



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences  
Peace And Conflict Studies

**WHY AND HOW CAN IMPROVISATIONAL THEATER IMPACT  
CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTS AND PEACEBUILDING?  
A COMPLEMENTARY APPROACH**

Celia Ann OWENS

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2014



WHY AND HOW CAN IMPROVISATIONAL THEATER IMPACT CONFLICT  
ENVIRONMENTS AND PEACEBUILDING?  
A COMPLEMENTARY APPROACH

Celia Ann OWENS

Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences  
Peace And Conflict Studies

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2014

## KABUL VE ONAY

Celia Owens tarafından hazırlanan "Why and How Can Theater Impact Conflict Environments and Peacebuilding? A Complementary Approach" başlıklı bu çalışma, 3 Kasım 2014 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından yüksek lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.



Prof. Dr. A. Deniz Bozer (Başkan)



Doç. Dr. Havva Kök Arslan



Yrd. Doç. Dr. Şebnem Udum (Danışman)

Yukarıdaki imzaların adı geçen öğretim üyelerine ait olduğunu onaylarım.

Prof. Dr. Yusuf Çelik

Enstitü Müdürü

## EİLDİRİM

Hazırladığım tezin/raporun tamamen kendi çalışmam olduğunu ve her alıntıda kaynak gösterdiğimi taahhüt eder, tezimin/raporumun kağıt ve elektronik kopyalarının Hacettepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü arşivlerinde aşağıda belirttiğim koşullarda saklanmasına izin verdiğimi onaylarım:

- Tezimin/Raporumun tamamı her yerden erişime açılabılır.
- Tezimin/Raporum sadece Hacettepe Üniversitesi yerleşkelerinden erişime açılabılır.
- Tezimin/Raporumun ..... yılı süreyie erişime acılmasıı istemivorum. Bu süre sonunda uzatma için başvuru da bulunmadığım takdirde, tezimin/raporumun tamamı her yerden erişime açılabılır.

03.11.2014

İmza

Celia Owens

[Öğrencinin Adı Soyadı]

## Dedication

The thinking, research, and writing of this thesis is dedicated for the benefit of all who suffer in this world, who seek to suffer less, and who devote themselves to reducing the suffering of others.

## EPIGRAPH

*The Moral Imagination* is about this messiness of innovation.

Discussions have emerged between those who believe responding to conflict and building social change is primarily a learned skill and those who see it as an art. [..]. Building constructive social change in settings of deep-rooted conflict requires both. But the evolution of becoming a profession, the orientation toward technique, and the management of process in conflict resolution and peacebuilding have overshadowed, underestimated, and in too many instances forgotten the art of the creative process.

A horizon, though visible, is permanently just out of touch, suggesting an epic journey, the pursuit of which in peacebuilding is forging of new ways to approach human affairs with an enemy.

John Paul Lederach  
*The Moral Imagination*

The poem, the song, the picture  
Is only water  
Drawn from the well of the people  
And it should be given back to them in a cup of beauty  
So that they may drink  
And in drinking  
Understand themselves.

attributed to Federico Gabriel Lorca

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to thank Havva Kok Arslan, the Rector, and everyone who brought the Peace and Conflict Studies MA program at Hacettepe University in Turkey into existence, because it is uniquely positioned to serve a wide balance of international students. I thank Ava Evans, founding International Coordinator, who conveyed the information and spirit it took for me to apply, and who often sustained us throughout the program. How else would I ever have bonded with my beloved family of classmates, who fulfilled my lifelong desire for making friends with all the people of the world? It is impossible to overstate the practical, cultural, and intellectual value of the education this international experience in this field has set me on. I thank all the teachers who came to share their expertise with us. I thank the people of Turkey who so kindly welcomed us.

For guidance in writing this thesis and improving my scholarship, I thank my advisors, Dr. Diane Ross and Dr. Sebnem Udum. For encouragement and good questions and suggestions, I thank Cliff Honicker. I thank Misha Shulman and all the theater people I have ever known, brave generous hearts. They have made me believe in the gifts theater has to offer people. And I thank all whose writing, work and inspiration I have relied on for this study.

Special thanks to Salvatore, who made it possible, and Sylvia for helping. For the time I was not available, I thank my mother and others who sacrificed my attention.



## ABSTRACT

Owens, Celia. *Why and How Can Improvisational Theater Impact Conflict Environments and Peacebuilding? A Complementary Approach*. MA thesis. Ankara, 2014

This study examines some of the sociological, psychological, intellectual, aesthetic and practical reasons why art and creative processes are not only useful, but fundamental to human learning, meaning making, and change, and therefore to social regeneration. Literature from psychology, anthropology, mythology and peacebuilding is explored, concerning the role of art in human conduct and communication, suggesting a complementary role for art, sometimes essential, to go along with cognitive modalities for problem solving. Through the synonymous languages of scholars from different fields, similar themes are reiterated which are valid across cultures, genders, age groups and epochs, elucidating the function of story, ritual, and creative (i.e. new, symbolic, or improvised) acts in individual and community development. These mechanisms demonstrate the human needs and purposes for art.

Improvisational theater performance is examined, as a representative art form, for its application in the field of Peace and Conflict, through three methods: Playback Theater, Workable Peace, and Theater of the Oppressed. Foundations and practices in these models are reviewed as a prerequisite to comprehending case studies taken from the field, using each of the forms. Considering Lederach's contrast of 'an art' and 'a learned skill', this study reveals the necessity of learned skill in art and the complementarity of art to cognitive processes. Contemporary cases of improvisational theater interventions from multiple settings, are assessed to consider a range of applications where theater has been used in peacebuilding, to identify how improvements have been achieved, what problems have occurred, and to evaluate to what extent specific criteria for change objectives are met or not.

**Key Words:** Improvisational Theater, Playback Theater, Image Theater, Theater of the Oppressed, Workable Peace, Peacebuilding, Conflict, Story, Symbolic Act, John Paul Lederach, Gregory Bateson, James Hillman, Joseph Campbell.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>KABUL VE ONAY</b> .....	i
<b>BILDRIM</b> .....	ii
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	iii
<b>EPIGRAPH</b> .....	iv
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	v
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	vi
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	vii
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>1.1 PROBLEM.QUESTIONS</b> .....	1
<b>1.2 APPROACH. RATIONALE</b> .....	3
<b>1.3 SOURCES. POSITIONING</b> .....	5
<b>1.4 TERMS. STRUCTURE</b> .....	6
<b>CHAPTER 2 THEORIES</b> .....	9
<b>2.1 JOHN PAUL LEDERACH</b> .....	9
2.1.1 Art in Peacebuilding .....	9
2.1.2 Re-evaluating Practice .....	10
2.1.3 Sources and Resources .....	13
2.1.4 New Measures .....	14
<b>2.2 JOSEPH CAMPBELL</b> .....	15
2.2.1 Artists as Mythmakers .....	16
2.2.2 Functions of Stories .....	17
2.2.3 A Surpassing Vitality .....	19
<b>2.3 JAMES HILLMAN</b> .....	21
2.3.1 Love of War .....	21
2.3.2 Sympathetic Imagination .....	26
<b>2.4 GREGORY BATESON</b> .....	28
2.4.1 Learning and Logical Levels .....	28
2.4.2 Play and MetaCommunication .....	29
2.4.3 Map / Territory Distinctions .....	31
2.4.4 Frames .....	32
2.4.5 Patterns and Evolution .....	33
<b>2.5 SYNTHESIS OF SCHOLARS</b> .....	36
<b>2.6 SYNTHESIZING ART AND COGNITION IN PEACEBUILDING</b> .....	38
<b>CHAPTER 3 IMPROVISATION</b> .....	41
<b>3.1 REHEARSING TO IMPROVISE</b> .....	42
<b>3.2 PLAYBACK THEATER</b> .....	46
3.2.1 Before to Now .....	46
3.2.2 How to do Playback .....	49
3.2.3 Conductor and Teller .....	50
3.2.4 Players and Musicians .....	51
3.2.5 Audience .....	52
<b>3.3 WORKABLE PEACE</b> .....	53
3.3.1 Theory and Cognition .....	53

3.3.2 Role Play.....	55
3.3.3 Debriefing.....	58
<b>3.4 THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED.....</b>	<b>60</b>
3.4.1 Paolo Freire.....	60
3.4.2 Action Research.....	61
3.4.3 Augusto Boal.....	62
3.4.4 Forum Theater.....	64
3.4.5 Workshop.....	65
3.4.6 Spectators.....	66
3.4.7 The Difficultator.....	67
<b>3.5 COMPARISONS.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4 EVALUATION.....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>4.1 METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>69</b>
4.1.1 Change Criteria.....	69
4.1.2 Cases - Sources.....	71
<b>4.2 PLAYBACK THEATER CASES.....</b>	<b>72</b>
4.2.1 Tears, Education.....	72
4.2.2 Asylum Child.....	76
4.2.3 Citizens Cuba.....	81
<b>4.3 A WORKABLE PEACE COMPOSITE CASES.....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>4.4 THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED CASES.....</b>	<b>90</b>
4.4.1 Body Forum.....	90
4.4.2 Image Critical Literacy.....	93
4.4.3 Bullying Forum.....	96
<b>CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>108</b>

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 PROBLEM. QUESTIONS.

In the field of peacebuilding, there is an apparent scarcity of art and artistic approaches applied to problem solving. Training for work in the field often touches only tangentially or superficially on artistic processes. When art is used, it is usually separated from the core approach to peace work, and is treated rather as a sideline, instead of being integrated and relied upon as an essential component in the overall structure of program design. A valuable, but perhaps not well-understood, resource for intervention in conflict environments, art is minimized in a context where every possible asset needs to be exploited to its full advantage.

While the necessity of sound cognitive and didactic solutions to human problems is fairly universally agreed upon, controversy and evasion are not uncommon responses to contentions that there are aspects of human learning and change that can only be grasped through the flexible, sensory-based, layered languages of art. While facts must be reckoned with, so, some say, are essences an inextricable aspect of the world as we live in it, especially in the complexities of peace and conflict, which are not always touched by institutional programs and strategies. If regarded as complementary, rather than as out of place, or antithetical to cognitive frameworks in peace and conflict work, art and creative processes might be introduced more effectively.

The arts persist and occasionally gain attention, as a positive agent for change. The title of this thesis is a question: Why and how can art

processes, such as improvisational theater, impact peacebuilding? What is it about the make up and mechanisms of human beings that render art and art processes – particularly, in this study, narrative, performance arts -- impactful in peacebuilding? What intellectual theories claim that methods, pedagogy and tools from story-based arts have something to offer to people struggling with conflict? What is the practical evidence that the art of improvisational theater, as it is being used, is an effective tool in peacebuilding? If improvisational theater is found to impact change, what is needed to put it into practice?

Since peace and conflict often make their way into art and theater, it is completing a circle to examine theater's impact on peace and conflict, suggesting an inter-penetrating relationship. Although some of the findings in this research are applicable not only to improvisational theater but also to other types of theater, as well as other art forms, and while it may be true that other art forms may elicit similar results, this discourse is focused on improvisational theater. At the same time, the reader is reminded (especially in Chapter 2) and encouraged, by the use of other terms, such as 'theater', 'stories', 'drama' or simply 'art', to imagine applications for art beyond the examples covered in this thesis. Indeed, improvisational theater is inclusive of all of these. In Chapter 2, concerning theories, most of the claims made by the authors studied are for art in general, and concern related human behaviors, not only improvisational theater; whereas in Chapters 3 and 4, it will be only improvisational theater that is discussed.

If we think of a shift from a state of 'conflict' to a state of 'peace' as a type of 'learning', then can art have a function in this learning process? Does the performance of stories have a part in the ways humans craft meaning to live by? If theories support the promise of art processes, such as improvisational theater, as a tool for evoking insight, emotional healing, reconciliation, and regeneration, what is the practical evidence of its efficacy in practice? If improvisational theater is shown to be effective, how does anyone (amateur

or professional) cultivate the mindset and skills for using it as a tool to transform and transcend some problems? If people cultivate the strategies for creative work, how do they go about performing the type of art chosen as an example for this study, improvisational theater? Thus the practical question is: Why and how can improvisational theater impact peacebuilding? It is hoped that exploring explanations to this question may further the field by addressing some of the problems put forth above.

## **1.2 APPROACH. RATIONALE.**

In Peace and Conflict Studies, opinions are mixed about whether the arts are an effective vehicle with which to address social problems or rather a distraction from real solutions. Many who consider the arts valuable resources in these contexts, may still see artistic methods as impractical. Among the people who promote and use artistic disciplines in the field, methodologies compete, applications vary, and results are mixed. These discrepancies can be due to factors such as inevitable contextual conditions, variations in relationship management, project design, practitioner preparedness, and how an art intervention is conducted and executed. Differences and commonalities will be examined and comparisons made concerning three approaches to improvisational theater.

It is supposed that problem solving with artistic approaches might be more widely and effectively embraced if better understood. This inquiry begins examining the assertion of a renowned peacebuilder, John Paul Lederach, that artistic approaches and processes need to play a bigger role in peacebuilding. Next comes research into how art, storytelling, and performance, have functioned in human life, culture, and learning in other contexts. This study arrives finally at an examination of how improvisational theater arts are functioning in peacebuilding today, and what may account, both theoretically and practically, for observable outcomes.

The case study results seen in Chapter 4, require that the reader have an understanding of how improvisational theater functions, which is, therefore, given in Chapter 3. Understanding how improvisational theater is done has more meaning if first one grasps the underlying value for such antics as are found in improvisational theater, for their impact in human interactions. So, these reasons and theories are elucidated in Chapter 2. Thus the preceding two chapters prepare the reader for the heart of the research, the case studies, which are found in Chapter 4. That is the rationale for the order and the content presented.

Academic articles and internet videos provide case studies from improvisational theater art interventions found in peacebuilding. These examples are analyzed for specific indicators of qualitative change among the participants, suggesting anticipated, unexpected, problematic, and beneficial outcomes of the event. These criteria are entered into a simple grid for comparisons, and to quantify, to some degree, the impacts. There is also a narrative analysis of each case, considering other relevant factors. Questions are posed and alternatives proposed. These evaluations reveal specific results that have transpired from actual improvisational theater programs in the arts, as applied in the field of social change and peacebuilding.

