

Trauma narratives, double injury and the seeming effectiveness of schizoid-paranoid uses of technology: mass rape, weaponised hunger, organised crime and state terrorism

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Abstract

This article examines Playback Theatre as a conceptual case study in how narrative, embodied witnessing, and collective reflection may interrupt the social reproduction of political violence. Methodologically, it combines a bounded case-study design with critical onto-phenomenological reflection and a narrative synthesis of scholarship on structural violence, collective trauma, psychoanalytic political theory, psychodrama insight, terrorism, and participatory theatre. It reports no original participant, clinical, or intervention data. The argument develops two linked concepts. Double injury names the initial harm and the second injury produced when institutions, public narratives, or technologies deny, normalise, commodify, or repetitively reactivate that harm. Schizoid-paranoid technopolitics names, as a non-diagnostic metaphor, infrastructures that amplify splitting, projection, distance, and the conversion of persons into targets, risks, or disposable populations. Playback Theatre may create a provisional, safe-enough space in which testimony becomes shared interpretation and spectatorship becomes responsibility. Yet narrative repair is not social transformation by itself: it must be joined to redistribution, enforceable rights, institutional accountability, and durable forms of care. The article therefore proposes a multiscalar practice of

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recognition in which cultural work supports material and political change, including the complex transition away from fossil dependence and ecosystem-predatory development.

Keywords. *Playback Theatre; double injury; structural violence; collective trauma; political violence; technopolitics; recognition; social change.*

1 - Introduction

Violence is never exhausted by the moment in which a body is struck, a home is destroyed, food is withheld, or a population is terrorised. It continues through the arrangements that decide whose pain is intelligible, whose account is credible, and whose future is treated as expendable. Mass rape, weaponised hunger, organised crime, and state terrorism differ in agents, histories and legal status. However, each can combine immediate injury with a second order of harm. That of denial, bureaucratic indifference, forced silence, spectacular repetition, or the conversion of suffering into an instrument. The question pursued here is therefore not only how violence happens, but how its meanings, affects and enabling institutions are reproduced. And, more significantly, how they might be interrupted.

Playback Theatre is the article's case study from the outset. In this improvisational form, a person, the teller, offers an experience and an ensemble gives it back through embodied performance before a witnessing audience. The practice draws on psychodramatic genealogies while establishing a distinct public form of shared narration (Moreno & Moreno, 2014; Fernández, 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2024). Its importance for the present argument lies neither in theatrical virtuosity nor in a promise of cure. It lies in a fragile social operation, that an experience moves from private possession to collective attention without ceasing to belong to the teller. This dynamic allows the exploration of the transformations that occur when a story is heard, enacted, revised, or refused.

The initial intuition is deliberately counter-intuitive, but not irrational. Counter-intuitive thought is understood here as the disciplined suspension of an apparently obvious frame so that neglected relations can become visible. It is one moment of inquiry, to be tested by evidence, conceptual consistency and public criticism. Therefore, it is neither the exclusive domain of science nor a license for paradox for its own sake. The relevant reversal is the following. Speech can be necessary for change and still be radically insufficient. Words shape consciousness, memory and the imaginable. They may also conceal material asymmetry if recognition is offered where land, income, safety, legal standing, or institutional power are being withheld.

The argument proceeds in seven stages. It first places structural violence at the centre of social change. It then consolidates the concepts of double injury and schizoid-paranoid technopolitics and relates them to research on political violence and terrorism. A methodology section defines Playback Theatre as a bounded conceptual case. The following sections examine recognition and othering, the ethical renewal of technoscience, and restorative practices and living laboratories. The conclusion returns to the article's governing claim. The argument is that stories can widen political possibility. However, that possibility becomes change only when meanings, resources and institutions are transformed together.

2 - Structural violence, trauma narratives and social change

Structural violence names injury embedded in ordinary arrangements, rather than confined to an identifiable assault. Unequal access to food, shelter, health care, education, mobility and political protection shortens lives and narrows agency even when no single actor appears to command the result (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 2004). This perspective changes the grammar of social change. If injury is organised through markets, borders, administrative rules, inheritance, policing and infrastructures, then transformation cannot consist only in replacing hostile words with benevolent ones. It must alter the distribution of resources, the rights by which claims can be enforced and the institutions that decide whose needs count.

