that are depicted within it. It is this betrayal of the unique status of these personal accounts of trauma, I would argue, that discloses a crucial difference between the verbatim and testimonial theatre subject. For the testimonial subject speaks only for him or herself. Testimony, as elucidated by Shoshana Felman is a 'radically unique, noninterchangeable and solitary burden' (Felman in Laub and Felman 1992: 30). Rather than attempting to recount the factual truth of the situation, in testimonial theatre we encounter the uncertainty and unknowingness of testimony. Instead of being tied to a chronological retelling of what happened by way of an interview or a court transcript, testimonial theatre enables a more meditative reflection on the magnitude of an event that has been lived through. Unlike verbatim theatre which assumes the communicability and the transparency of the traumatic event, testimonial theatre can acknowledge its opacity and allows for the subject's unknowingness and the fragmentary way the testimonial subject encounters an event. While verbatim theatre could be described as being constitutively - that is to say, dramaturgically - incapable of engaging with the radical asymmetry of trauma, theatre of testimony uses poetry and metaphor to open up the possibility for an authentic reflection on how the resonance of trauma has transformed the life of the individual who has lived through it. One such example of a testimonial play that effectively opens up a profound and existential exploration of trauma is *He Left Quietly*, written by South African playwright Yael Farber in collaboration with and about the life of Duma Kumalo.



### ***He Left Quietly* ( Farber 2008): authentic attestation and being-towards-death**

*He Left Quietly* tells the story of Duma Kumalo's wrongful arrest and his subsequent sentencing to death for his 'alleged participation in the mob killing of a town councillor in Sharpeville' (Farber 2008: 181) in 1984. The case of the 'Sharpeville Six' became well known both in South Africa and beyond. As a result of international pressure, in 1988 Kumalo received a stay of execution just hours before he was due to be hanged. He was subsequently released from prison several years later and met Farber at the Grahamstown festival, South Africa in 2001 when he was performing in his own play '*The Story I am About to Tell*'. Kumalo agreed to collaborate with Farber and together they went on to create *He Left Quietly*, in which Kumalo performed himself. Rather than adopting verbatim theatre's approach of using documents and transcribed interviews to piece together the evidence of the 'case' of Duma Kumalo's wrongful arrest, Farber worked with Kumalo over a period of six weeks to develop a text that uses poetry, metaphor and vernacular language to bear witness to Kumalo's testimony. The play does not open by establishing the facts that explain Kumalo's story, instead Farber orchestrates a direct confrontation between Duma - as he's known in the play - and his audience of listeners. As Duma enters the space and takes his seat before us he addresses his audience directly asking us to reflect on what it means to live and what it means to die. He says:

When does the soul leave the body? ... At which precise moment?  
Does it leave with our last breath? ... Or the final beat of our heart?  
Is it possible that I stayed here amongst you - the living - long after  
my soul quietly left my body behind? ( Farber 2008: 188)

These reflections continue to haunt Duma's story throughout the play. Farber's dramaturgy resists a linear narrative and instead the play interweaves Duma's account of life on death row with his memories of childhood, his dreams and his reflections on his existence and who he is now. In this way the 'truth' of the play corresponds less to factual veracity and instead creates a fragmented *testimonial* truth which in Shoshana Felman terms is:

composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of references (Felman in Laub and Felman 1992: 5).

The incorporation of different languages ( Afrikaans, English and Kumalo's own vernacular) means that the audience is never fully in possession of the truth of the play. Instead there are references and insights which are disclosed only to Kumalo and perhaps other members of his community. In this way the play respects the uniqueness and singularity of Duma Kumalo's testimony; yet through its use of direct address and the existential framing

of the story, Duma draws his audience into a profound, exploration of what it means to be human and what it means to exist.

Through his engagement with what could be defined as his own *missed* death Duma's testimony discloses a 'now' that is neither the past, the present, nor the future. Instead the text reveals how he is repeatedly returned to the trauma of death row, Duma says: 'I have never really come home [...] Every night, I am back there. Every night - I go home to Death Row' (Farber 2008: 205). The text then discloses a 'traumatic now' in which the events of Duma's arrest and incarceration on death row reverberate through his attempt to grasp and take hold of his own existence.