It is seen in Chapter 4, that in conflict environments and educational contexts, improvisation is sometimes performed by professional artists, and sometimes by peace and conflict professionals or educators, with or without training in theater, or simply by self-tutored people within communities engaged in resolving their own conflicts. The case study examples of art interventions are chosen from three different forms of improvisational theater that are used in peacebuilding. Therefore, in Chapter 3, these three forms of theater improvisation are studied to help clarify how they developed theoretically and historically, and how they are put into practice today. Explanations in that chapter reveal the differences, similarities, and complexities within these art forms, and show how they can be cultivated by amateur practitioners, or

sometimes require professional training, to be used effectively. Seeing the way they work also differentiates the contexts that would call for one approach to be chosen over another.

### 1.3 SOURCES. POSITIONING.

Before the reader confronts the case studies, and the descriptions of how improvisational theater has developed, Chapter 2 will first provide scholarly theories for comprehending the function of play and pretend, imaginative narrative, and creativity in human communication, emotion, and learning. In this chapter, these theories are linked directly to aspects of art and improvisational theater that are related to the phenomenon described in the theory. The scholars explored are John Paul Lederach, Joseph Campbell, James Hillman, and Gregory Bateson.

In the field of peace and conflict, John Paul Lederach articulated well the relationship and value for art and artistic approaches. He compares the cognitive with the artistic approach: "The academic community, unlike the artistic community, often begins its interaction with and journey into the world by stating a problem that defines both the journey and the interaction. The artistic community, it seems to me, starts with experience in the world and then creates a journey toward expressing something that captures the wholeness of that feeling in a succinct moment."<sup>1</sup> Defining "the journey and the interaction", can be understood as determining a preselected solution to a problem and devising a way to achieve it. Whereas, the artistic process described -- allowing the experience, or problem, to inform a creative journey that encompasses a sense of 'wholeness' including multiple, often unpredictable aspects -- is also a description of being in any present moment, where all possible trajectories for change begin. Lederach challenges us to

---

<sup>1</sup>John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005. p. 5.



reconcile cognitive and artistic approaches into a complementary relationship, habitually integrated and maintained.

As a person trained and experienced in theater, visual arts, creative writing and music -- a lifelong artist – this author has observed the healing capacity of art in human conflict, both personal and social. Many artists attest to this and many non-artists concur. Training in Peace and Conflict Studies, as well as in therapeutic models for communication, has made evident the applications for art. At the same time, there is a need for corroboration that would contribute a foundation to this discourse by grounding anecdotal evidence in scholarly theory and in practice. John Paul Lederach, with experience in both worlds (conflict resolution and art), has elaborated the themes that inform this thesis. Other voices from other fields, offer a trans-disciplinary approach to come at the problem from different angles, to discover what has been established through the life work of several great thinkers.

#### 1.4 TERMS. STRUCTURE.

‘Art’ will be used as an all-embracing term for creative acts and disciplines, but in this case specifically, we are speaking of art that is being used for the purpose of addressing human problems, rather than art intended for decoration, entertainment, or other purposes. ‘Theater’, likewise, will refer to that theater and performance which is applied to mitigating human problems, and usually to improvisational theater. ‘Conflict’ will be used broadly to include nearly any human problem; and ‘peace and conflict work’ and ‘peacebuilding’ as interventions aimed at reducing human suffering, individual or collective. Defining ‘peace’ is not essential to this discourse. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition for ‘essence’ is, “‘Substance’ in the metaphysical sense; the reality underlying phenomena; absolute being,” or, “The most important indispensable quality or constituent element of anything,” and notes

that it is “Now restricted to spiritual or immaterial entities.”<sup>2</sup> Synonyms are soul, spirit, nature. ‘Symbolic acts’ will be referred to as words or actions that are offered as a representation of a feeling, a change or an intention (such as celebrations, funerals, reconciliation), for intangible purposes. Unusual vocabulary will be defined as it occurs in the text.

First, this study explores theorists from a few disciplines for clues as to why the arts can have a critical role in reducing conflict and contributing to peace. Links are made explicit between the authors quoted and summarized, and how their thinking applies to the arts and theater in the context of peace and conflict.

Next, theoretical background, methodologies and practices in improvisational theater will be examined for how they are rooted in the theories that came before. What improvisational theater artists do to prepare themselves for their work, and attitudes they cultivate in themselves, show how they invite spontaneity, creativity, and improvisation. An awareness of what is involved will facilitate thinking about these forms. Particular to this study, this explanatory background is also needed in order to relate practice to theory, and to better visualize and understand the case studies.

The three types of theater under discussion are Playback Theater (PB), which aids participants in connecting to feelings, insights, and restorative internal and interpersonal resources; Workable Peace (WP), a pedagogy which focuses on imparting to high school students, through role play, new understanding, skills and behaviors in conflict negotiation, along with the acquisition of knowledge of history and social studies; and Theater of the Oppressed (TO), designed to raise awareness and develop strategies for solving group or inter-group problems. All three involve structure, ensemble

---

<sup>2</sup> Prepared by A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, Oxford, New York, Toronto, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Karachi, Petaling Jaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Cape Town, Melbourne, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1989.

work, and improvisation. An analysis will be made of case studies, from each of these methodologies, to identify the ways in which they demonstrate, or fail to support, the aims of peacebuilding.

Gregory Bateson teaches us the value of Synonymous Languages. He said, “In many cases, an increment of insight is provided by a second language of description without the addition of any extra so-called objective information. Two proofs [...] may combine to give the student an extra grasp of the relation that is being demonstrated. The discovery that the two languages [...] are mutually translatable is itself an enlightenment.”<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon of synonymous languages will be exploited in Chapter 2.

---

<sup>3</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature*, New York: E.P.Dutton, 1979, p. 73, 75.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORIES**

The following literature, directly or indirectly, pertains to and elucidates matters of art, learning, art processes, and improvisational theater. The text links the theories to the concerns of peacebuilding.

#### **2.1 JOHN PAUL LEDERACH**

John Paul Lederach, Professor of International Peacebuilding at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA, with experience working in multiple international conflict environments, advocates an elicitive approach to conflict transformation, emphasizing the importance of relationships, contexts and history in ongoing processes of change, acknowledging the role of both systemic social reforms and reconciliation of emotional narratives. He defines peace work as both a skill and an art. He advocates for art interventions in conflict resolution, and more so, for art processes and approaches, the thinking of an artist, to be included in the repertoire of peace workers (Lederach, 2005).

##### **2.1.1 A Case for Art in Peacebuilding**

The cornerstone of peace and conflict is said to be dialogue, and, as Lederach observes, “The artistic process has this dialectic nature”<sup>4</sup>, which is one key to its effectiveness in peace and conflict settings. Art develops step by step, and is not pre-ordained, but the next step is often determined by the effect of the last, as in a conversation. Art is inclusive and has the capacity to speak, not only directly to people, but also on multiple levels, to different parts of one person’s mind at the same time, and simultaneously to a variety of different kinds of people, in different ways. Why this is true will be examined below through the work of other scholars. As Lederach points out, the arts cultivate qualities that are missing or wanting in many negotiation settings -- qualities such as serendipity, sensory-based communication, and non-linear approaches that utilize disruptions and breaks in chronology for effect.

Nevertheless, many are skeptical about what remedial role, if any, art of any kind can play in peace and conflict. From a review, entitled ‘Confessions of a Tamed Cynic’, of J.P. Lederach’s book, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (2005), mediator Robert Benjamin writes, “Even before reading this book, I admit to flinching at first sight of the title [...] to words like: ‘moral,’ ‘peace’ and ‘soul.’ [...] The field of conflict management has always been a magnet to many with fuzzy, feel good, idealistic notions that well-intentioned beliefs anchored in a spiritual, if not religious, foundation can counteract destructive conflict and violence. [...] He [Lederach] poignantly quotes a Tajik warlord ‘... you have to circle into the truth through stories.’”<sup>5</sup> One is left with the sense that this type of ‘circling’ is not considered a proper method.

But after reading the book, the reviewer, also deeply experienced in conflict management, changed his opinion, convinced that Lederach is far from naive. He agreed with Lederach, saying, “Lederach notes that, in the

---

<sup>4</sup> John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Benjamin, “Confessions of a Tamed Cynic – Review of *The Moral Imagination* by John Paul Lederach” <http://www.mediate.com/articles/benjamin20.cfm> , April 2005. accessed December 15, 2014.

professionalization of the field, we may well have lost the essential sense of art.” He finishes the review concluding, “Conflict management practitioners are grappling with the same age old question that, ironically, folkloric trickster figures have confronted since the beginning of time: resolving immovable objects and irresistible forces. Lederach has done a masterful job of sorting out many of the most critical variables.”<sup>6</sup>

Benjamin’s reaction to Lederach’s title, articulates the understandable resistance, uneasiness or lack of comprehension many professionals have about terms such as ‘art’ and ‘soul’, especially in a field like peace and conflict, where the stakes are high and achievements come with difficulty. By nature, art practice, like that of peace and conflict, takes place at frontiers and is fraught with uncertainty and risk.

### 2.1.2 Re-Evaluating Practice

In his book, *The Moral Imagination -- the Art and Soul of Building Peace* (2005), Lederach synthesizes what he has learned in 25 years of conflict resolution, in some of the world’s most daunting conflicts, with what he has learned from his practice writing poetry, through studying the creative processes of artists, observing nature, and thinking about stories and images. His book became an inquiry into some new and recurring thinking that addresses essences in his work – inextricable, defining qualities that require inclusion in the discourse. The moral imagination, he explains, “develops a capacity to perceive things beyond and at a deeper level than what initially meets the eye,” [and has] “the capacity to give birth to something new that ... changes our world and the way we see things,” [and] “which has a quality of transcendence ... [free from] structurally determined dead-ends,” [all] “rooted in the challenges of the real world.”<sup>7</sup> After gaining respect in his field by demonstrating expertise with cognitive peacebuilding tools, he concludes in

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press p. 26-29.

this book that something has been largely missing, and it involves the combination of imagination and morality, and that art has a part to play in supplying this. This study is a follow up and continuation of his inquiry.

Lederach's entire book is a reconsideration of "peacebuilding [as] forging new ways to approach human affairs with an enemy."<sup>8</sup> His voice, throughout the book, supports its own revelations, as he weaves together memoirs of field notes from Columbia to Africa to Northern Ireland, with descriptions of how spiders build their webs, and the fairy tale of the Pied Piper, to illustrate the key ingredients to effective peace building. In other words, in crafting his book, he is modeling an artistic, creative approach to writing and to thinking about peacebuilding.

Among the properties Lederach found critically necessary are the capacity of people to see themselves in interdependent relationships with their enemies, the "paradoxical curiosity" capable of remaining open to apparently contradictory truths long enough to get to another truth, making spaces for allowing creative acts, and the willingness to risk. Indeed, this could be a description of his style of writing in this book, as he seemed to be identifying the things from his work that had remained vivid in his mind, and curiously pursuing them to find out why, and in this way gaining unexpected insights relevant to peacebuilding.

It is not just about stopping the fighting, he says, but also about how to create "something desired." This vision that is desired is a product of, and beckons to the imagination. It was this pursuit that brought him to the artist's way of "expecting the unexpected" (Lederach 2005). These criteria he calls for are not vague or unknowable, as they seem to sound. They can be identified when they occur. A list of such indicators have been taken from Lederach's text and used in Chapter 4 to evaluate case studies for evidence of outcomes from the art interventions reviewed.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 29.

### 2.1.3 Sources and Resources

Looking for clues from his successes, his failures, his reading, and from art, Lederach identifies underlying principles to follow, such as to first understand simplicity as a resource in the midst of complicated situations. This could be said of Playback Theater, where the performers listen intently to an audience member's story, often complex, profound, and encumbered with emotion and peculiar details. Then, almost instantly, the actors play it back in the form of a vivid image, or a short improvisational skit of evolving images, movement and sounds. It takes only moments. The image is a poetic combination of abstractions and literal words from the story the teller has just told; it is inspired by his or her experience. Through the course of this study, we will explore what goes into producing, in the form of improvisational theater, this seemingly simple, though non-reductionist, action of only a few minutes.

"Images," says Lederach, "are powerful not just because they convey meaning but [...] because they create meaning."<sup>9</sup> Lederach's conviction, based on his experience, is born out by MIT scientists who determined that the rapidity with which the human brain is capable of processing images suggests that what vision does is find concepts. Even fleeting images offer the brain ample opportunity to see the essence of relationships and meaning within the whole.<sup>10</sup> This may suggest that the functioning of the brain can tell us why an image, for instance from a dream or something one saw long ago or in passing, sticks in the mind to be recalled later, with stored up or fresh understanding. Images are a source for meaning that goes under-exploited in much of peacebuilding.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 44.

<sup>10</sup>Trafton, Anne, "In the Blink of an Eye", *MIT News Office*; January 16, 2014. <http://newsoffice.mit.edu/2014/in-the-blink-of-an-eye-0116> accessed December 17, 2014.



While acknowledging that, among people dealing with conflict, “constructive pessimism”, with its qualities of resistance and resilience, is a resource for survival, Lederach suggests that forums for genuine change must, nevertheless, engage whole communities with a sense of ownership in their hope for the future. Theater and other art forms offer an opportunity for the collective imagination, a chance to share intimate images and concepts in public, without compromising autonomy or privacy. By bringing together diverse people into relational spaces, it increases the prevalence of interface for creative interactions, and tentative considerations that might not be articulated in formal environments. Lederach cautions against relying only on instrumental connections for networking, emphasizing the role of serendipity for changes that occur instead in informal settings. Theater and other forms of art are not a replacement for formal relationships within power structures, but art can bring different sub-groups together that would not otherwise mingle in the same spirit.