Four dimensions are analytically distinct but politically interdependent, and refer to discursive, relational, material and institutional factors. The discursive dimension concerns names, narratives, images and the horizon of what can be said. The relational dimension concerns trust, fear, solidarity and the capacity to appear before others without being reduced to a category. The material dimension concerns income, land, housing, health, energy, time and access to common goods. The institutional dimension concerns law, public administration, ownership, representation, accountability and the organised capacity to maintain change. A credible politics of repair must move across all four dimensions. A theatre encounter may affect discourse and relation. However, its political force depends on whether those effects can inform material decisions and institutional commitments.

Trauma narratives occupy an ambivalent position in this field. They can restore historical presence, connect survivors, transmit evidence and support claims for justice. Collective trauma is not simply an aggregate of private symptoms. It is also a social struggle over meaning, identity, memory and continuity (Hirschberger, 2018). Yet a narrative may be received through a script that permits only helplessness, purity, vengeance or heroic overcoming. As these scripts harden, they limit perceived possibility, inhibit collective agency, cultivate fear and make alliances between injured groups far more difficult. This reflects no defect in the survivors' testimony itself. Rather, it exposes a flaw in our conditions of listening and in the political uses to which testimony is put.

The distinction matters because acknowledgement can itself become extractive. Institutions may invite stories while leaving the causes of injury untouched. Media may reward the most consumable suffering. Aid systems may require people to repeat intimate harm to prove eligibility. Public rituals may offer moral closure without accountability. Survivor-centred scholarship shows how violence descends into the ordinary, inhabiting gestures, silences, households and the texture of daily time rather than remaining a discrete past event (Das, 2007). The ethical task is therefore not to make every experience speak, but to build conditions in which speech, silence, privacy, evidence and political claim can coexist.

This account does not diminish the formative power of words. Language can name a previously normalised harm, gather a constituency and make a right conceivable. It can loosen the fatalism by which present arrangements appear natural. But the political test is what follows. That is, whether budgets change, services become accessible, perpetrators and institutions are held accountable, labour and property relations are revised, and ecological costs are no longer displaced onto those with the least power. Narration begins a passage. It does not complete it.

3 - Double injury and schizoid-paranoid technopolitics

Double injury describes a sequence and a structure. The first injury is the violent event or deprivation. Examples may include sexual assault used to destroy a community's social world, famine organised or tolerated as an instrument of rule, coercion by criminal networks, detention, torture, disappearance, or bombardment. The second injury occurs when the surrounding order denies the event, blames those harmed, turns testimony into spectacle, withholds redress and compensation, or reproduces the threat through repeated exposure and administrative neglect. Rape used in war attacks persons and the social relations through which a community understands itself (Card, 1996). Mass starvation similarly becomes political when access to food is shaped by decisions, permissions, siege, displacement and selective indifference rather than by scarcity alone (de Waal, 2018).

The second injury is not invariably chronological. Anticipated disbelief may be present during the first harm. As examples, a legal category or digital archive may frame the event before it has ended. Nor is every recollection retraumatising. The concept identifies a risk: that the social handling of injury becomes another site of violence. It also clarifies why the moral quality of listening is insufficient without procedure and power. A compassionate hearing that cannot protect a witness, preserve evidence, secure treatment, or alter an institution may be meaningful, but it remains politically incomplete.

The expression schizoid-paranoid is borrowed from Klein's account of splitting, projection, persecutory anxiety, and the division of objects into wholly good and wholly bad (Klein, 1946). In this article it is a conceptual metaphor, not a clinical diagnosis of a person, population, institution, or political movement. It designates a recurrent political operation by which complexity is evacuated, ambivalence becomes treachery, and an adversary becomes an absolute contaminant. The term technopolitics adds the infrastructures that accelerate or stabilise that operation: databases, platforms, legal codes, targeting systems, supply chains and administrative classifications.

Technology is neither an independent force, nor an inevitable destiny. Its seeming effectiveness derives from organised relations among design, ownership, law, military or commercial purpose, institutional incentives and learned habits of attention. The drone is not merely an aircraft; it is also a distribution of visibility, risk and distance between those who may strike and those who live under the possibility of being struck (Chamayou, 2015). Digital systems can similarly convert persons into profiles, probabilities, and targets. Han (2022) argues that datafied communication fragments public reason, creating a profound social crisis. Pistor (2019) shows how law codes assets and durable privilege. These mechanisms are powerful precisely because they are institutional, and for the same reason they are contestable. No apparatus is literally unstoppable.

