



Antjie Krog

PREPARING FOR NEWNESS

(Part Two)

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When we entered a democratic space in 1994 under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, one of the crucial events signalling the 'new' was the hearings conducted by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This commission was tasked by the new government to record testimonies of gross human rights violations committed during the times of apartheid by both the nationalist regime and liberation movements. It was a time of deep catharsis.

As a radio journalist reporting then on the new parliament and the drafting of a new constitution, I was appointed head of the radio team which was required to cover all hearings for the state broadcaster. Perhaps because being a poet and therefore intimately gripped by sound, I was literally, within days, overwhelmed by the depth, scale, meaning and sound of these testimonies of torture, bodily humiliation, violence and death experienced mostly at the hands of the white apartheid regime. Or more aptly: at the hands of my people, Afrikaners.

For months on end, every day from eight to five, ordinary South Africans, flanked by family members and friends, described the devastation of their lives—some used humour, others imagery,

some could hardly speak, others rambled on as if it were no longer possible to find a logical thread in their lives. The atmosphere was unbearably saturated with grief.

One of my first radio reports said: *"It's like travelling on a rainy night behind a large truck—images of devastation breaking in sheets on the windscreen. You can't overtake, because you can't see; and you can't slow down or stop, because then you will never get anywhere. It is not so much the deaths, and the names of the dead, but the web of infinite sorrow woven around them. It keeps on coming and coming – and in all of us the wide, barren, disconsolate landscape our country was under apartheid takes a particular shape. When people can no longer speak, they sing. When they can no longer sing, they pray. When they can no longer pray, they just breathe. Painfully. And then start talking again. Piece by piece the collective memory of South Africans is being built. We are learning how this country belongs to the voices telling it."*

Working for the radio, one had to listen carefully to the testimonies, to rewind, re-listen in order to choose the most appropriate soundbite for radio news bulletins before cutting it into suitable broadcasting length. This means that the timbre of these words, their rhythm, intonation, the emotion embedded in them, the pauses are forever engraved into one's mind and soul. *I stared at her in my front door ... she was screaming ... my friend her hair flaming ... her chest a furnace ... she died a day later ... I pulled out the baby from the burning house ... her skin stayed behind on my hands.*

After nearly twenty years I don't see these words. I hear them, with the grief-stricken Xhosa in the background and the soft, moved voice of the simultaneous interpreter: *And he was dying ... and my key fell on the ground ... And they asked, quickly:* "What's that? What was that?" ... *And I said:* "It's the key of my house."

Many years after the commission, I was in a grocery store and felt myself in a sudden state of inexplicable anguish. Sitting down on a bench, I began to identify the origin of it. One of the simultaneous interpreters was being interviewed over the local radio station broadcasting into the store. Although she was describing her work in parliament, the tone of that voice stirred me into distress. (Simultaneous Interpretation [SI] was used for the first time during the Nuremberg Trials.)

HUMAN RIGHTS CANTATE

When the Truth Commission completed its work in 1998, it felt crucial in some way to honour these testimonies, to prevent them from disappearing into the exploitative amnesia of a country battling to find itself after centuries of racism. We heard that after the Chilean Truth Commission, a human rights cantata was composed, with a text written by priest Esteban Gumucio and set to music by Alejandro Guarello for the Santiago Cathedral. This seemed a suitable possibility, as the South African truth commission was highly influenced by the Chilean one, except for one main feature: unlike in Chile, our hearings were made public. So there were many texts and they were public.

I began exploring the work of young South African composers and was confronted immediately with the important *ethical* problem this contemporary style of music presents within the context of apartheid, with its multiple issues of the Third world, African culture, appropriation, subaltern exploitation and the irritation of white people telling African people's stories of suffering or bravery. In another way, it felt important that a white composer compose the homage. However, if a white composer 'uses' the testimonies from black victims, because s/he wants to

honour them, is moved by them, then one simply does not dare to produce the kind of composition where the resulting sound and structure may alienate (experienced as contamination?) those very people and their culture that one confesses to honour and respect. The composer must therefore be contemporary and at the same time, be able to work deeply with rural solo and choral South African traditional music, weaving them into something that could be appreciated by a variety of other cultures. (The mere thought of an American composer busy collecting TRC material for a full blown *musical* left me speechless with horror and spurred the search for another route!)

INDIGENOUS

Philip Miller, who produced albums where 'struggle' choral works as well as South African lullabies were reworked for orchestra and voice, but on the other hand composed music for contemporary films and artists like William Kentridge, seemed like somebody to approach – and so the beginnings of a TRC cantate were stirred into being.