Lederach recalls Paolo Freire’s ‘conscientization’ (Freire1970) as the ability people can acquire to ask good questions, interact and discover resources among themselves, and to invent their own developments to “re-story” their lives. Freire considered it a way to become more fully human. In *The Moral Imagination*, Lederach challenges peacebuilders to see themselves as artists, a shift in the very metaphor that guides us, and proposes that practices, such as those of artists, that build intuition and creative imagination, become a part of training for conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

#### **2.1.4 New Measures**

From these lessons we can notice a different order of criteria for evaluation, from the kind measured when cognitive interventions are being considered. When the goals are psychological or qualitative, the language (as seen in the

phrases above) will be also, and results will concern essences and intrinsic attributes, among other more tangible factors, such as policies and strategies.

Lederach has given us a whole lexicon of descriptive phrases that will be used in Chapter 4 on evaluation, to help identify criteria for qualitative changes found in the case studies. He acknowledges the risks that lie “beyond the rest stops of techniques and day-to-day practice [and] requires that we recognize and develop our moral imagination ...”<sup>11</sup> and accept the risks of art for the attendant rewards (Lederach 2005).

The field of peace and conflict has evolved gradually away from qualitative language towards a more quantitative approach, as a necessary way to determine and report what investments are bringing desired results for change. Even so, it is a natural aspect of corrective processes to continually adjust to constant feedback, and the language used to interpret results in the evaluative phase of this paper will tend toward the qualitative, answering Lederach’s call for the inclusion of essences and artistic approaches.

## 2.2 JOSEPH CAMPBELL

Art, on cave walls and in the form of statuary, has been a fundamental expression, along with tools and weapons, of human societies as far back as the oldest traces of our ancestry. These objects and pictures are the evidence we have of the earliest performed arts. Story, ritual, metaphor, ceremony and images are illuminated by Joseph Campbell as carriers of culture, meaning, and character for people around the globe, throughout history. He insisted that modern people need to recall and engage with the ancient power of the narrative arts.

Best known for his writing in comparative mythology and comparative

---

<sup>11</sup>Lederach, op. cit., p. 24.

religions, Campbell was for nearly 40 years a professor at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. In his books, *The Masks of God* (in four volumes, 1962-68) and *Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), he reveals common elements in religious narratives and myths from different cultures, and explains the historic uses, common across cultures, for story and myth, the ways they have impacted individuals and society, and the ways they continue to do so. A scholar, Campbell popularized the importance of teaching stories, such as parables and myths, for the modern age, in his book, *The Power of Myth* (1991), which is an overview and a synthesis of his life's work, captured in the spontaneity of an interview. He insisted these stories serve purposes in the lives of contemporary individuals and communities, and that we suffer personal and social consequences from having lost touch with them in today's world.

### 2.2.1 Artists as Mythmakers

Campbell taught that symbolic acts and metaphors contained in myth could be more powerful than words found in ordinary discourse because they pointed beyond themselves to layered messages directed at our most fundamental and universal human predicaments, including leaving childhood and becoming responsible adults, accepting profound loss, and facing death - - reflecting many of the difficulties which are intensified for people facing conflict.

He contended, "Myth must be kept alive. The people who can keep it alive are artists of one kind or another. The function of the artist is the mythologization of the environment and the world. [...] The mythmakers of earlier days were the counterparts of our artists."<sup>12</sup> He goes on to compare the artist with the shaman who typically at some point in life has "an overwhelming psychological experience that turns him totally inward. ... The

---

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, New York: Anchor Books/Random House, 1991, p. 107.

whole unconscious opens up, and the shaman falls into it.”<sup>13</sup> The breakdown of consciousness he describes can become widespread in a population in crisis. In severe conflict, people are sometimes driven into depression, insanity, or conversely to higher states of awareness, focus and wisdom, or a numinous state, having a strong religious or spiritual quality. One of the reasons artists’ ways of communicating connect with people suffering in conflict, may be that the inner life of many artists often reflects the experience of people caught in conflict. Artists, too, are facing a difficult, uncharted journey, usually without structural institutions, societal support, and unsure of what will come of it. They take creative risks, and risks with the course of their livelihood and their lives. They must find their own, sometimes abstract or ritualistic solutions, to ambiguous and concrete problems.

Artists, through their work, have often touched deeply disturbing parts of the psyche, or they are driven to art as a result of such experiences. Artists typically are willing to accept loneliness, material deprivation and social marginalization to pursue their craft. They do this by choice, as a consequence of wanting to be an artist, rather than by forced circumstances, as in conflict. Instead of going crazy, they find patterns and even beauty in the chaos, and express through the art forms and objects, something to give back to society. The precise meaning may be ineffable, but, in some ways, still comprehensible to others. This is, in fact, also a normal experience for most people when confronting art: to witness a dance performance, or hear music, or see a painting, and feel secure that we have understood its relevance, even if we cannot articulate it. Campbell says, “It is the function of the artist ... to interpret unseen things.”<sup>14</sup> ‘Unseen things’ is another way of referring to essences. Symbolic acts are a way of addressing essences.

### 2.2.2 Functions of Stories

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 122.

The phenomenon of venturing beyond customary norms of experience and returning with a kind of gift, for one's own edification or for one's society, is a type of story Campbell refers to as the hero's journey. It "begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there's something lacking."<sup>15</sup> Artists are often people who are not at ease with ordinary life until they add artistic praxis that brings together the known and the unknowable. Often, through the work, they arrive at new perspectives. And, typically, they make sacrifices for it. In a graver sense, people caught in conflict make unusual sacrifices, facing the unknown. Afterwards they may be left with an understanding of something that does not necessarily fit easily into the life they are attempting to restore or return to, requiring new perspectives.

"In one kind of adventure, the hero sets out responsibly and intentionally to perform the deed. ... [Or, alternatively] there are adventures into which you are thrown. ... You didn't intend it, but you're in now."<sup>16</sup> This description could be referring to the artist, or the soldier, or to victims of conflict. Whether by committing to a cause or getting caught up in it, people in conflict are faced with the hero's journey, whether they want it or not. They are going to have to draw on more than they knew they had in them, perhaps from a new source, to overcome dread and hardship and to restore life to a better condition. Stories, in literature or theater or imagery, reflect aspects of such experiences, and weave fragmented chaos into a coherent entity (that 'wholeness' of which Lederach spoke) that can be regarded apart from the event that inspired it. In Chapter 4, the case studies will demonstrate how time and space can be compressed and expanded in art and stories, allowing for new perspectives to emerge.

If we accept the idea that the role of many artists is to put into form, difficult or 'invisible' material -- the stuff that myths are made of -- what is this supposed to do for us? Campbell recounts several kinds of myths and rituals. He says

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 152.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p.158.

myths can guide a person through passages in life, such as from puberty to motherhood, or from domestic life into battle and back, or from the prime of life into old age. Myths can speak to the nature and mysteries of the world, or of private transformations, or teach people how to adapt to their society or the conditions they are facing. Campbell says art performs, in the modern world, similarly to the way myths functioned in the past, or in contemporary societies that maintain ancient traditions.

Stories and images found in art can offer patterns that reconnect people to a lost order, or trigger contact with a new resource for changing their situation. Campbell claimed that psychological reality and external reality are joined in stories. He gives an example of “the princely hunter, who has followed the lure of a deer into a range of forest that he has never been in before. The animal there undergoes a transformation [becomes something else] ... This is a type of adventure in which the hero has no idea what he is doing but suddenly finds himself in a transformed realm.”<sup>17</sup> Conflict is a transformed world, and although stories and creative acts may not end conflict, they can sometimes deliver people from some of the impacts of conflict, by giving them a way of looking at it that makes it possible to integrate their experiences, or conceive strategies for transforming their situation, as does the ‘princely hunter’. Artists’ studios and theaters are spaces designed to transform materials, characters, and the way we see things.

### 2.2.3 A Surpassing Vitality

This power to transform the ordinary into something extraordinary, that we find in art, is also to be found in conflict. Both change the familiar into something unpredictable. Campbell reminds us, “Men sometimes confess they love war because it puts them in touch with the experience of being alive.”<sup>18</sup> Instead of boredom, ennui, and predictability, conflict suddenly calls forth new capacities from ordinary people. “People say that what we’re all

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 158.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 141.

seeking is a meaning for life. [...] I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality,..."<sup>19</sup>

One of the reasons people do such things as produce art, encounter art, go to museums, concerts and plays, and read books is to get in touch with a vivid experience their everyday routines may not supply. In times of conflict, people do not cease to need the same things that give them sustenance in times of peace.

Violence and oppression are also known to sometimes have a numbing effect on the people who experience it, and even on bystanders, near or distant, when they have seen too much reporting of it. Cognitive dissonance sometimes disconnects victims of violence from any longer trusting what they had heretofore believed to be true or impossible. Whether it is to counteract a feeling of deadness, or to connect with inner resources to help us face fear and dread, Joseph Campbell has affirmed that in addition to conveying the established order of things, and perhaps especially when we are without it, stories can give life and renewal in the absence of hope. He says, "One thing that comes out in myths is that at the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation. The black moment is the moment when the real message of transformation is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light."<sup>20</sup>

Again, while the condition he describes is something many people recognize and remember, from their own lives (a bleak, despairing moment), it often takes art -- a short story, a song, a play, a photograph -- to take us to the feelings associated with that moment of transcendence over great sorrow. Campbell is saying art can stimulate reliving a moment that is hurting us, or that we have blocked from ourselves, or that could help us, and to access the resilience and overarching values that can match it vividly.

Reading Campbell affirms our most natural instincts that the sheer pleasure and reassurance we experience from stories and images, is common among

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 44.

people from every time and place. One of the reasons for that pleasure is the resonance stories have with our inner life. By comparing similar myths from one culture to the next, and by linking those stories to the personal experiences we recognize in life, he has validated the importance and even the necessity of stories in resolving human predicaments (Campbell, 1991).

## 2.3 JAMES HILLMAN

Founder of Archetypal Psychology, James Hillman was Director of Studies at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, co-founder of the Dallas Institute for Humanities and Culture, and a prolific writer with a private psychotherapy practice. Cautioning against over-literalism in modern psychology, Hillman saw some psychological and sociological disorders as a message from the psyche expressing the need for its own kind of language, to be found in myth, imagination, fantasy, metaphor, and art. In his book, *A Terrible Love of War* (2004), he examines war from the perspective of archetypal psychology.

### 2.3.1 Love of War

Hillman recounts a survivor's sentiments, expressed by many people who have lived through war: "After World War II a Frenchwoman said to [philosopher] J. Glenn Gray, 'You know that I do not love war or want it to return. But at least it made me feel alive, as I have not felt alive before or since.'"<sup>21</sup> It is not difficult to find people who feel that their lives, even when without violent conflict, and especially when oppressively dominated and controlled by larger societal forces, is leaving out something essential that we long for. Life is experienced as not enough alive. This feeling of being hyper-alive, often missing in ordinary life, is found not only in war and violence, but it

---

<sup>21</sup> James Hillman, *A Terrible Love of War*, New York: Penguin Press, 2004, p. 11.



is also sometimes discovered in philosophy, learning, nature, art and creativity.

In saying, “An unsurpassing love opens in the heart of war,”<sup>22</sup> Hillman addresses the paradoxes of war – the very paradoxes Lederach says we need to tolerate if we are to transform or transcend them. “We can never prevent war or speak sensibly of peace and disarmament unless we enter this love of war. [...] we cannot comprehend its pull.”<sup>23</sup> The notion is supported by the passion people around the world have demonstrated throughout history, and to this day, to go to war. He is saying, that in addition to the ostensible reasons people fight, there is an unconscious attraction to the overall drama of conflict, and that it behooves us to understand the part of mind that wants drama. The urge to dramatize through theater and other art forms (and perhaps in sport as well) can be a healthy expression of our drive for passionate action. It may be necessary to minimize the demonstration of passions in some peace processes, such as negotiations, and useful to allow passion to flourish in others, such as theater and other forms of art.

Boldly, Hillman went further. After describing the ubiquitous normalcy that protracted war can become, and the horrifying inhumanity of war, Hillman arrived at its strange contradictions. “We are nearer, too, to understanding the worst behaviors in war, where all civilized leashes are loosened and we become as utterly free as ecstatic children. ... [quoting a veteran] ‘We sprayed gasoline around...and ran along touching matches here and there and feeling crazy.’ In other words, ‘We were not ourselves. It was like a play. [...] like kids letting loose’ -- is this not like ... rediscovering in crazy abandon the [...] lawless paradise? [...] War needs a constant supply of imagination, and eros is imagination’s fuel.”<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 142.

The Oxford English Dictionary states that 'eros' is "in Freudian Psychology: the urge towards self-preservation and sexual pleasure."<sup>25</sup> The on-line Merriam-Webster Dictionary offers what they refer to as a 'medical' definition, which goes more directly to the heart of the term as it applies to this discourse: "the sum of life-preserving instincts that are manifested as impulses to gratify basic needs, as sublimated impulses, and as impulses to protect and preserve the body and mind."<sup>26</sup> So it is basic needs and instincts that drive imagination, not only in war, but also in art. Furthermore, the same dictionary refers the reader to the contrasting term, 'death instinct', defined as "an innate and unconscious tendency toward self-destruction postulated in psychoanalytic theory to explain aggressive and destructive behavior not satisfactorily explained by the pleasure principle."<sup>27</sup> Eros (Greek god of love) and Thanatos (the demon that personifies death) have been understood to be joined since ancient times.

Attempts to keep conflict resolution within the confines of cognitive and didactic language are met with an undeniable disparity of emotional tenor when it comes to the effects conflict can have on perpetrators, victims and bystanders alike. A precise, easy to comprehend and commonly agreed upon language is needed for creating laws, to counteract 'lawlessness'. A complementary language is called for as well – the intuitive, poetic language of eros -- to match the subjective, strange and mesmerizing beauty of war. This is the language found in art.

Military veterans are also victims of conflict. A veteran from Desert Storm (the first Gulf War of the 1990's), who is attending art college in the USA, and

---

<sup>25</sup> Prepared by A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, Oxford, New York, Toronto, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Karachi, Petaling Jaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Cape Town, Melbourne, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Sokolowski et al editors, *Free Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eros> accessed December 15, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/death+instinct> accessed December 15, 2014.

who was interviewed for this study, said, "I was trained to destroy. Now I am learning instead to create, and it is healing me. I go to the veteran's hospital and help other vets to heal with art."<sup>28</sup> He had stumbled upon a solution for himself that Hillman is alluding to in this book.