Marxist psychoanalytic approaches deepen this analysis by refusing a choice between material domination and psychic life. Reich (1970) examined how authoritarian desire can be cultivated within economic, familial and bodily arrangements. Fanon (2004) traced the reciprocal formation of colonial order, racialised violence and injured subjectivity. Their continuing value lies in the insistence that fear, submission, aggression and identification are neither free-floating pathologies nor automatic reflections of class position. They are formed in institutions and lived through bodies. A politics that

changes only symbols leaves domination intact. A politics that changes only ownership while ignoring humiliation, projection and desire may reproduce its relational form.

Research on terrorism supplies an important corrective to careless pathologisation, as early and recurring claims that terrorists are psychologically abnormal have historically exceeded empirical evidence (Silke, 1998). To counter this, psychodrama practices of embodied listening - being inherently socially embedded and critical - offer an alternative framework. This methodological approach enables the emergence of critical insights that move beyond individual pathology (Moreno & Moreno, 2014).

Comparative work on political and non-political murderers in Northern Ireland (Lyons & Harbinson, 1986), interviews with incarcerated Middle Eastern militants (Post et al., 2003), and later research on lone-actor violence (Corner & Gill, 2015) address different populations and cannot be collapsed into one profile. A systematic review likewise finds a heterogeneous and methodologically fragile evidence base, with important distinctions between lone actors and group-based offenders (Sarma et al., 2022).

The literature formed around European political violence, including the Red Brigades and the Red Army Faction, and contemporary questions about recruitment and training in organisations such as ISIS should therefore be read as studies of socialisation, ideology, grievance, group discipline, opportunity, and biography in interaction - not as a search for a diagnostic essence. Incarcerated participants' accounts are valuable yet shaped by prison, retrospective self-presentation and political context. Survivor accounts are indispensable for understanding consequences and the ordinary afterlife of violence, but they must not be instrumentalised as illustrations of a theory decided in advance. The analytic unit is a configuration of persons, institutions, narratives and material opportunities.

Double injury and schizoid-paranoid technopolitics thus name linked but not identical processes. The first identifies how harm is renewed through its social reception. The second identifies a mode of organising perception and action that makes renewal easier. This occurs by splitting communities into protected and disposable lives, projecting danger onto an absolute other, and using technical distance to evade the other's claim. Their conjunction helps explain why facts alone may fail to interrupt violence. Facts require institutions of attention, protection and consequence.

4 - Playback Theatre as a case study - methodology and analytic frame

This article uses Playback Theatre as a bounded conceptual case, rather than as an empirical trial. Case-study reasoning is appropriate when a contemporary practice must be understood in relation to the contexts that give it meaning (Yin, 2018). The case is bounded by the recurrent Playback sequence described in the literature. An experience is offered by the teller, received by performers, enacted in compressed aesthetic form, returned to the teller and witnessed by a group or public (Fernández, 2018). The object of analysis is this social form and its documented applications, not a particular company, performance or participant population.

The method used in this article combines three operations. First, a narrative and theoretical synthesis places Playback Theatre in conversation with scholarship on structural violence, collective trauma, psychoanalytic political theory, psychodrama action-based critique, terrorism, and

participatory performance. This synthesis is interpretive, not a new systematic review. The recent systematic review by Gonzalez et al. (2024) is used to delimit the practice's reported fields of application. Second, a critical onto-phenomenological reflection asks how embodied experience, vulnerability and being-with-others are disclosed or obscured in the movement from telling to enactment. Phenomenology of practice attends to lived meaning without detaching it from the situations in which it arises (van Manen, 2023). Third, a structural critique tests whether relational insight connects to material and institutional change.

The onto-phenomenological frame joins existential experience to questions about what kind of world permits a life to appear as a life. Henry's account of self-affecting life and pathos, Devarieux's study of embodied persistence, and Malabou's concept of plasticity each resist the image of the subject as a fixed, self-transparent unit (Henry, 2004; Devarieux, 2004; Malabou, 2005). Experience is at once intimate and formed through stories, bodies, institutions and relations. The metaphysical question is therefore practical, referring to what arrangements allow a person to remain more than the injury, category or risk assigned to them.

Analysis follows three moments in the Playback sequence. First, telling concerns authorship, consent, selection and the right not to disclose. Second, enactment concerns translation, as performers inevitably select gestures, affects, relations and silences. For this reason, fidelity cannot mean literal duplication. And third, witnessing concerns the audience's movement from consumption to response, from passivity to co-agency. At each moment the same four questions are asked: What becomes visible? What is transformed or lost? Who holds interpretive power? What material or institutional consequence could follow?