Indeed, it is in his attempts to testify to his own not-dying, that Duma comes face to face with what Blanchot, citing Heidegger, describes as 'the possibility of impossibility' of death (Blanchot 1995:70). For in his own missed death, Duma glimpses what one might call the structural finitude of existence. It is in that moment that I would like to suggest Duma attains insight into the only possible outcome of his life, and specifically into what I would call an authentic seizing of being-towards-death. For what is at stake in the 'traumatic now' is nothing other than the opening up of the possibility of the impossibility of reconciling himself to the end point of his own existence in which he is always already living to eventually die. In other words, in his story of the trauma of death row, Duma explores the possibility and impossibility of his own death and his own non-dying, or in Derrida's terms the 'imminence, the instance of what will already have taken place' (Derrida 2000: 49). In the play, Duma takes his audience again and again to the ungraspable moment of the imminence of his own death and the random instant of his own survival which attests to the visceral actuality of the deaths of others.

Through the text's engagement with the impossibility and possibility of survival, the storied Duma engages with what verbatim theatre fails to see in the essence of traumatic experience: that which eludes explanation or which is unknowable in its radical asymmetry. For while Duma is unable to speak to us from the instant of his own death, his performed testimony points to this encounter with his own finitude and all that follows when the imminence of death becomes an event that is missed. Rather than seeking to explicate the trauma of this moment, however, the text uses poetry to disclose glimpses of that which is *unknowable* and *unsayable* - and in this way, it allows Duma to approach that which would otherwise elude those who lived though death row.

The truth that *He Left Quietly* discloses, then, is not an evidence-based claim of veracity that provides a correspondence with concrete fact. Instead it could be better understood as an 'authentic' truth that is disclosed through the testimonial act itself and discloses insight into the trauma of wrongful imprisonment and the brutality of death row. However, in order to more fully grasp our use of the term 'authentic' from a Heideggerian perspective we should perhaps re-appraise what is meant conceptually and

philosophically in our attempt to appropriate the term, as we saw Hare did earlier, within the context of theatrical representation. It is to this question, that I would like to finally turn in conclusion.

### **Trauma and the authenticity of insight: Heidegger's being-towards-death**

As we have seen, for Heidegger, authenticity is about our capacity to come to terms with the structural finitude of existence, the inevitability of death and the closing down of possibilities that death precipitates. By coming to terms with, or in Carman's words '*owning up wholly*' (Carman 2003:276, his italics) to my existential death, an authentic mode of being-in-the world is disclosed, Carman says:

Indeed, Heidegger maintains that it is precisely in the face of its own death that Dasein is capable of understanding itself wholly, or authentically (Carman 2003:276).

This is because it is only through death and the possibility of my own death that I encounter an opening to the real significance of 'mineness and existence' (Heidegger in Carman 2003: 277). In other words, death and existing as 'being-towards-death', according to this perspective, opens up the possibility of an authentic seizing of existence. It is death that individuates me and precisely insofar as death is non-substitutable - which is to say, existentially viewed, death is radically mine and no-one else's. As Taylor Carman explains:

there is an essential asymmetry between *my* relation to the deaths of others and my relation to *my own* death, just as there are asymmetries between my relation to my own body and mind and the relation in which I stand to the bodies and minds of others (Carman 2003: 277).

What in my view makes *He Left Quietly* an extraordinary and poetic meditation on trauma is that it moves beyond the facts of Kumalo's wrongful sentencing to death and considers what can be retrieved from an event of trauma. In this way it poses questions of what insight can be disclosed from the event of trauma and how this can shape our comportment towards our existence within the world. For through the trauma of his incarceration Duma seems to seize upon the truth of his own existence. Moreover, just as for Heidegger, death prizes open one's situation to the possibility of genuine choice, insofar as it discloses what most matters to me in the situation that confronts me, for Duma, as a result of the trauma of wrongful arrest and his own missed death he undergoes a transformation and relates to the world in a new and political way. A significant example of this comes near the end of the play where we encounter a more politicised Duma who has been much changed by the events he has lived through. This is in contrast to the Duma we meet at the opening of the play, for prior to his arrest Duma tells us that: '[he] was never a political animal. Much happier to smoke Craven A, drink Castle

Lager, and spend time at the shebeen'<sup>vi</sup> ( Farber 2008: 192). Yet later in the play, following his release, Duma speaks not only of what it means to exist as being-towards-death, in a Heideggerian sense, but on the other hand, he also addresses what it means to live as a black man under South Africa's brutal apartheid regime. He speaks of this in response to an important question asked by the character of 'Woman'.