It is not only the human capacity to destroy, or to go wild, that is tapped in conflict. Our noblest qualities are also brought out under extreme conditions, as Hillman goes on to describe, "... there is no escape, caught in the vice between duty on one side and death on the other, binding strictures give way and the heart opens to a love never known before or to be known again. [...] There is tenderness. A man helps another man to die [...] There is an unquenchable desire to help. [...] There is the terrible love that breaks out in mourning [...] There is bravery for the sake of another."<sup>29</sup> When people find out what they are made of, when they discover greatness within themselves, something ceremonial or ritualistic may be a more fitting way, or the only way, to connect with aspects of the experience. Theater offers the flexibility for a reverent encounter of secular holiness, with its recourse to silence, colors, music and symbolic movements and gesture, that might be out of place in the formats expected in mediation and diplomacy.

The intensity of these contradictions does call for solutions, such as persuasion, incentives, and trade-offs. But alone, they may not be sufficient interventions. Going back to the original premise, artistic approaches are seen as a complement to cognitive approaches. It is the contradictions that defy our best efforts to stop conflict, and cause us to harden, despair, or, alternatively, to open us to a possibility that solutions to peace might be augmented from the under exploited realm of arts and culture. Hillman (like the veteran above) concluded that creativity, culture and art are the antithesis of destruction. Hillman posited, "... Is civilization so dedicated to repression that it fears an outbreak of culture? Imagine a nation whose first line of

---

<sup>28</sup> Gibson, John, Personal Interview, March 21, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Hillman, op. cit., p. 145-8.

defense is each citizen's aesthetic investment in some cultural form. [...]All the diabolic inventiveness, the intolerant obsession and drive to conquer compelled toward culture. Would war lose some of its magic?"<sup>30</sup>

Proposing that artistic culture might prevent war altogether has to be an overstatement, since civilizations that were highly cultured also went to war, probably without exception, throughout history. (Art is, in fact, often used to glorify war.) But hyperbole is not useless. Overstating the case does not negate the fact that there is logic for what art can achieve that formal dialogue cannot. The freedom of feeling-based, multi-sensory expression that is possible through art has been shown to offer unique channels for communication. And if a civilization ever reversed their investments, and put the resources behind art and culture that it now puts into armaments and infrastructure for conflict (and vice versa: 1% for military expenditures), the statement might be found to be closer to fact, rather than exaggeration.

"The explanation of unusual human behavior [found in war] requires that [...] we be 'amazed' and 'transported with wonder' rather than merely 'persuaded' [...] thinking that changes one's being. Understanding then is no longer couched in the language of problem-solving..."<sup>31</sup> Hillman is reiterating Lederach's identification of the limits of didactic language to address some of the needs of people in conflict, and Campbell's belief that stories and images speak to the human predicament in a symbolic language that resonates with the nuanced internal experience of people who are reconciling the meaning of their inner and outer life.

"Survivors insist that their war experience was sublime in its transcendence of their usual feelings and sense of themselves. [...] How does one return from this sublimity, as if from a spiritual retreat on the mountain or seized by an angel?"<sup>32</sup> The very language that Hillman uses (for example, "seized by an

---

<sup>30</sup> Hillman, op. cit., p. 212-14.

<sup>31</sup> Hillman, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>32</sup> Hillman, op. cit., p. 158-60.

angel”) is an illustration of the phenomenon he is addressing. It is symbolic and cannot be paraphrased and still serve its purpose. Just as this language “transports” us to the experience of the survivor, art, and theater, as we will see in the case studies, has the capacity to inexplicably transport participants to a state that is transcendent of their trauma. “There is no way down to the valley, and besides, who is there to receive?” Hillman asks; and answers: “Only those who cannot understand, cannot imagine.”<sup>33</sup> It is the job of artists, some artists, Campbell said, to be there, like shamans, with sufficient imagination – the moral imagination called for by Lederach. In this way, the synonymous languages begin to reinforce the special role art has to play in the field of peace and conflict.

“Myths provide archetypal ways of insighting the human condition; they present psychological truths such as we discover when turning to war.”<sup>34</sup> Archetypes are the original psychological model used by C.G. Jung to signify the collective experience of humanity that is present in the unconscious of every one of us. According to Archetypal Psychology, it is because of these psychological templates that archetypal imagery and stories function to address the psychological truths of change, recovery from calamity, and reconciliation with past injustices. The indirection and patterns of art and story, reaching back into the depths of human experience, can sometimes meet the psychologically wounded at the same level of consciousness in which they are afflicted.

### 2.3.2 Sympathetic Imagination

Hillman could have been referring to Lederach’s ‘moral imagination’ when he says, “... the first principle of psychological method holds that any phenomenon to be understood must be sympathetically imagined.”<sup>35</sup> Art is a discipline constructed for the purpose of imagining. Training in the arts is

---

<sup>33</sup> Hillman, op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>34</sup> Hillman, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>35</sup> Hillman, op. cit., p. 2.

training in imagining and giving expression to that imagination. Likewise, Lederach said, “First, we must understand and feel the landscape of protracted violence [...] of what destructive relationships produce [...] and [imagine] what breaking their violent patterns will require.”<sup>36</sup> These ‘synonymous’ insights support the rationale that art can sometimes affect the impact of trauma. Artists are trained to connect profoundly with what they encounter, to become sensitized to what they are seeing, hearing, and feeling, and to transform it in some way. John Paul Lederach wants to bring this into the heart of peacebuilding: “... we must explore the creative process itself, not as a tangential inquiry, but as the wellspring that feeds the building of peace. In other words we must venture into the mostly uncharted territory of the artist’s way as applied to social change...”<sup>37</sup> Improvisational theater exemplifies a ‘wellspring’ of vivid imagining. The deeply aware but unknowing approach, combining training with intuition, bears resemblance to the workings of war and conflict, that seem to have a life of their own, where maneuvers are both planned and improvised.

How does the creative imagination help us in understanding conflict? Hillman proposes, “The failure to understand [...] may not lie simply in the obduracy of war -- that it is essentially un-understandable, unimaginable. Is it war’s fault that we have not grasped its meanings? We have to investigate the faultiness of our tool [...] War demands a leap of imagination as extraordinary and fantastic as the phenomenon itself.”<sup>38</sup> Hillman described war as “one of those timeless forces” (an archetype) that characterize life as we know it on this planet, and he added that the reason myths help us to penetrate the mystery of our relationship to conflict is because myths are “the norms of the unreasonable.”<sup>39</sup> This is similar to Campbell’s point, that the structural and psychological breakdown that characterizes conflict needs to be met with a sense of shamanism in the artist. Lederach reiterated the same thing when

---

<sup>36</sup>Lederach, op. cit. p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>38</sup>Hillman, op. cit. p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

he said, “Brokenness wanders all over our souls. Healing requires a similar journey of wandering.”<sup>40</sup> Indirectly they are each referring to meeting a problem on the same logical level, a phenomenon to be described by Bateson in the next section. They are also using synonymous languages. Hillman acknowledged the challenge when he said, “Psychological inquiry makes peculiar demands. The validity of its understanding depends on the exposition of the case and on the exposure of the inquirer.”<sup>41</sup> This study exposes the peacebuilder to the workings behind the artist’s way.

## 2.4 GREGORY BATESON

Anthropology, like Peace and Conflict Studies, and like art, is an interdisciplinary/ trans-disciplinary field, a quality exemplified by no one more than Gregory Bateson. An English epistemologist, anthropologist, linguist, semiotician, cyberneticist, social scientist, natural scientist, and game theorist, Bateson inspired developments in many fields.

### 2.4.1 Learning to Learn and Logical Levels

In his books *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972), *Mind and Nature, a Necessary Unity* (1979), and *Angels Fear* (1987), he often relies on science and mathematics to illustrate the structure of how minds work. He defined learning to include “adaptation, character formation, habituation, acclimation, addiction, etc.”<sup>42</sup> He concluded “that ‘learning to learn’ and ‘learning to deal with and expect a given kind of context for adaptive action’ and ‘character change due to experience’ are three synonyms for a single genus of phenomena, [...] grouped together under the term deutero-learning.”<sup>43</sup> This

---

<sup>40</sup>Lederach, op. cit p. 159.

<sup>41</sup>Hillman, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>42</sup>Gregory Bateson and Catherine Bateson, *Angels Fear*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987, p. 209.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid. p. 13.

life-learning differs from memorizing information, and includes conflict resolution, reconciliation and other changes of mind that arise in peacebuilding. It occurs through subtle, layered processes. While his preoccupation with learning, play/pretending, and the workings of relationships within systems, render his insights highly relevant to this study of theater and peace and conflict, they are usually stated in technical language and detail not suited to this discourse. Several concepts will be interpreted in simplified terms, and as they pertain to theater.

Speaking of logical levels, Bateson said, “the class is of a different logical type, higher than that of its members.”<sup>44</sup> In his study of play, which Bateson analyzed in humans and animals, he pointed out that problems would arise if a communication intended at one logical level (e.g. ‘play’) was interpreted at another (e.g. ‘combat’). True understanding depends not only on language, but also on accepting a communication on the same logical level at which it is directed.

Bateson observed that play relies on signals that amount to pretending, or trying out hypothetical behaviors, intended to be understood not as they appear, but in a different way at another logical level. The entire apparatus of theater and performance is often called a ‘play’, and, like poems, images, and dance, functions as a way to address issues obliquely or indirectly, or at another logical level (like metaphor). A helium balloon can be released, in the context of a play, and understood to be not a toy, but the freeing of the human spirit. What we know as theatrical behaviors, are deeply embedded in human and animal conduct, relational learning, and communication that transcends the literal, whereas cognitive and didactic peace processes usually rely more on direct facts.

#### **2.4.2 Play and Metacommunication**

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 209.



“... When organisms [...] discover that their signals are signals, not only the [...] invention of language” [symbolic sounds or marks denoting that sound] “can then follow, but also all the complexities of empathy, identification, projection, and so on [can follow] ... I saw two young monkeys play, i.e., engaged in an interactive sequence [of] actions or signals [which] were similar to but not the same as those of combat. It was evident, even to the human observer, that the sequence was as a whole not combat, and [...] that to the participant monkeys this was ‘not combat’.”<sup>45</sup> Here Bateson connected developing the ability to grasp the symbolic language of play with the subsequent occurrence of other symbolic complexities, such as language, identification and projection. By making this connection apparent, he explains one of the mechanisms that makes us respond to story, art, and theater. We are freed from the literal, to identify with unpredictable symbolic elements – a repeated phrase, a feather seen floating to the floor, a tapping sound, a reaching movement – that our own mind can reconstitute into meaning, according to its own pattern.

“This phenomenon, play, could only occur if the participant organisms were capable of some degree of metacommunication, i.e., of exchanging signals which would carry the message ‘This is play’.”<sup>46</sup> Metacommunication is communication about the communication. Theater is metacommunication. The fact that it is theater is the first signal exchanged; ‘This is not conflict; this is a play about conflict.’ It offers a distinctive space that may be about life but ‘apart from life’. In theater, the sequence of actions, the story being told, might be about a bad experience, but in this context it is understood to be about ‘healing from the bad experience.’ This sends the message that one is allowed and expected to make sense of the signal on two mental levels at once (‘communication’ and ‘metacommunication’). Bateson refers to this as a paradox, “These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those

---

<sup>45</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 179.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p. 179.

actions for which it stands would denote."<sup>47</sup> For instance, in play or pretend, if one exaggerates a frown and lowers the eyebrows together in the center, it can be expressing mock displeasure, or even pleasure, instead of displeasure. This paradox allows performers to communicate with audiences in the 'unreasonable', 'wandering' mode referred to above, by Hillman and Lederach, respectively. Everything does not have to make sense in a conventional way to carry meaning.

There are those who fear that telling stories and theatrical enactments can re-traumatize people who have suffered in conflict. While this can occur, it is the nature of theater, as metacommunication, operating on the principles above, to process the emotional effect of the narrative, with the possibility to arrive at a new destination, an experience of transcendence. It is a calculated risk, which Lederach urges us to take, skillfully. The purpose of reconnecting to the original content of the story is not to reinforce it but to transform it. To what extent this does and does not occur in practice will be examined in case studies, in Chapter 4.

Living skillfully with our community depends, in part, on understanding signals correctly (studied in the field of semiotics). In life and in theater, comprehending the intended message is empowering. Misreading the message is disempowering. We miss out on what is going on. While the use of signals is natural outside of theater, in theatre it can be taken to degrees that may not be encouraged in society, where emotions are often hidden, or thoughts are not expressed aloud, as they can be in theater. Even the stones can speak in theater. Theater is not only a way of conveying stories, it is also a way of bringing a space into life, where subjects that may not be permitted in other settings, can be brought into the performance as 'pretend'. In this way taboos, non-verbal experiences, and political contradictions, which may be difficult to address directly, can be considered indirectly.

---

<sup>47</sup> Bateson, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

### 2.4.3 Map / Territory Distinctions

“Histrionic [melodramatic] behavior is another example of the primitive occurrence of map-territory differentiation [...] a jackdaw [bird] may imitate her own mood-signs.”<sup>48</sup> She pretends to be feeling a certain way, in order to influence the behavior of her mate. Exaggeration and mimicry, of ourselves and each other, “bluff, playful threat, teaching play in response to threat,”<sup>49</sup> are not only components of theater, they are behaviors essential in social learning. Symbolic information, the ‘map’ about relationships, is used to talk about real experience of relationships, the ‘territory’.

The name of anything is a map or symbol of the thing it refers to. The word ‘cheetah’ is a tiny map encapsulating what it means to be a real cheetah. Theater is a map of the real life it refers to. To use the word ‘conflict’, even with a great deal of imagination, is still merely a symbol of what it means to be in conflict. Theater is an opportunity to explicitly practice map and territory relationships. A player acting ‘as if’, or observing a play, provides an opportunity to deal with any subject in a protected environment (theater), where it can be considered in a different light, a different space, a different sense of time. Theater makes accessible, like a map, something that may be difficult to witness, look at, or take in, if it were the real thing.