Miller decided to collaborate with choral arranger and composer Michael Dinga to produce a musical work engaging with uniquely African vocal forms from 'isicatamiya' (a Zulu choral style of singing) to a kind of 'sefela' form of Sotho melodic recitative poetry. He turned the integral concept of the commission into the main device of his composition namely listening to testimonies through translation and archiving them through recording. Original indigenous languages were present, with translators' voices as single vocalists, interspersed by real archival sound, alternated by a choir playing the role of both commentator and chorus.

FIRST PERFORMANCE

After years of research and intense work, the cantata was to be performed in St George's Cathedral on Reconciliation Day, the 16th of December, 2006. The cathedral itself, the seat of Archbishop Desmond Tutu during the years of turmoil, was known for the important role it played in assisting activists, supporting the poor and attacking the government's policy of excluding people from citizenship on the basis of race.

The beautiful stone cathedral was packed. It was very hot and the massive doors were left open. The former commissioners were there, many of the victims turned up with their families and the people whose testimonies were used had honorary seats.

The cantate opened simply: taking the oath of truth. One heard the voice of one of the commissioners asking: *"Can you hear everything?"* Somebody answered: *"Yes I can hear everything."* *"Can you hear the translation?"* Then in Xhosa *"What I am telling you now, is the truth inside."* But this 'hearing' is immediately interspersed with voices from real testimonies saying that they can't hear, they are not heard, the earphones are not working, the interpretation is faulty and by doing so, sets an important context of how difficult it is for people to hear one another after such historic devastation.

Miller's music contained all the familiar Truth Commission soundbites that we hadn't actually noticed—the efforts to hear, understand, interpret, honour amidst delving into the truths of our past. Then, suddenly, from the back of the cathedral the choir entered with a powerful and well-known protest song: stamping feet, whistling, ululating against a counter melody from the Son-tonga String Quintet. The music became angrier, contorted.

REWIND

With it followed the testimony of Mrs Miya, who was watching television news and then unexpectedly recognised her only son, Jabulani, as one of the dead bodies on the TV screen, killed by the police that morning. One could hear the sound of a machine tape turning and Mrs Miya pleading to the commission: “Please rewind the tape, please rewind it so that I am in the time when my son was still alive.” The electronic sounds playing backward against the rhythm of the word “rewind” slowly became a lullaby. A high, beautiful soprano voice acted as a counterpoint to Mrs Miya: “They were treating people like animals ... but even a dog, you don’t treat it like that ... an ant you would think one should have feelings for an ant, but our children were not even taken as ants.”

The stormy choir entering with chugging rhythms from the back of the cathedral was complimented by soaring solo voices, high pitched whimpers, screeching technical equipment and a string octet — this transported everybody into some kind of spiritual realm of conceptual and aesthetic relations.

But then something unexpected happened. One became aware of a very ‘untoward’ sound and strained to make out in what way was it part of the ‘contemporary’ idiom of the composition. Soon it became clear that a group of Minstrels was cheerfully marching down the street as part of their early Christmas celebrations. What a wonderful moment! The ‘high serious’ music of the cantate, despite subtle closing of doors, invaded, but was never overwhelmed by the exuberant simple tunes of banjo’s, guitars and male voices singing hilarious lyrics in falsetto voices. This infiltration of the joy of living into the grief of dying created a permanent presence on the first recording of this historical cantata. But then we heard the haunting solo of Sibongile Khumalo:

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ring. But afterwards Mr Dingaan explained that he and the choir felt proud of their past, they wanted to celebrate and honour it with the music coming from the places where those victims came from. Intellectually, I agreed: if we say we respect the victims, we must act as if we respect the victims, and admired Miller for allowing the composition to move out of his hands at such a crucial moment so that the tone of the piece’s ending was practically decided *not* by the composer, but by the people about whom the cantate was about.

For a performance in New York, Miller composed his own ending. But apparently even there, directly after the more complex ending took place, a group of black South Africans jumped up, singing triumphant songs and dancing, joined by the Harlem choir who sang in the cantata. So again: this musical text was taken over and turned upside down by its audience and context.

Why am I telling this? To illustrate the complexities ambushing contemporary composers in an African Third World country. I believe that it is also the instilled sensibilities of Philip Miller’s Jewish origins which enabled him, as a white privileged man, to compose a piece with so much sensitivity, so little intrusion, so much consultation and with such a haunting quality— allowing the voices in it a definite say in the ways in which it became a true carrier of grief.

[FIN]

“My son was eleven ... he came home during school break ... cutting himself a slice of bread ... spread peanut-butter leaving only the crumbs on the cupboard. He ran out still chewing the bread. I heard shots outside.”

The choir and strings entered with unearthly sounds: *uluthando nanko thando bantubule*. “There lies my son, my only child...”