The approach is assessed by conceptual coherence, fidelity to the cited evidence, attention to counterexamples and limits, and refusal of diagnostic or causal claims that the material cannot sustain. The article reports no new participants, interviews, clinical observations or intervention outcomes. It cannot estimate therapeutic effectiveness or generalise across cultures and conflicts. Playback Theatre is selected because it concentrates narrative, embodiment, witnessing and public interpretation in a visible sequence. The case is heuristic, as it makes a problem easier to examine, and it is not a solution universally valid.

5 - From othering to recognition: Playback Theatre and collective repair

Political splitting often begins with a familiar distinction between friend and enemy and ends, in its most violent form, with a transformation of enemy into fiend. An enemy remains an adversary within a possible political world; a fiend appears outside obligation, dialogue and grief. Othering operates across scales. In a household, one experience may be rendered unspeakable. In a neighbourhood, a group may be marked as dangerous. In a state, citizenship and protection may be distributed unequally. Across geopolitical blocs, whole populations may be imagined only as threat or collateral. Inclusion is not the simple reversal of exclusion if entry requires the other to abandon memory, difference, or claim. Agamben's (2013) figure of a coming community is powerful precisely where belonging is not made conditional on a qualifying identity.

Playback Theatre can interrupt this movement by slowing perception. The teller, the one that brings a biographical story to be told, is neither an isolated patient, nor a source from whom content is extracted. The performers make an interpretation visible and therefore answerable. The audience witnesses both the experience and the incompleteness of its representation. In this arrangement, a story can become plural without becoming ownerless. The practice may create a safe-enough rather than perfectly safe space. Moreover, risk cannot be abolished, but it can be named, bounded and shared.

Love and knowledge require clarification in this context. Love does not mean sentimental harmony, private affection or the suspension of judgement. It names a public refusal to treat another life as disposable. Knowledge does not mean possession of the other's interiority. It names an accountable effort to learn how harm is lived, produced, and sustained. This includes the readiness to revise one's categories. When joined in recognition, love and knowledge are two sides of the same coin. Love without knowledge leads to blindness, and knowledge without love leads to coldness. Neither is a substitute for rights, resources or institutional repair. Their political value is to orient those changes towards lives rather than abstractions.

Evidence on participatory theatre supports possibility rather than certainty. Work with migrant mothers shows how performance can make marginalised forms of knowledge public while also exposing the politics of representation (Erel et al., 2017). Playback practice in occupied Palestine has been analysed as a response to political violence that can support witnessing and community dialogue while remaining constrained by occupation and continuing insecurity (Rivers, 2014). These cases matter because they do not make structural conditions disappear. They show how cultural practice may help participants interpret and contest those conditions.

The dangers are equally real. Enactment can aestheticise pain, reproduce a stereotype, expose a teller to unwanted recognition, or encourage disclosure without adequate support. A trauma-informed Playback process therefore requires voluntary participation, the right to silence or withdraw, careful facilitation, clarity about confidentiality and limits, attention to cultural and linguistic translation, and pathways to appropriate support. Where stories concern crimes or ongoing danger, theatrical care cannot replace safeguarding, evidence preservation, legal advice or clinical services. Collective repair begins by refusing to ask one practice to do every kind of work.

6 - Ethical, epistemic and political renewal of technoscience

If no social justice is possible without ecological justice, no technoscientific development can occur without ethical, epistemic and political renewal. Ethical renewal concerns ends, limits, care and responsibility for foreseeable harm. Epistemic renewal concerns who can define a problem, what counts as evidence and whose situated knowledge is excluded. Political renewal concerns ownership, governance, law, public capacity, and the distribution of benefits and risks. Together they displace the fiction that innovation is a neutral sequence to which values are added afterwards.

The crisis is not technology as such but the enclosure of possibility within a narrow account of efficiency. A platform optimised for attention may intensify fear; a model optimised for prediction may inherit the exclusions of its data; a legal technology may make private claims durable while rendering

social and ecological costs external. The appropriate response is neither worship, nor refusal. It is democratic specification: which problem, defined by whom, under what rights, with what recourse, and within which planetary limits?

Here counter-intuitive thought becomes a practical discipline. It asks whether the fastest system is actually efficient once repair, care and ecological loss are counted; whether distance reduces violence or merely removes it from view; whether more data produces knowledge or amplifies an inherited category. Mann's (2006) feminist treatment of the sublime warns against forms of transcendence that erase embodied and environmental dependence. The point is not to abandon universality, but to build it through accountable encounters with difference.