### 2.4.4 Frames

Referring to a mental construct used by humans to craft meaning, Bateson uses the term, “... ‘Frame’ and the related notion of ‘context’ [...] [that are] psychological concepts [neither] abstract [nor] excessively concrete ....[not] physical or logical.”<sup>50</sup> In theater, the stage is literally framed, or is at least understood as separate from the space in which ordinary life takes place. This signals that there is a special relationship between what goes on here

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p. 181.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p. 181.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 186-187.

and what goes on out there in real life. So the 'frame' (or stage, or curtain), just by being there, can be used to broaden or narrow the context, to shift from one logical level to another, to comment on communication (metacommunication), to say 'this is a map of another territory', and to say 'consider this, not that', or 'consider this in light of that' (Bateson 1972). This is obvious, but pointing it out explicitly we recognize the fact as another underpinning of why people respond to theater with a set of permissions and restrictions different from ordinary life, sometimes leading to new or different connections. Our ability to understand symbols allows us to comprehend multiple layers of meaning at once, in abbreviated signals.

The stage in Playback Theater, Theater of the Oppressed, and Workable Peace is deliberately modified or dispensed with, as can also be the case in other types of theater, where there may be no formal stage or curtain, or, if there is a stage, it may be jutting out into the audience, as a means to bring the players and the audience closer together, literally, figuratively and psychologically. The blurring of the division between performance space and audience communicates the fact that this genre of theater is not truly fictional, it is and is not other than real life. The event is 'staged', setting it psychologically apart from daily life, but it is living, not a spectacle strictly for entertainment. "Psychological frames are related to what we have called 'premises'. The picture frame tells the viewer that he is not to use the same sort of thinking in interpreting the picture that he might use in interpreting the wallpaper outside the frame."<sup>51</sup> So, in the case of Playback, Workable Peace and Theater of the Oppressed, the absence, often, of the formality of the stage, frames a dialogue explicitly inclusive of both what has really happened or can happen, and imaginative metaphor, together. It is saying, 'This is play' and at the same time, 'this play is to be a real life experience'.

#### 2.4.5 Patterns and Evolution

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 187.

An essential aspect of peacebuilding and the arts is the fact that both are necessarily trans-disciplinary, and both operate intuitively, on multiple levels simultaneously. “The combination of diverse pieces of information defines an approach of very great power [...] ‘the pattern which connects’,<sup>52</sup> which is identified by Bateson as critical in learning. In formal settings, the structure of procedures usually lacks the wide range of pattern options found in theater. Theater can make use of almost limitless options. Many actions are taking place at the same time, in multiple modalities (sound, movement, words, color, lights), and altogether they are generating a pattern that the mind itself sorts and selects for relevance. Since each person is sorting and selecting with his or her own mind, the relevance they find is unique to them. From the same work of art, each observer derives a meaning that may differ from that of the others, in some or all respects.

Bateson described this in another way, “that for the creation of new order,” [learning] “the workings of the random,” [one of the qualities found in art and nature] “the plethora of uncommitted alternatives [entropy] is necessary. It is out of the random that organisms collect new mutations, and it is there that stochastic learning gathers its solutions.”<sup>53</sup> Stochastic processes, defined by Bateson, combine intended factors with random factors. He describes evolution as combining these two types of processes, one conserving and one risking. One is predefined, the other is ‘a plethora’ (multitude) of possibilities. Conserving traditions and stability prevents change from happening too quickly, or devolving into chaos. Risking the new prevents the system from stagnating or dying, by introducing elements that allow for new developments, repairs and solutions. Healthy systems keep these two in balance.

It is possible to view theater, of the type we are studying, in this way: conserving some elements of the structure, the story, or the desire, and at the same time risking “uncommitted alternatives”, trying new expressions, and

---

<sup>52</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature*, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979, p. 68.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.

improvisations capable of taking the outcome in a fresh direction. In Playback Theater, the performers hear a story repeated, already formed, and they bring it out in another somewhat random form when they perform it (play it back) to the teller and the audience, bringing about new combinations of meaning. Sometimes the simple fact that there are alternative perspectives has been overlooked, and theater introduces forgotten resources.

Bateson uses math, systems theory, biology and biological terms to describe how 'the new' (i.e. change, learning, mutation) enters a system. The fact that the same principles seen to be in artistic processes, are found in multiple systems, supports the notion (through synonymous languages) that there is structural intention behind the seeming randomness of offerings in art, and they have a strong likelihood of being reconstituted by the observer for meanings not always anticipated by the artist. The artist is trained, in fact must train, to present his/her material in a way that is at once structured and at the same time, open to interpretation, so that it is possible to gain different insights from it. Artists resist limiting the art by making it overly predetermined. This enlarges what it is possible to 'get' from a performance, increasing the possibilities for meaning. If the artist goes too far in this direction, or is out of touch with the audience, meaning can be lost altogether. If it does not go far enough, and remains too literal, it offers nothing new. Some would even say it is not, at that point, art.

"Evolution leads to climax: ecological saturation of all the possibilities of differentiation [a dead end]. [...] By return to the unlearned [...] the ongoing species again and again clears its memory banks to be ready for the new."<sup>54</sup> The 'unlearned' can be understood as the found, the created, the invented. But if the 'species' is driven to 'clear its memory banks to be ready for the new', another way of doing this is to destroy. By that logic, one might think of art as a kind of antithesis to conflict (as Hillman suggested). And, the veteran soldier mentioned before, may be understood to be speaking of his

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

need to ‘clear memory banks’ and ‘return to the unlearned’, when he left the military to pursue art.

Bateson boldly stated, “I hold to the presupposition that our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, just as giving less importance to the contributions of, for example, women in history, or the wisdom of indigenous people, or the messages coming from nature, we then, as a culture, build an entire mistaken theory of knowledge, so does minimizing or marginalizing the importance of aesthetics and creative disciplines result in skewed premises, upon which many false assumptions are subsequently based.

## 2.5 SYNTHESIS OF SCHOLARS

Our ‘enemy’ (whether it be based on ethnicity, gender, politics, religion or socio-economic status) represents an aesthetic disconnect. We cannot accept ‘that’ with ‘us’. From Bateson’s call for aesthetic unity, we come full circle back to John Paul Lederach, who said, “Stated simply, the moral imagination requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies;[...] the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act; and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence.”<sup>56</sup> Art is not the enemy of the cognitive, but it is sometimes set as if in opposition. It is not a polarity, but a web that is wanted, as Lederach took the pains to describe it to us.

Lederach urges us to turn to art for what it has to offer directly (engaging with a poem or a performance), but also for modeling the unlearning and cultivating processes of indirection that artists employ, to work in peace and conflict this way. Asking us to learn from the artist’s approach, he points out

---

<sup>55</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature*, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup>Lederach, op. cit. p. 5.

that the two communities share this in common: “Ultimately, at some moment in time, they both rely on intuition.”<sup>57</sup> And it is this necessity for intuition in both fields that implies experience in or with the arts, where intuition is actively and methodically cultivated, will offer another value to peace workers. At the same time, the field of peace and conflict can help to ground art in the concerns of the world, in a way that infuses it with relevance that some people do not find in art that is purely aesthetic.

Bateson poses a question pertinent to peacebuilders: “How is the world of logic, which eschews ‘circular argument,’ related to a world in which circular trains of causation are the rule rather than the exception?” and he offers a response, “What has to be investigated and described is a vast network or matrix of interlocking message material and abstract tautologies [repetitions], premises, and exemplifications [...] logic and quantity turn out to be inappropriate devices for describing organisms and their interactions and internal organization.”<sup>58</sup> The messages in images, in the tableaux of improvisational theatre, indeed most theater, and in stories, are interlocking and can be non-linear (out of chronological order), and might be seen as fit devices for communicating the narratives that come into play in conflict resolution. That is why they complement the linear (direct from point A to point B), rather than compete with it. What can compete with something linear, is an opposing thing that is also linear, not something of a different order or type.

“Read myths,” Campbell suggests. “They teach you that you can turn inward, and you begin to get the message of the symbols.”<sup>59</sup> We naturally understand symbols, metaphor, figures of speech, analogies in language, in images, in gestures and in objects. We hear someone is ‘free as a bird’ and we do not think that person can fly in the air. Rather we easily understand that they are unconstrained by many conventions, inhibitions, or relational

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

<sup>59</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, New York: Random House, 1991, p. 5.



ties. Someone holds an index finger in front of his or her lips, and we know to be quiet, or not to tell what is being said. With no explanation we naturally understand. That is how quickly and automatically theater communicates. Obviously there can be cultural differences, but is it sometimes surprising how nearly universal many symbols are.

Setting fire to colored cloth -- a symbolic public performance reminiscent of a theatrical performance -- can be neutral, or aggressive, or wounding to different people. "In the dim region where art, magic, and religion meet and overlap, human beings have evolved the 'metaphor that is meant,' the flag which men will die to save."<sup>60</sup> The 'metaphor that is meant' is a symbol that is not differentiated in the mind from what it represents. It is not a distinction, but a fusion of map and territory. We see this in life, in public international events, and in the fact that the same principle can be exploited in art. Pictures, theater, film, stories and music can make people cry, laugh, become angry, and it can change their thinking, their decisions, and their actions. The fact that people fuse their own story with the message (as Campbell said we naturally do), can make it another tool for peacebuilding.

Bateson, late in life, stated, "I argue that art is a part of man's quest for grace [free, unearned favor from God]; sometimes his ecstasy in partial success, sometimes his rage and agony at failure. [...] I shall argue that the problem of grace is fundamentally a problem of integration and that what is to be integrated is the diverse parts of the mind -- especially those multiple levels of which one extreme is called 'consciousness' and the other the 'unconscious.' For the attainment of grace, the reasons of the heart must be integrated with the reasons of the reason."<sup>61</sup> Bateson believed that the artistic must be integrated with the cognitive for transcendent gifts to come of our endeavors.

---

<sup>60</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 183.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p. 129.

## 2.6 SYNTHESIZING ART AND COGNITION IN PEACEBUILDING

A synthesis of this integration of the artistic sensibility (if not art itself) and cognitive discourse, is demonstrated in an event Robert Sapolsky referred to in the *New York Times*, as an example of the positive consequences which can result when the brain takes metaphor and symbol literally. He described secret negotiations that took place between Nelson Mandela and an Afrikaner general, who had led a bloody armed resistance against the opposition to apartheid. Whether by cunning or instinct, it involved aspects of theater and the ‘moral imagination’.

“...Some negotiators [...] prefer the formality of a process that protects interests in the negotiating agreements, processes that are reduced almost exclusively to [...] the written or spoken word.”<sup>62</sup> Instead of setting up a neutral location, devoid of personal associations for either of them, Mandela invited the general into the warmth, comfort, intimacy, and the quality of vulnerability and exposure, as well as strength, of his own home. Instead of sitting across from each other with a bare table dividing them, they sat side by side on a sofa, and Mandela spoke to him, not in the neutral language of English, but in the general’s own language, Afrikaans (Sapolsky 2010). The invitation was to a table of a different kind, a tea table. One can imagine the ancient ritual of breaking bread. Sipping tea is conducive to discussions that are warmer, considerations that dissolve or diminish differences. It is civilizing, humanizing, and engages the whole body and all the senses (Lederach 2005). The need to become more fully human is also the way Paolo Freire described the aims of his work in critical pedagogy. The humanizing effect Mandela would eventually have on the world, he applied to this negotiation.

---

<sup>62</sup>Robert Sapolsky, “This is Your Brain on Metaphors”, The Opinionator, The Stone, The Opinion Pages, *The New York Times*, online, November 14, 2010, 4:32 pm. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/this-is-your-brain-on-metaphors/> accessed December 18, 2014.

In spite of the terrible grievances between them, the two South African leaders found rapport and came to an agreement they could both accept (Sapolsky, 2010).

Compared to dry customary settings for formal political negotiations, this was a theatrical stage set for breaking down barriers. The brain experiences a melding of the literal with the metaphorical: home, kinship, and sharing responsibilities. The surrounding symbolism of hospitality, nourishment, and togetherness, of past and future generations, enhanced the opportunity for accord. Mandela and the general were able to achieve, as Lederach described it, “a turning point, the movement toward a new horizon in order to redefine both the moment and the relationship.”<sup>63</sup> This ‘turning point’ will be one of the identifiable criteria for change used in Chapter 4 to evaluate impacts of theater used in peacebuilding.

Most high-level negotiations are conservative, using a ‘stage set’ that contradicts their aims, and does not suggest alternatives to the status quo, or foster creativity or fresh thinking. Whereas Mandela, by virtue of not only his character, and his persuasiveness, but also his choice of staging, acknowledged interdependency, commitment, humility and recognition that both were part of the same pattern (implying that the well-being of our grandchildren depends on us today, as well as on each other later), and he admitted to the paradox of the present in light of the past and the future (Lederach 2005). It is argued that non-verbal messaging frequently has more influence on what is perceived than verbal communication.

---

<sup>63</sup>Lederach, op. cit. p. 40.

## CHAPTER 3

### IMPROVISATION

Among the variables that can make a difference in the efficacy of most work is whether or not people know what they are doing. Because improvisation seems like play, and training for improvisation seems like play, it gives the false impression that there is nothing to know, except that most of us have forgotten how to play. There are criteria, techniques and practices which have been developed to cultivate the skills for improvisation, just as there are ways of learning how to be skillful in mediation, critical thinking, mapping a conflict, or designing an intervention. If people have evaluated a situation and believe theater to be a promising method, it can be done, without formal training, but with the same thoroughness of approach that they would apply to preparing for any other intervention.

“The techniques of theater are the techniques of communicating,” wrote Viola Spolin in *Improvisation for the Theater* (1963). Considered one of the founders of modern Improvisational Theater, her own mentor was Neva Boyd, the social worker at Hull House in Chicago, during the USA’s Great

Depression. Their educational program engaged immigrants, the disenfranchised poor, and the socially marginalized, in play and group games, drama and storytelling, dancing, gymnastics and social awareness. These techniques were used to overcome cultural and ethnic divisions and to foster inclusion, to teach literacy, problem-solving and self-confidence. Among people speaking different languages, for instance, or exhibiting different levels of comfort in social interactions, an approach like this offers an accessible way to interact. Within a group who are dealing with an issue they need to address but are uncomfortable speaking about it, improvisational activities can help people forget their inhibitions and start communicating non-verbally. Eventually dialogue can come more naturally. In this way improvisational games and images can serve the complementary role suggested in the opening pages of this study.