Described by Farber as being 'in her mid-thirties... white and nondescript' (Farber 287), 'Woman' could be interpreted as representing the white audience member, the listener of Duma's testimony both in South Africa and beyond. She says:

'what do we do after such knowledge? I had asked [Duma]... We tell stories - he told me. We find the words for what can never be described.' ( Farber 2008:234).

In this moment of course, the 'Woman' acknowledges both the limits of testimony - that which 'can never be described' and the limits and responsibility of *listening* to testimony, asking us to consider what kind of demand is placed upon us by this testimonial performance.

There is an interesting parallel here with the closure of *The Exonerated* at the Riverside Studios in 2006 and points to the different dramaturgical end-points that verbatim and testimonial theatre lead us to. At the end of *The Exonerated*, perhaps in recognition of the audience's desire to 'do something' in response to what they had heard, ushers gathered with buckets to collect donations to a cause, which I assumed (though this wasn't made clear to me at the time) associated with the issues explored within the play. The audience filed out of the auditorium placing their money in the buckets as they did so.

*In He left Quietly* the audience is not let off so lightly, rather than requesting some form of purgation of the audience's conscience by way of a financial donation, Duma calls upon his to audience to recognise their own interconnections with his story. He responds to the Woman's question, by reminding us of the need for solidarity and participation in the politics of a unjust situation, saying:

This is our history. We all come from this broken place.  
Either you are in or you are out. But if you choose to be in - you must partake (Farber 2008:234).

With these words, Duma acknowledges the limits of testimony, for while his testimonial performance may be attended by an audience, there is no guarantee that his listeners will *hear* what has been spoken. It is important, then, to note that testimony, by definition, requires someone to listen to it, but that there is no guarantee that the listener will not turn away and refuse to acknowledge or hear it. Unlike verbatim theatre's promise of a totalised, objective truth, testimonial theatre could better be understood as a leap of faith rather than the assurance of factual truth. When Duma asks

whether we are ‘in or out’ he places a demand upon his audience to reflect on how we can become implicated in this story and how we position ourselves in relation to this injustice.

As the play ends Duma considers the future, yet in his final words he also acknowledges that the trauma of the past refuses to *stay* the past and will always be ‘present’ in the ‘now’ of South Africa’s future, he says:

For we who survived must tell the world  
 Outside, a new day is beginning in Pretoria, South Africa.  
 And I am here to see it.  
 I - Duma Joshua Kumalo  
 Prisoner V 34-58 ( 238)

## References

- |   |        |   |  |
|---|--------|---|--|
| Blanchot, M. and Derrida, J. ( trans. Rottenberg, E.) | (2000) | <u>The Instant of my death and Demeure: Fiction and testimony</u>                                 | Stanford University Press, California  |
| Blanchot, M.(trans. Smock, A.)                        | (1995) | <u>Writing on the Disaster</u>  | University Of Nebraska Press, USA      |
| Blank, J. and Jensen, E.                              | (2006) | <u>The Exonerated</u>   | Faber and Faber, London                |
| Brantley, B.  | (2002) | <u>Theater Review: Someone Else Committed Their Crimes</u>  | <u>The New York Times</u> , October 11 |
| Bryne, N.   | (2006) | Guardian Interview with Sonny Jacobs: 'I wasn't going to be defeated'                             | <u>The Guardian</u> , February 20      |
| Carman, T.  | (2003) | <u>Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse, and Authenticity in <i>Being and Time</i></u> | Cambridge University Press, Cambridge  |
| Critchley, S.   | (1999) | <u>Ethics, Politics,</u>  | Verso, London                          |