CRI DE COEUR

On the very first day the TRC had its first public hearings, one of the victims spoke about the death of her husband. Nomonde Calata then stopped, threw her whole body, wrapped in an orange-red jersey, backwards in her chair and uttered an unheard and unforgettable sound. At the time I reported for radio: “*This was the actual beginning of the TRC—the definitive moment of the ultimate sound of what the process of hearing truth is about.*” Miller took this cry, skillfully parceling from it different ‘notes’ and composing an exquisite tender thread around it.

The entry of the Minstrels was not the only surprise in store that day. The composer, quite correctly I believe, decided to hand over the last movement of the cantata to Mr Dingaan, the choirmaster. So, after the heartrending performance of what we assumed was the complete cantata, the cathedral audience was stunned into silence until Mr Dingaan and his choir started with a most celebratory and cheerful, but powerful traditional song, beginning to sway and dance and ululate!

Many of us were confused, then shocked, as this fell completely outside the contemporary idiom both in harmony and rhythm, producing a much too simple ending for a piece that was so intensely complex. Some of the audience found it unforgivably jar-

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Sources:

Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla (2003): *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness*, Cape Town: David Philip. Krog, Antjie (1998): *Country of My Skull*, Parktown: Random House.

Antjie Krog, geboren 1952 in Kroonstad, ist eine der engagiertesten Journalistinnen und wichtigsten Lyrikerinnen in Südafrika. Die Dichterin und Autorin, die in Kapstadt lebt, hat mit ihren Büchern den Wandel ihres Landes vom Apartheid-Regime zur Demokratie über Jahrzehnte unerschrocken begleitet und gilt in ihrer Heimat als das »weiße Gewissen Südafrikas«. Als Dichterin hat sie seit ihrem Debüt 1970 bislang elf Gedichtbände vorgelegt, die in viele Sprachen übersetzt wurden. Mit dem Lyrikband *Körper, beraubt* erschien beim Verlag Matthes & Seitz 2015 endlich eines ihrer Werke auf Deutsch. In berührenden Texten erzählt Krog von dem Versuch der Versöhnung nach Ende der Apartheid, von der Suche nach einem neuen Gebrauch der Unterdrückersprache Afrikaans und von sich selbst. Antjie Krog war 2007/08 Fellow am Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin und 2013/14 Gast des Berliner Künstlerprogramms des DAAD.

Impressum
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OKTOBER 2015 — VERANSTALTUNGEN

26. — 19.30 Uhr — **KlangKunstBühne spezial: Lecture Rabih Mroué, Bildender Künstler (in englischer Sprache)**
UdK Berlin, Grunewaldstraße 2–5, 10823 Berlin, Medienhaus, Hörsaal
Rabih Mroué ist Bildender Künstler, Schauspieler, Regisseur, Autor, Redakteur der libanesischen Zeitschrift »Kalamon« und des New Yorker Theaterjournals »TDR«, Gründer und Vorstandsmitglied des Beirut Art Center (BAC) sowie Fellow am International Research Center »Interweaving Performance Cultures« an der Freien Universität Berlin. Im Rahmen einer »KlangKunstBühnen spezial«-Lecture stellt er seine eigenen Arbeiten vor.
Informationen: www.klangkunstbuehne.de

NOVEMBER 2015 — VERANSTALTUNGEN

4. — 20 Uhr — **EM4 | Berliner Studios für elektroakustische Musik** — *Akademie der Künste, Hanseatenweg, Studiofoyer, Eintritt: 7 / 5 €*
Zum zweiten Mal findet die Reihe Berliner Studios in den Räumen der Akademie der Künste am Hanseatenweg statt. Das musikalische Abendprogramm wird vom Studio für elektroakustische Musik (STEAM) der Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin gestaltet.

14.+15. — **Klangwerkstatt Berlin** — *Kunstquartier Bethanien*
Bei verschiedenen Konzerten der diesjährigen Klangwerkstatt stehen Uraufführungen von Kompositionsstudierenden der UdK Berlin und HfM Hanns Eisler Berlin auf dem Programm, die im Rahmen einer Zusammenarbeit von klangzeitort und der Klangwerkstatt Berlin entstanden sind. Der international renommierte Saxophonist Marcus Weiss hat im Januar 2015 einen Kurs für InstrumentalistInnen und KomponistInnen bei klangzeitort gegeben. Das Abschlusskonzert findet bei der Klangwerkstatt Berlin statt. — *Informationen:* www.klangwerkstatt-berlin.de

14. — 18 Uhr — **Elektrogitarrenquartett »e-werk«** — *Kunstquartier Bethanien, Studio 1; Eintritt: 7 €*
Programm: [Tim Brady](#), »Symphony #5.0« (DE), »The same river twice«; [Antonis Adamoupoulos](#), Neues Werk (UA); [Hendrik Rungelrath](#), Neues Werk (UA); [Sidney Corbett](#), Neues Werk (UA); [Daniel Weissberg](#), »A Trois« für drei elektrische Gitarren und Live-Elektronik; [Frédéric L'Épée](#), Neues Werk (UA)