### 3.1 REHEARSING TO IMPROVISE

“Often people ask how improvisers can ‘rehearse’ if they don’t know what is going to happen in a show. Like athletes, improvisers practice skills that can be used in a variety of situations.”<sup>64</sup> Actors ‘work out’ by breathing together, moving together in exercises or dance, vocalizing together, mirroring each other’s movements, acting and reacting to each other’s gestures and remarks, mimicking each other, relating to each other blindfolded, connecting through eye contact, touching, making sounds, assuming postures, pantomiming, and other spontaneous inventions. Improvisation is physical theatre. Players rehearsing also offer each other gestures and ‘lines’ (sentences), for cultivating the ability to respond to anything that is spoken or any type of interaction. Improvisers also play games to generate skits (scenes), just as athletes and soldiers train for anticipated real events. They ‘try out’ scenarios.

---

<sup>64</sup>Kat Koppett, *Training to Imagine – Practical Improvisational Theatre Techniques*; Sterling, Virginia, USA: Stylus Publishing, 2013, p.12.

“The heart of collaboration is trust. In order to create, a person needs to trust his impulses and follow through on seemingly irrational, nonlinear, or ‘foolish’ ideas.”<sup>65</sup> Actors ‘play games’ designed to build trust. Physical trust can grow by learning, through exercises, such as, to fall and allow the weight of our own body to be held by others. Emotional trust is cultivated by letting others see your feelings, and by showing your empathy for theirs. Intellectual trust develops through the work when collaborators work responsibly and skillfully together, making and acknowledging valuable contributions. Self-trust comes with keeping our own promises to learn and grow, and showing kindness towards ourselves when we fall short. Trust in the process is the result of trying things we do not necessarily know will work, and seeing where it leads. Trust in failure is practiced when we make mistakes and instead of excessive reproach, try another way. Trust in what is too obvious is respecting the depth of simplicity (as Lederach reminded us to do), and finding a plain thing to do to address a complex problem, or recognizing when changes come easily. Trust in fear is surmounting our anxiety and remaining engaged when we want to retreat or refuse. Trust in not knowing is a way to move forward even when in doubt. All of these kinds of trust, and more, can be enhanced through exercises invented in the field of improvisational theater. These exercises offer ways for peace and conflict workers to enter into processes with each other and with the population they are there to assist. Trusting the other and trusting self, actors learn to accept whatever another player does, and to use it, build on it, to add layers or take it in another direction. Improvisers learn to initiate and respond quickly. They avoid censoring and judging. Training for improvisation is a process of de-socialization from the very conditioning and inhibitions that govern ordinary (socialized) behavior. It is not to take away the option of logical and cognitive problem-solving, but to build a bridge to it, or move such processes through passages that are inherently unknowing.

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

Some of the exercises and games used to build these skills may seem silly or challenging, but the only way to learn from them is by doing, not by intellectualizing about it. Physical improvisation, used in Image Theater, is thinking with the body. Some of the games are similar to group orientation exercises in many contexts, including peace work. People train to do improvisation, and improvisation trains people to be spontaneous.

Improvisation exercises combine the intentional with the random (a concept referred to by Bateson as stochastic). It may look to some like complete abandon, but it has, instead, a structured language, that keeps it from being nonsensical. 'Getting out of one's own way' is a common aspiration among artists. They deliberately cultivate an internal power balance between knowing (skills) and not knowing or doubt, to create an opening for the new or unexpected to appear.

It is customary in improvisational theater rehearsals for there to be a leader who maintains an overview of pace and direction, informing everyone in a group what to do. This allows the improvisers the freedom of not knowing what is coming, as they generate spontaneous responses. They learn to 'expect the unexpected', as Lederach recommended.

Augusto Boal, the creator of Theater of the Oppressed, taught this exercise: everyone is asked to make a circle in the air with their right hand, and simultaneously with their left hand to make a cross. It sounds easy until you try it. The experience of trying to do something simple, and (for most people) failing, causes laughter and letting go of inhibitions. It also connects left and right sides of the brain (like crawling does for babies, before they can walk). People integrate a paradoxical experience of giving up and continuing to try at the same time. This opens a pathway for the new to enter the system (as Bateson insisted systems must do to remain sustainable). The exercise offers a visceral experience of Lederach's intellectual concept of holding together the seemingly contradictory (Lederach 2005). Practicing to fail and

continuing to go, trying things, becoming childlike, is preparation for improvisation.

A sample protocol for beginning a training for improvisation, with a group new to the form, might be for the leader to first ask everyone to close the eyes, and quiet the mind by following a guided meditation, to put each person in touch with the present moment, with their own breath, to let go of what they were doing before they came, to renew awareness of being inside one's own body, and to sense a kind of openness. This preparation is a shifting of gears from functioning within the boundaries of social expectations, to move in the direction of Bateson's 'return to the unlearned'. One is leaving behind their ordinary way of thinking, and entering a space where new behaviors, not necessarily rational, are welcome.

After that, synchronized movement, such as a folk dance, would be a good second activity for a novice group, because it has prescribed steps. No one has to feel pressured into having original ideas. The group begins to breathe and move together contributing to rapport within the community. After this orientation, the group is 'warmed up' for games for introducing participants by name, and sharing some kind of personal information with each other.

Soon, improvisation is introduced. People could be given a word that they will use to create a visual expression, by assuming a statuesque body posture. Combining movement with the statue, builds toward an improvisation exercise that requires physical inventiveness in motion, such as creating a collaborative group 'image' or a human 'machine'. Translating words (such as 'trapped' or 'free'), concrete objects (such as 'bridge' or 'flower'), and concepts (such as 'kindness' or 'grandiose') into images is part of the practice Boal called Image Theater. Expertise in forming images with one's body improves with flexibility, imagination, and experience. It is a powerful form of communication, often exploited by children and clowns to express 'refusal', 'joy', 'fear', or any emotion or concept, and it begins to move thinking



intuitively from being based solely in words, towards images and movement. This conscious shift to another sense modality can bring up alternative intellectual options for changing a situation, options that may not be available in a strictly cognitive way of thinking.

The short series above demonstrates, in brief, the way theater games build one on another, gradually developing connections, trust, non-verbal communication, physical language and physical conversation. When approached in small increments, the gradual relaxing of inhibitions releases fresh options to a performer, and generates increasing confidence in spontaneity. The resulting physical fitness contributes to mental alertness and peripheral awareness, all advantages to peace workers, too.

There are many resources for exercises and games used in improvisation. The point of this explanation is not to teach the craft, but to emphasize the tiny, seemingly meaningless increments of physical and mental orientation that free a person towards spontaneity. If the theories shared above have been convincing, then this is a glimpse into the reality of what improvisation work looks like in the field. Bateson gave explicit details for us to understand the function play has in learning. If spontaneity is to be relied upon for intentional work, such as peace and conflict, play has to be taken seriously as work.

The concept of taking play and humor seriously as work, is exemplified already in peacebuilding by Jorgen Johansen, when he designed and participated in interventions that defy categorization. Part theater, part performance art, part political demonstration, and part civil disobedience, the interventions increased justice where there was injustice, concerning the cause of war resisters in Norway who refuse conscription. By putting on a robe and a wig, posing as a lawyer, and engaging playfully and seriously with the judicial system, in court, Johansen and his group generated change at a structural level, (reducing time spent in prison for non-criminal political

detainees), and gained media attention that raised public awareness of the philosophies and values within an issue the public was ignoring.

## 3.2 PLAYBACK THEATER

### 3.2.1 Before to Now

Although Playback Theater was not derived from Psychodrama, they share many similar characteristics, and often practitioners are trained in both. Jacob L. Moreno, MD, while still a student in Vienna around 1910, started the Theater of Spontaneity, a precursor of what would later become Psychodrama. He envisioned a theater, not run by professionals, but by the community and for the community. Moreno considered spontaneity the most important curative capacity to develop in any person, meant to bring “the whole being towards a higher level of vitality, authenticity, expressiveness, spontaneity, and creativity. This effect is facilitated through catharsis in both actor and spectator.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, through spontaneity, Moreno aspired to arrive at a state similar to what Paulo Freire called ‘becoming more fully human’. Spontaneity is an immediate expression of flexibility in behavioral options. Learning to trust in the wisdom of the physical (to accompany the cognitive) part of the self, comes with practice. Playback is an elicitive approach (one of the qualities favored by Lederach), relying on dialogue to draw out personal stories upon which the ‘playback’ (enactment or image) is based.

The first Playback Theater performance was done in 1975 in New York City. Experimental theater, created by Jonathan Fox and his wife, Jo Salas, Playback was conceived as grounded in storytelling, and, like Moreno’s

---

<sup>66</sup>Scheiffele, Eberhard, “The Theatre of Truth: Psychodrama, Spontaneity and Improvisation – the Theatrical Theories and Influences of Jacob Levy Moreno”, PhD. dissertation U.C Berkeley, 1995, p. 4.

Stegreiftheatre in Vienna, to be done by people living in the community, for helping each other solve their problems. The form developed collaboratively through a combination of intuition, scholarship, dramatic exploration, and dialogue, over many years, until now it is practiced in over 160 countries, in a variety of different styles.

The form of Playback has evolved characteristics in a variety of different groups, but the most significant difference today, relevant to this inquiry, is the fact that the problems being addressed with it now are sometimes very grave, such as reconciliation in post-conflict environments, whereas in the beginning the problems were those found among small communities living in New York City. Citizen-actors in Playback groups who now work among people who have been exposed to protracted and sometimes violent conflict, often recognize a need for additional training, in both theater and trauma, as the demands and the risks increase.

Another development is that it is not uncommon for Playback ensembles to travel and work outside their own community. They may be invited to perform for a conference of educators or peace workers, or activists, to demonstrate how Playback works and what it is capable of doing. Or they may be invited to work therapeutically with immigrants, or to facilitate healing among traumatized people, or to teach a community how to work with Playback independently among themselves. These challenges sometimes call for a level of expertise beyond what is needed when small groups simply get together to explore the techniques among themselves.

Some groups emphasize their skills as professional theatrical performers. Some focus on being skilled therapists to groups, and are often trained in Psychodrama (the form developed by Jacob Moreno). And some remain practicing amateurs, rehearsing to maintain and develop skills, and trusting in the process, experience, and inner wisdom. All of these can be valid, depending on the circumstances. And Playback groups can be made up of a

mixture of these. There are occasions when people, experienced or not very experienced in the form, are pulled together in an international setting to work together for the first time, just as peace workers sometimes are. The demands on individuals to collaborate effectively together, apply in both situations. The case study examples in Chapter 4 will represent a variety of practitioner profiles.

### **3.2.2 How to do Playback**

The arc of a program will usually go through 1) a period of building rapport with the audience; 2) a sequence of short Playback images as a response to simple questions, to demonstrate the form to those unfamiliar with it; 3) the core of the program, which is the sharing of several personal stories related to the theme of the event; 4) playback by the performers; 5) summing up, reflection, and orienting to closure of the program.

Most events focus on a topic, a problem, a concern, a reason that calls the Playback gathering to a scheduled time and place. This will usually define the make-up of the audience, who may be concerned about domestic violence, bullying in schools, sharing limited resources in a community, post-conflict reconciliation, immigration issues, or any topic causing conflict. The Playback ensemble consists of an audience (the affected community), a small group of improvisers (the Playback ensemble), one or two Playback musicians, and a Conductor (master of ceremonies).

From the audience, the Conductor invites a volunteer to the stage to tell a story. The Conductor, through dialogue, elicits from the Teller all pertinent aspects of the story and context. As the story unfolds, the Teller chooses someone from the Players (or sometimes from the audience) to play each of the important roles, including his or her own role in the story. Through open dialogue, the Conductor confirms the accuracy of the story with the Teller, and then offers the story to the Players. They spontaneously create an image,

sound, and movement tableau as an enactment of the story. The first stories are brief, and briefly enacted. In the core content of the program, when the stories are more developed (and, depending on the venue, may be of a deeply serious nature), the improvisation may go slowly or vary in pace, manifest complexity, and last several minutes. After a reflective pause, the Conductor asks the Teller if the enactment represents the story truly, and if there is anything that needs to be changed or re-done. Once the Teller is satisfied, and after some brief responses, the Teller returns to the audience. Sometimes people from the audience are invited to offer responses. Sometimes there is a silent pause. Then another volunteer is invited, to tell another story, for another playback. The process is cyclical and inclusive.

The form, though repeated countless times by the same and different practitioners, is, like all spontaneous conversation, always unique, reflecting the group, the subject, the place, and the culture of the event. Like every occasion for peacebuilding, the steps taken are both structured and intuitive.

### **3.2.3 Conductor and Teller**

Like the Director of a play, the importance of the role of the Conductor, cannot be overstated. The Conductor is sometimes referred to as the Chief Servant, responsible for maintaining a safe open space for vulnerability and creativity to meet -- a key to effective elicitation, according to Lederach. This is a space for building and maintaining rapport with the Audience and the Teller, and for supporting the Players.

As the program progresses, the Conductor perceives what is needed: building togetherness, acknowledging differences, stimulating engagement, contextualizing whatever occurs, slowing down, lightening up, communicating with everyone and calibrating their responses (mood, boredom, receptivity, reactivity, tension, sadness, etc.), that determine what the next step will need to be. The Conductor must be skillful, but not in the center. To use

Bateson's concept, she or he is in a meta-position, communicating about the communication: about the Playback process, about what it means to be the storyteller, about the story, about the audience, about the topic or problem or context, about the performers – eliciting from the participants, rather than supplying the solutions -- and all in such a way that it does not draw attention to him or her self. The Conductor must make decisions, without over-influencing, or interfering. The qualities and skills required of the Conductor are the same needed in many conflict resolution processes.

Once the Conductor, through dialogue with the audience, calibrates that most of the people present understand the form, and that they are comfortable, present, and engaged, a discussion about the program's topic is opened, and she or he invites a volunteer to tell a story. When someone assents, they become the Teller, and they are invited onto the stage, to sit next to the Conductor, and tell his or her tale. The Conductor may ask questions, elicit details, and repeat the story, to be sure it is heard as the Teller intends it to be understood. When the story has been fully shared, the Conductor turns to the actors (who have been listening), and offers the story to them.