Farber, Y.	(2008)	<u>Subjectivity Theatre as Witness: Three Testimonial Plays From South Africa</u>	Oberon Books, London	
Felman, S. and Laub, D.	(1992)	<u>Testimony: Crisis of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history</u>	Routledge, Abingdon	
Gilmore, L	(2001)	<u>The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony</u>	Cornell University Press, New York,	
Guignon, C.	(2004)	<u>On Being Authentic</u>	Routledge, London	
Heidegger, M.	(1962)	<u>Being and Time</u>	Harper and Row Publishers, London	
Lacan, J.	(1994)	<u>The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho- Analysis</u>	Penguin, London	
Martin, C.	(2006)	'Bodies of Evidence',	<u>TDR 50:3</u>	pp.8 - 15
Miller, K.and Tougaw, J.	(2002)	Introduction: Extremities	<u>Extremities: Trauma, testimony and community</u>	Miller, K. and Tougaw, J. ( eds.), University of Illinois Press Jennings, S. ( ed.), New York,
Schinina, G.	(2009)	'Like Ham in a Temperance Hotel: Healing, participation and education in social Theatre'	<u>Dramatherapy and Social Theatre: Necessary Dialogues</u>	
Smith, W.	(2007)	'Why Tugendhat's Critique of Heidegger's Concept of Truth Remains a Critical	<u>Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy, 50:2</u>	pp.156-179

Soans, R.	(2005)	<u>Problem'</u> <u>Talking to</u> <u>Terrorists</u>	Oberon Books, London
Stoller, T.	(2003)	<u>Review: The</u> <u>Exonerated</u>	<u>Theatre</u> <u>Journal</u> , Vol 55: 3, pp.345-347
Stolorow, R.D.	(2007)	<u>Trauma and</u> <u>Human</u> <u>Existence</u>	Taylor and Francis Group, New York

---

<sup>i</sup> The famous objection to Heidegger's concept of truth comes from Ernst Tugendhat, for a discussion of this see Smith's article in *Inquiry: 'Why Tugendhat's Critique of Heidegger's Concept of Truth Remains a Critical Problem' (2007)*. For highly 'expressivist' interpretations of authenticity in Heidegger, see Charles Guignon's interpretation of being-towards-death, which he understands as being true to oneself and living one's life story authentically and coherently, Guignon says:

' Heidegger holds that coming face to face with death [...] open[s] the possibility of living one's life as a coherent story. To face up to death is to see your life as a finite project, something that can and will be finished' ( Guignon 2004: 133).

Taylor Carman disagrees with Guignon's interpretation, rejecting the notion of a coherent 'finite life span' ( Carman 2003:272) arguing that the 'global narrative of a life is structurally unavailable to me' ( 272-273) for, no one can speak of or from beyond death and to speak of death as a narrative end point to a life's story overlooks this.

<sup>ii</sup> Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* ( in the German 'Da-sein' , literally meaning being there) to denote human existence. For Heidegger, what individuates us from different beings, such as animals for example, is our capacity to reflect on the very possibilities of our own existence. He says in *Being and Time* [1926]'Thus to work out the question of Being adequately, we must make an entity - the inquirer - transparent in his own Being. [...] This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "Dasein"' ( Heidegger 1962: 27).

<sup>iii</sup> For a more developed discussion of this, refer to the work of social theatre practitioner Guglielmo Schininà. In his writing about the presumption of post traumatic stress disorder following the 'crisis' in Kosovo Schininà describes the 'unchallenged western presumption that there is a universal response to highly stressful events, and that this response can be categorized as a diagnosable form of mental disorder' (Schininà 2009: 39 - 40)

<sup>iv</sup> In other words, a limit experience places *limits on experience*, it is the point at which subjectivity loses its apparent transparency: we cannot penetrate the thought of our own deaths. Nevertheless, such a thought produces certain *affects* within us - Heidegger would call these affective compartments, 'stimmung' - attunements or moods - and the principal mood is one of 'anxiety'.

<sup>v</sup> There is of course something of a paradox here, for whilst the verbatim theatre playwright might honour the factual truth of a story, this promise of transparency does not take account of the editorial process of selecting, editing and interpreting the material that is presented by the verbatim subject.

<sup>vi</sup> Shebeen means pub.