Playback Theatre offers no energy policy, algorithmic audit or political treaty. Its more modest contribution is procedural. It rehearses the passage from information to attention, from a category to a situated life, and from spectatorship to a question of response. Such rehearsal can support public deliberation only when linked to institutions capable of acting: schools, municipalities, unions, co-operatives, courts, health systems, research organisations and democratic forums. Ethical imagination without institutional form evaporates. And institutional form without ethical imagination hardens.

7 - Restorative practices and living laboratories

Restorative practices, permaculture, community co-operatives, Transition initiatives, and other grassroots realities are living laboratories that make alternatives perceptible. This occurs because they join narration to repeated material practice. More importantly, they are not islands outside power. They are sites in which rules, ownership, care, expertise and ecological limits can be tested at a scale where consequences remain visible. In other words, their value lies in institutional learning: a different story is accompanied by a different allocation of work, risk, voice and resource.

Existing Playback applications provide bounded examples. Participatory theatre with migrant mothers has connected embodied knowledge to public research and political voice (Erel et al., 2017). Community practice in Palestine demonstrates how performance may hold experiences of political violence without pretending to remove the structures that continue to produce them (Rivers, 2014). A small pilot following Hurricane Harvey explored anxiety and brain-connectivity outcomes after a Playback intervention, but its sample and design make the results preliminary rather than generalisable (Munjuluri et al., 2020). Read together, these studies support careful experimentation, not a universal efficacy claim.

As argued, grassroots alternatives become politically significant when they acquire durable rules and connections across scale. Ostrom's (1990) research on governing commons shows that collective resource management depends on institutions fitted to ecological and social conditions, rather than on goodwill alone. The Mondragón co-operative experience demonstrates both the durability and the tensions of worker-governed enterprise within wider markets (Whyte & Whyte, 2014). Transition initiatives organise local responses to oil dependence and resilience (Hopkins, 2008), whereas Wright's (2010) real-utopian approach asks how viable alternatives can erode, tame or move beyond dominant structures. Neither is pure; each offers a site for learning how values become arrangements and new configurations emerge.

A multiscale strategy can connect these experiments. At the micro scale, people need protected spaces for testimony, mourning, disagreement and renewed agency. At the meso scale, organisations need participatory rules, trained facilitators, budgets, safeguarding and accountable leadership. At the macro scale, law and public policy must secure rights, redistribute resources, regulate technological and ecological harm, and protect democratic infrastructures. Global co-operation is needed where supply chains, digital platforms, forced displacement, climate change, and political violence exceed national borders.

A story can travel across these levels only if institutions are prepared to receive it as more than a symbol. Three evaluative questions keep living laboratories from becoming decorative. First, do they transfer interpretive and decision-making power to those most affected? Second, do they change the distribution of resources, exposure and care, rather than merely improve institutional language? Third, can their gains be sustained, contested and revised through transparent rules? Playback Theatre can contribute a fourth question: whose experience is still absent from the scene? The answer should guide recruitment, governance, funding and policy, not only the next performance.

8 - Conclusion

Playback Theatre makes visible a central paradox of trauma narratives. An experience may need language and witnesses in order to enter a shared world. However, its repetition can become a second injury when institutions demand disclosure, deny consequence, or convert pain into spectacle. The practice's promise lies in its capacity to render interpretation public and revisable, literally implying that taken-for-granted assumptions are to be revised and resignified. Its limit lies in the fact that no performance can redistribute land, guarantee safety, prosecute a crime, rebuild a health system, or decarbonise an economy.

The concept of schizoid-paranoid technopolitics helps explain how splitting, projection, technical distance, and institutional coding can make violence appear necessary or remote. Used carefully, it is not a diagnosis and not a claim that technology is inherently destructive. It is a warning that infrastructures can stabilise a persecutory imagination - and a reminder that design, ownership, law, and public purpose can be changed. The effectiveness described in the title is therefore seeming and conditional, never unstoppable.

Social transformation requires a braid of discursive, relational, material, and institutional change. Recognition must meet redistribution; memory must meet accountability; care must meet enforceable rights. Playback Theatre can serve as a modest technology of democratic attention when it protects consent, welcomes ambivalence and connects cultural insight to organised action. A story may return breath to a room. The political task begins when that breath becomes time, shelter, food, safety, law, and a liveable earth.

The transition away from fossil dependence and ecosystem-predatory development is technically complex, materially uneven and narratively contested. Consequently, it cannot be reduced to changing individual attitudes, nor can it be achieved by infrastructure without public legitimacy and shared imagination. The case examined here suggests a disciplined hope: not that theatre repairs the world, but that practices of embodied listening can help communities perceive what must be repaired, who must decide, and which institutions must carry the work forward.

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