#### **3.2.4 Players and Musicians**

Immediately the actors create a spontaneous physical image or moving scene of the concept or story. This may startle newcomers. One is suddenly in the experience of Playback Theater, seeing a verbal expression of ideas translated into image and sound, repeating certain phrases and themes from the telling.

The Players have understood sequences, essences, and emotions. They recall phrases, words, sounds. Colored fabrics, the only prop, can become a river, a waterfall, wind, fog, a flag, a towel, a shawl, a hat, a heart, blood, a baby, a burden, a bridge, a bandage, a blanket – depending on the way it is held, worn, waved, or placed. Metaphor is constantly evoked from the

imagination and transformed into physical images, recalling the myths Campbell said encapsulate our travails and life passages so that we can integrate them effectively and move into the future.

Normally, there are 1 or 2 musicians involved in Playback, who play several different instruments, sound makers, percussion, singing, and vocalization, they improvise ambience and dynamic emphasis, at any time they sense it will add value. In addition to playing in the course of an enactment, musicians will also support the Audience and the Conductor by giving background, or texture to silence or discussions. The skill of the musician is most apparent in their sensitivity, selectivity, inventiveness, and appropriateness.

### **3.2.5 Audience**

The fact that the Audience comes together is as important as the playback itself. Without the willingness of the Audience to witness and share stories, to give and receive in a kind of dialogue, there can be no Playback, and no impact on the problem. Their engagement depends on a feeling of safety, and openness to addressing issues through the creative act. Audience members may already know each other, or they may be strangers, or even members of estranged groups, depending on the nature of the program. Lederach emphasized the necessity of creating intersections among people for the possibilities of resolutions to emerge.

The Teller comes from the Audience, returns to the Audience, and may represent other members of the Audience when they tell their story. Listening and witnessing – being there for each other -- is a crucial element of the healing process, illustrated in the first of the case studies in Chapter 4.

The last period of time in a Playback program is used for reflection, appreciation, connecting and closure among the Audience. The Conductor elicits from the Audience pertinent feedback and contributions that frame the experience and the impacts. Seeds are planted which can grow in other contexts of peace work, inside homes, through organized civic work, and in government concerns.

### 3.3 WORKABLE PEACE

The Consensus Building Institute (CBI) is a conflict resolution service in Cambridge, Massachusetts, founded in 1993, which recognized that some conflicts could be avoided, or resolved in early stages, if more people in ordinary life had the skills that professionals use to help others address conflicts. “Most high school social studies classes do not teach students to analyze multiple sources of conflict or to see conflict from multiple perspectives. [...] And rarely do students put themselves into the shoes of primary actors in historical conflicts, to try out for themselves different ways to meet their needs and uphold their values.”<sup>67</sup> This inspired CBI to develop a high school curriculum, based on role play, to empower students who, in the absence of such a program, are unconsciously learning that “group identities are fixed, conflict is usually zero sum, and violence and coercion are not only common but often effective ways—maybe the only ways—to deal with intergroup conflict.”<sup>68</sup>

#### 3.3.1 Theory and Cognition

---

<sup>67</sup> Stacie Nicole Smith, and David Fairman, “Normalizing Effective Conflict Management Through Academic Curriculum Integration: The Example of Workable Peace”, *New Directions for Youth Development*, No. 102, Summer, New York: Wiley Periodicals, Inc. 2004, p. 49-50.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 50



Students first learn the basics of conflict resolution, and read the historical background of a case. Then they take roles from characters out of history or social studies, and attempt, through role play and dialogue, to arrive at a 'Workable Peace'. The goal of consensus determines the trajectory, and no one knows how they will get there, except by talking, listening, and proposing as skillfully as possible. Classmates on the other side of the room, represent opposing points of view, and share the goal of consensus.

CBI does not present Workable Peace as theater. In fact, its potential for dramatization is usually under-exploited. Through role play, the students do become dramatically, as well as ideologically, invested, and they learn skills. Evaluations in Chapter 4 will consider how Workable Peace might increase effectiveness by incorporating more tools from theater earlier in their process, as a way to enhance learning and communication.

The curriculum is divided into sequenced segments. First, a theoretical framework for learning negotiation skills: how to step back and take a broader view of the situation, learning to map a conflict, identifying who is involved and what is important to them, how to talk about disagreements constructively, figuring out ways conflicts can bring about changes that end up being better for everyone, not just whoever wins.

Students learn, many for the first time, that there are identifiable sources for conflict, it does not just 'happen.' And they learn how to differentiate among interests, beliefs, emotions, and identity.<sup>69</sup> Students learn to frame strategies by identifying their own concerns, and those of the other group.

They look at the kinds of steps that lead to conflict and war, such as losing incentive, making threats, stopping talking, and finally taking actions that disregard relationship -- anything that expresses that they have given up on

---

<sup>69</sup> CBI's Workable Peace Curriculum Teacher's Guide: Framework, Part 2a, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzhfA574Vil> accessed December 17, 2014.

diplomacy.<sup>70</sup> Then they contrast that to what can happen when someone has the imagination to consider other options. Students learn that there are rational steps that can lead to peaceful solutions to problems. They learn to analyze everyone's needs, to consider how things could change if at least some of these needs were met, to identify who needs to be involved for changes to last, and to consider the costs.

Through a cognitive process, the students begin to appreciate how much thinking goes into solving problems in a constructively active way. They see how it is possible to open up one's mind to the other side, before they have ever had to concede anything or make promises. They see why it is necessary to address the emotions of both sides, and how much goes into creating an agenda for peacebuilding. They start toning down violent rhetoric and actions. This pre-negotiation groundwork is a revelation to high school students. They begin to look at their own arguments with their parents and friends differently. Finally they learn, to perceive, not just arguments, but structure in conflict resolutions. They learn to prepare for negotiations by thinking through what they would be willing to give up, what they should not give up, and to imagine what the other party might give up in an effort to resolve a conflict.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.3.2 Role Play

The second part of the curriculum adds to these cognitive lessons, the theater of role play, based on actual characters from history and social studies, which can be Ancient Greeks and Peloponnesian War, Indigenous Rights and Environment in Latin America, Rise of Organized Labor in USA, Civil Rights and School Integration in USA, Religion and Nationalism in Northern Ireland, Ethnic Conflicts and Genocide in Post-Colonial Africa, and Managing Conflict

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. Framework, Part 2b [www.youtube.com/watch?v=omETZmMHVp1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omETZmMHVp1) accessed December 18, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Negotiation Part 4b, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXwo\\_iCnCag](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXwo_iCnCag) accessed December 18, 2014.

in the Middle East.<sup>72</sup> The creators of the curriculum have matched certain skills to correlate with particular content, elaborating a process that is supposed to build toward increasing mastery.

Students have complained that the amount of reading required is too much to handle. And some of them don't keep up, or they begin actual negotiations unprepared or without enthusiasm. Up to this point, the classroom follows a modern, but conventional format. They are learning the framework, and they are mapping the conflict. Everyone retains their own teenage identity, even if some role-playing has been employed for practicing skills. Chapter 4 will consider how introducing theatrical tools earlier and exploiting it more might augment the learning process and intensify engagement of the students.

Once the teacher assigns roles, the theater begins. Students receive dossiers on the character they will play, and they begin to invest into their character, what they have learned about conflict resolution. They find out about their character's job, their gender, and think about their beliefs, and how they can skillfully represent their point of view. Tensions arise within a student if they have to argue a point they do not personally agree with. Since beginning the unit, students have been keeping self-reflective and planning notes in a workbook, to keep track of ideas they have while they are studying. At this stage they can begin to refer back to their notes.

In the beginning of role plays, the students often revert to being themselves, arguing the way they would have before learning any conflict resolution skills. They offend each other. Conflicts arise among students, either because of lack of skillful behaviors or lack of sufficient preparation. Usually the class is divided into groups that work together, and some students end up doing all the work. This is just like real life conflict negotiations (and, indeed, most

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Credits Part 7, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLVDsaW1YEU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLVDsaW1YEU) accessed December 18, 2014.

group projects), and they are teaching moments.<sup>73</sup> But they tend to notice their own failures, reflecting on them, and trying to get control of themselves and improve their negotiating behavior through skills such as better information gathering, better listening, and timing their input effectively.. This is the phase when a classroom has to become, like a theater, a safe space to fail, one of the hallmarks of improvisation.

Teachers experienced with this curriculum promise that “Awkwardness at the beginning, the extra time it takes backtracking ... will pay off.” And ultimately, the students begin to recognize their autonomy, and that “they are not just reactors.” As a student explains, “How are you going to get what you want and what everybody else wants, too?” Or, “Even if I’m just talking to my mom ... you have to come to an agreement.”<sup>74</sup> These comments demonstrate the developments of critical pedagogy, espoused by Freire in the next section of this study.

When formal negotiations begin, the desks are set up for formal talks, dividing the two sides. Now, each student is supposed to remain in character. Their character’s name is on a plaque, saying who they are or what organization they represent. Wearing their school uniforms, the new role of each student is manifest mainly through the nature of their thought and speech, emphasizing the cognitive approach to conflict resolution, without recourse to theatrical tools beyond role play.

Each character introduces him or her self as an official, administrator or citizen, and then presents to the group his or her role, and concerns. The teacher is keeping visible flip charts linking points and terms. By now, people are beginning to feel invested in the cause of their constituents. But when they regress into just trying to force their points, they catch themselves and

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Preparation (Part 3), [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOUc6fQYYbc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOUc6fQYYbc) accessed December 17, 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. What Students Learn (Part 6), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmJK18H2Py8> December 17, 2014.

each other and get back to negotiating as they have been taught, differentiating it from debating, or arguing. After the enactments, class discussions reveal how much self-awareness, and especially self-criticism the students have.

By now the students are more in control of their skills in the dialogue. The theater has begun, and it has freed them, to some degree, from pre-conditions into truly striving for new options and real solutions to the problems they are facing. “What you want is to get the students heavily engaged and frustrated,” a teacher admitted. “They came to a breaking point and understood these things are difficult, and that if you want to remain at the table you have to let go of grudges. That point at which there are entrenched emotions, a complete impasse -- between groups or within groups -- is when the most learning is taking place.”<sup>75</sup> The ‘actors’ have transcended themselves and have become negotiators in causes they really care about. Some of them change their own opinions. They have gained respect for negotiating a common solution that takes seriously the necessity of satisfying all sides. If they have had to concede something, they understand why and they are pleased with what they were able to defend. Now that role play is fully functioning, it is apparent that it is easier for the students to relate to their material.

### 3.3.3 Debriefing

The final stage of the curriculum is debriefing, which, in reality takes place throughout the process. It is a classroom reflection on what has been learned and how it happened. Again, charts are filling up. This includes the failures. Students who didn’t prepare adequately willingly admitted their personal loss and the fact that they let down their classmates. They express that they would do better if they had a chance to do it again. “Without the facts, you can’t get attention just because you want it,” is how one student put it.

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. Negotiation (Part 4a), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4dGLxXXJDQ> accessed December 17, 2014.

Getting stuck in the negotiations had become a force for continuing to talk, and becoming more persuasive. Someone said, “No one wanted to argue with Elizabeth because everything she said was sensible.”<sup>76</sup> One student threw up his hands and capitulated in anger, just as may happen in ‘real life’ negotiations.

There are occasions when people settle on an agreement, but they do not feel ownership of it. It was recognized that better preparation, and starting all over, might have led to a better outcome. If the agreement was seen as weak, it was predicted that the people involved might not invest as much in sustaining it going forward.

“The curriculum gives people options, not just fighting or walking away from a fight, but to understand what they want and what the other party wants. ... All the students learn that preparation is power, in this curriculum. ... It takes on a life of its own. It’s not a drudgery to get them to do it. They can’t wait to get back to the table. They talk about it in the hallway. They are getting skills for the rest of their lives.”<sup>77</sup>

Students did speak of how they argue differently now, with their parents and with each other. Their questions and comments demonstrate a greater interest in current events and world conflicts than they had previously. And they acquired new respect for the great difficulty faced by the people who go into professional conflict negotiations. Whereas before they couldn’t understand why it took so long for parties to come to an agreement, now they are impressed whenever there is any improvement in the situation, whatsoever.

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. Debriefing (Part 5), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3l1u23BtaM> accessed December 17, 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Debriefing (Part 5), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3l1u23BtaM> accessed December 17, 2014.

In comparing these three forms, the curriculum of Workable Peace represents the minimum aspects of theater (mainly role play) that can still be referred to as an experience of theater. The learning that is clearly demonstrated throughout the course, can be attributed as much to the hard work the students and teachers invested in traditional didactic learning, as in the role play. Yet it is clear that the role play is what finally brought to life all what they were learning, and made it vividly memorable.

### 3.4 THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED

#### 3.4.1 Paolo Freire

Augusto Boal was an actor and theater director in Brazil, who considered theater a political act, just as his friend, the educational philosopher and teacher, Paulo Freire, considered education to be. Influenced by Marx, and a leader in critical pedagogy, Freire was best known for his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), which inspired Boal's innovations in theater, defined in his book, *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979). Freire's belief in the urgency for humanization, that is "the vocation of becoming more fully human,"<sup>78</sup> was the basis for his pedagogy of critical inquiry. Recognizing the fear the oppressed can have of the responsibility that comes with freedom, he saw the role of educators as to first trust the people and their ability to reason, and to listen to them in dialogue, in order to engage them in their own struggle against oppression (Freire 1970).

Freire promoted qualities that are essential to any art that would be used in peace work, such as careful analysis of relationships, humility, faith in the people to transform into actors in their own cause, and love, to ensure a

---

<sup>78</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1970, p. 44.

horizontal relationship of mutual trust between outsiders coming to help a community who are seeking help in their predicament. These qualities Boal aspired to embrace in theater.

Through what he called ‘problem-posing’ education, Freire found people became capable of critical analysis, investigation, and ultimately of transforming their own lives through increasing awareness -- from seeing themselves as objects, to becoming subjects in their own destiny (Freire, 1970). Boal’s theater embodies this ‘problem-posing’ method to the same ends.