14. — 20 Uhr — **Ensemble JungeMusik** — *Kunstquartier Bethanien, Studio 1; Eintritt: 7 €*
Programm: [Friedrich Goldmann](#), »Wintermusik«; [Aria Torkanbouri](#), Neues Werk (UA) und [Daniel Martínez Roura](#), Neues Werk (UA)

15. — 15 Uhr — **Landesjugendensemble »Neue Musik Berlin«** — *Kunstquartier Bethanien, Studio 1; Eintritt frei*
Programm: [Fabian Zeidler](#), »Mind the Gaps« (2014/15, UA); [Matthias Kaul](#), Neues Werk (UA); [Jobst Liebrecht](#), »An ordinary lesson« (UA); [Georg Katzer](#), »La scuola dell’ascolto 2« (2014)

15. — 17 Uhr — **Marcus Weiss: Neue Stücke für Saxophon solo** — *Kunstquartier Bethanien, Studio 1; Eintritt: 7 € (Einführung für Studierende: 13 Uhr)*
Programm: [Nikolaus A. Huber](#), »Aus Schmerz und Trauer« für Altsaxophon solo (1982); [Mark André](#), »iv 12« für Sopransaxophon solo (2013); [Tom Johnson](#), »Pieces« für Altsaxophon solo; [Giorgio Netti](#), »affrettandosi della luce risonante (seconda parte)« für Sopransaxophon solo

15. — 19 Uhr — **Ensemble Mosaik** — *Kunstquartier Bethanien, Studio 1; Eintritt: 7 €*
Programm: [François Sarhan](#), »Bon pied bel œil« (2011); [Max Murray](#), Neues Werk (UA); [Sarah Nemtsov](#), »Duo« (2014/15, UA); [Malte Giesen](#), Neues Werk (UA); [Petros Leivas](#), »Blessed persistence« (2014)

27. — 10–13 und 14–17 Uhr — **Upload Workshop Telemann – eine Exkursion in die Farbenwelt historischer Musikinstrumente** (Blockflöte, Traversflöte, Oboe, barocke Streichinstrumente, Theorbe, Tasteninstrumente)
Kammersaal Friedenau, Isoldestr. 9
Upload Workshop für KomponistInnen, die am Telemann Symposium im November 2016 teilnehmen werden, und für alle an Alter Musik Interessierte. DozentInnen und Studierende des Instituts für Alte Musik der UdK Berlin präsentieren an diesem Tag ihre Instrumente und deren Kombinationsmöglichkeiten sowie erweiterte Spieltechniken und zeigen anhand von Hörbeispielen und Partituren, was bisher für das Instrumentarium geschrieben wurde.
Leitung: [Susanne Fröhlich](#) — *Kontakt und Anmeldung:* suziefroehlich@googlemail.com

29. — 17 Uhr — **»Fümms bö wö tää zää Uu« – Dada in Text, Tanz, Ton** — *UdK-Medienhaus, Grunewaldstr. 2–5, Galerie; Eintritt frei*
28.Okt. — 19–21 Uhr: Einführungsveranstaltung
20.Nov. — 18 Uhr — 22. Nov. — 13 Uhr: Arbeitsphase — *Gutshof Sauen*
27.Nov. — 18 Uhr — 29. Nov. — 17 Uhr: Probenphase — *UdK-Medienhaus*
Die künstlerische und literarische Bewegung DADA widersetzte sich vehement bürgerlicher Kultur und zerlegte ihre Ausdrucksformen lustvoll in ihre Bestandteile. Zur Teilnahme an diesem Aufführungsprojekt sind Studierende eingeladen, mit Stimme, Sprache, Körper, Bewegung und Szene zu arbeiten.
Leitung: [Tobias Müller-Kopp](#), [Caroline Scholz Ott](#), [Prof. Dorothea Weise](#) — *Kontakt und Anmeldung:* tobias@mueller-kopp.de

30. — 19.30 Uhr — **Inszeniertes Konzert** mit [David Eggert](#) (Violoncello), [Alexandros Giovanos](#) (Schlagzeug), Stücken von [Ali Gorji](#), [Ehsan Khatibi](#) und [Hendrik Rungelrath](#).
Inszenierung: [Anna Melnikova](#)
UdK Berlin, Fasanenstraße 1B, Kammersaal
Bei diesem interdisziplinären Experiment werden drei Uraufführungen neuer Musik inszeniert. Dabei ist aber keine schon bestehende Musik in einen übergeordneten Ablauf eingebunden oder eine Handlung nachträglich mit Klängen illustriert worden – sondern eine Regisseurin, zwei Instrumentalisten und drei Komponisten haben versucht, ihre jeweiligen Perspektiven schon im Entstehungsprozess der neuen Stücke zu verschränken.



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