### 3.4.2 Action Research

Although derived directly from Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Theater of the Oppressed had another predecessor in Action Research (AR), which shares the aim to use collective processes to heighten awareness and create strategies to address social problems or group dynamics. “Action research is...the relationship between social action and research exploring transformative social change... [that] recognizes the importance of [...] a web or field of human interactions collectively working toward shared goals within a general community framework.”<sup>79</sup> This definition of Action Research, could be about Theater of the Oppressed. Action Research is a step toward interactive, democratic collaboration among social workers and the populations they serve, comparable in theater to the mixing of audiences and actors into what Augusto Boal called ‘spectactors’.

Action Research is an ensemble production that involves, vulnerability, social risks, courage, imagination, storytelling in dialogue, and a shift of the trajectory from “‘habits’ [of power that] can lead to acceptance of ultimately

---

<sup>79</sup> Michael Glassman, Gizem Erdem, Mitchell Bartholomew, “Action Research and its History as an Adult Education Movement for Social Change”, *Adult Education Quarterly*, 2012, p. 272.



destructive actions such as marginalization, scapegoating, prejudice, and tension between groups. [...] to understanding the impact of habits and boundaries and how they restrict community goals. [The idea that] “habits are changeable,”<sup>80</sup> (a premise embraced by Bateson as a form of learning), and the use of structured, flexible, collective interaction to practice and achieve this, make Action Research a form approaching Theater of the Oppressed. Action Research even has an analogy to the theatrical space, suggested in the way the project space is described: “the training took place on what [was] termed an island, away from everyday habits and patterns of action.”<sup>81</sup> The theater itself, and the stage serve the same purpose of this ‘island’.

The way the groups were encouraged to tap their imagination for solutions is another parallel to Theater of the Oppressed. “[Action Research] broke down traditional barriers between researchers and participants and changed the meaning of research, transforming it into a ‘creative activity’ owned by the entire intervention community.”<sup>82</sup> These processes were developing in social work arenas, in anticipation of Boal’s Forum Theater.

### 3.4.3 AugustoBoal

While there are aspects of Action Research in Theater of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal was not a sociologist, but a dramaturge and director, and has given a very thorough account of the evolution of theater, elucidating ways in which it is designed to maintain the social status quo, and how his own thinking diverged from it towards direct social interventions. In the preface to the 2000 edition of his book, *Theater of the Oppressed* (1979), Boal recounts the story of the Greek actor, Thespis, breaking the tradition of the scripted Chorus, and speaking extemporaneously about public affairs in front of the audience, declaring he was telling the truth (implying the ‘real’ truth). Then

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 274.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p. 279.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p. 279.

Solon compared him to Prometheus, who had given the people fire. “He showed them that what belonged to the gods could be used by mortals. ... You showed the people that each can think with his own head, choose his own words,”<sup>83</sup> instead of reciting from a script.

It is not within the scope of this study to follow Boal’s very interesting discourse on Aristotelian poetics and philosophies, and the values represented in drama through history, except to arrive at his conclusion, “We will have to seek another poetics!”<sup>84</sup> Lederach’s call for another methodology in peacebuilding, and Boal’s call for another poetics in theater, can be seen to be moving towards each other. Contrary to a belief that popular theater should be entertainment, Boal said, “We believe ... that the most important characteristic of the theater which addresses itself to the people must be its permanent clarity, its ability to reach the spectator -- appealing to his intelligence and sensitivity without circumlocution or mystification.”<sup>85</sup> He called it ‘dynamizing’ the participants.

This author interviewed director and playwright, Misha Shulman, who has worked extensively with improvisational theater, and who had the opportunity to participate in a workshop with Boal. He attributes his encounter with the Boal as one of the experiences that led him to choose a career in theater. He said, “Working with Boal taught me what theater is capable of doing in society. Until then, I didn’t know it could change people.”<sup>86</sup>

The theatrical inventions of Augusto Boal relied heavily on his own unusual charisma and ‘dynamism’, yet the form has survived its creator. As the following descriptions of some of these forms show, and as case studies in Chapter 4 reveal, his tendency to adapt and invent according to what is called for in different circumstances has been adopted by followers. And if these

---

<sup>83</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, London: Pluto Press, 1979 and 2000, p. xviii, xiv.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. p. 42.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 62.

<sup>86</sup> Misha Shulman. Personal interview. April 25, 2014.

practitioners do not always possess the same force of character exhibited by Boal, they demonstrate that the structures defined in Theater of the Oppressed do not depend on him to be a viable force in socially engaged theater.

Boal considered human beings to be natural actors, play-acting in childhood until we are taught to stop. His aim was to give that power back to people in communities to use in solving their own problems.

#### 3.4.4 Forum Theater

Theater of the Oppressed is a class of approaches to theater that can be endlessly invented for different applications. For instance, Legislation Theater was created to be used in governmental policy formation and implementation. “As city councilor, Boal secured the funding for [...] forum theatre practitioners [to establish] Theater of the Oppressed companies around the city of Rio [...] Based on the public interventions that emerged during these community forum collaborations, lawyers working with Boal drafted legislation that articulated community desires. [... In all,] Boal carried 30 laws [into government processes...], 13 of which were passed.”<sup>87</sup> The same form can be used to raise public awareness of policy issues, even when there is no legislative action involved.

Invisible Theater is a street scene, planned by TO actors, and designed to surreptitiously engage unsuspecting bystanders in discussions about social concerns or events that affect the whole community. “Newspaper Theater [...] consists of several single techniques for transforming daily news items, or any other non-dramatic material, into theatrical performances.”<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Geraldine Pratt and Caleb Johnston, “Turning Theatre into Law, and Other Spaces of Politics”, *Cultural Geographies* 14: 94-95, 2007, p. 95.

<sup>88</sup> Boal, op. cit., p. 121.

In Image Theater (also found in Playback), performers physically express internal feelings, social or structural relationships or abstract concepts by means of taking body postures, facial expressions, gestures, and sometimes sound, singly or relative to each other, to form an image of a concept. Boal considered Image Theater especially powerful because when we give form to inchoate ideas, we transform ourselves in the process, becoming more conscious of unconscious material, for which there may be no words (Boal 1979).

Like all of Theater of the Oppressed, Forum Theater does not require professional training, although usually some of the people involved have had training. Generally, a Forum program will be focused on a particular social predicament, such as family problems, oppression of workers, bullying, sexual abuse, health or addiction behaviors, environmental education, labor disputes, or any problem a group decides they want to explore for solutions not yet identified.

#### **3.4.5 Workshop**

As in other forms of Theater of the Oppressed, there is an ensemble (consisting entirely or mainly of people endeavoring to solve a problem), and there is a Joker. The Joker Boal also called The Difficultator, because the main function is to pose difficult questions. Like the Conductor of Playback Theater, or the facilitator/teacher in Workable Peace, this is a 'meta-position', for one who sets the tone, gives instructions, keeps the action on topic, notices opportunities to interrupt for reflection and dialogue, poses critical questions, makes comparisons or elicits them from the group. From this meta-position, the Joker can communicate about the play as it develops.

Beginning a Forum Theater workshop, the whole group will warm up together, under the direction of the Joker, doing improvisational exercises such as the ones mentioned above in the section on improvisation. These exercises generally have the effect of generating a genial, light-hearted, friendly atmosphere of connectivity. Lederach also emphasized the importance of establishing connectivity and collectivity among a community seeking answers to their problems.

Depending on how many people are involved, several ensembles can be formed from a large group, each with a different story concept relating to the topic. There is no script, but each member of the ensemble is given a paper on which is written the name, age, character of their role, and the predicament of their character within the scene. One of the characters will always be a protagonist, that is, someone oppressed with a problem, and an antagonist, or oppressor. No one knows what the other members of their group are going to say or do, or, indeed, what their own character will say and do. Everybody makes it up as they go along, responding to each other according to the nature of their character's role, and their predicament. Boal's invention is an answer to Lederach's call for a space from which creative acts can begin to emerge.

#### **3.4.6 Spectators**

Boal did not divide theater into actors and spectators. He called everyone 'spectators', because at different times each person will take turns in these positions. In Forum Theater, the skit is performed once for the spectators who are not in the skit, as well as for players who are in the skit, so that everyone can see what the scene is about, what is the problem, who are each of the characters, and what are their interests. This gives everyone present a chance to comprehend the plight of the protagonist, how he or she is oppressed, and to begin thinking what character and what action could create a change in the situation. Boal's scenes always have a protagonist,

who seeks change and resolution to a problem, and some form of an oppressor maintaining the status quo.

After the skit is enacted once, and is finished, the Joker asks questions to get everyone thinking about the story, and encouraging them to come up with a plan to free the protagonist. The Joker explains that in the second enactment, anyone in the room can say STOP, when they have an idea they would like to try, to change the outcome of the scene. The first actor will then sit down, and the new one will take over the role, and act out the new behavior in the group. This change in the dynamic causes all the other performers to adjust their responses towards a new trajectory. These plays only last about 5 minutes, and are repeated several times, applying different possible transformations of the dynamics of the situation. Between each enactment, the Joker leads a discussion to analyze how the change functioned in the story. Who gained power? Not only does this generate real solutions to the problem, it also demonstrates the flexibility of thinking and behaving that can lead eventually to new alternatives.

Seeing the different options, and their consequences, played out, demonstrates how open life is at every moment, and how outcomes can be shifted when we choose different ways to interact. Pretty soon, the original dynamic begins to break up, and the relationships begin to give way to changes instigated by the new behaviors that are being introduced.

### **3.4.7 The Difficultator**

Boal used the terms Joker or Difficultator for the role of cultural animator or facilitator. We are accustomed to the facilitator making everything go smoothly. The Difficultator also challenges habitual thinking and the status quo, which is not always comfortable. Boal's idea was to recognize a problem and to elicit change to resolve it.

The description above of the Conductor in Playback correlates with the same role in Forum Theater, but in Forum Theater, the style is that of a playful, friendly confrontation. Through problem-posing and questioning, the problem is drawn out into the open and looked at from every angle, to be transformed. A dynamic process, Forum Theater conveys to people who feel stuck with a problem, that they have more agency than they may have imagined. It helps them to get in touch with 'something desired', a key component to change, according to Lederach.

Boal's inventions reflect himself. They also allow for different facilitators to express their role in a different style. In one of the case studies in Chapter 4, a facilitator commented on how challenged she felt to live up to the demands of skillfully and artfully fulfilling this function. The goal is elicitation, something familiar to teachers and parents, and the style in which it is expressed will reflect the individual performer (not necessarily the inimitable Boal).

### **3.5 COMPARISONS**

The three forms of theater reviewed above are each suitable to different kinds of problem solving. Playback Theater, which employs the greatest range of theatrical tools, is often applied in situations where the resolution sought may be of an emotional nature, such as reconciliation, or one that is exploratory of hidden dimensions within a personal or group context. Theater of the Oppressed is more often addressing problematic structural conditions, researching ways they can be altered for an improvement in relationships among peers, and within hierarchies, involving individuals or groups. Workable Peace is designed to enhance skills acquisition, and theoretical understanding, as well as practical application, of conflict resolution and historic conflicts. In addition, its effect is to broaden the range of imaginative orientation towards solutions, in both historic and contemporary contexts, in thinking about settling disputes.

By seeing how they were formed and how they function, it is also possible to imagine how one might invent a method that employs elements from any or all of these, in a prescriptive manner, to address a particular social problem. They can each be used at different stages of resolution of a problem, and in conjunction with other methods of problem-solving. This survey constitutes a minimum exposure to the possibilities.

In the next chapter, it will be seen how each of these approaches to theater has been applied in specific contexts, and what kinds of impacts they have had on people and circumstances.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EVALUATION**

#### **4.1 METHODOLOGY**

The identifiable criteria for impacts indicating change, to be tracked in the evaluation process, is taken from or inspired by the prose of John Paul Lederach, who articulated some of the elements of desired outcomes one



might hope for, in the field of peace and conflict. It is never expected that all of these criteria need to be met for there to be change. It is also true that there are other criteria that might have been chosen instead.

The nature of the change criteria will be followed by a quantitative notation indicating if the criteria is, a) strongly present (strong), or, b) somewhat present (some). Any impact not present, or not known will not be listed.

Following the grid indicating these change criteria, and the implied degree of it, there will be an analytical narrative about the case.

#### 4.1.1 Change Criteria

A. Criteria that is found in virtually all of the cases, and therefore not listed on the grid, yet considered important enough to be seen as a positive underpinning of nearly every case, is the following:

1. Pursuit of the creative act (by definition, uncertain)
2. Willingness to accept the risk of the unknown (to trust enough to show up)
3. Holding open communal spaces for creative acts to emerge (necessarily safe for feeling, risking, and reflection)
4. Witnessing / Sharing

B. Criteria that have the potential to contribute adversely to a situation:

Each of these negative impacts have the potential to be transformed and will only be listed in the grid as negative when they are not transformed through process. Any occurrence (transformed or not), if known, will be elaborated in the narrative analysis.

1. Re-traumatization
2. Offense taken
3. Attendees not engaged

### C. Variable criteria for positive outcomes:

1. Reaching transcendent turning points (some participants leave the event with a new sense of direction)
2. Seeing new perspectives
3. Increasing intersections / Bringing the mixed collective together in the same space / Fostering inclusion / Working across cultural and ethnic differences (within homo- or hetero-genous groups)
4. Imagining self in interconnected relationships with 'enemy' (including structures, people, time past or future, and/or place)
5. Simplicity becoming a resource at the heart of complexity (something small can impact or drive transformation in a messy problem)
6. Remaining attentive to seemingly contradictory truths (not fleeing from ambiguity nor resorting to duality)
7. Engaging whole community with a sense of shared ownership of solutions
8. Generating a concept for something desired (a mental image or idea)
9. Transforming / Processing / Transcending suffering  
(Lederach 2005).

#### 4.1.2 Cases– Sources

The cases for Playback and Forum Theater come from scholarly articles about live events. They were chosen for their variety of context populations, artist practitioners, topics, approaches and outcomes. The articles are written by practitioners or participants. The cases for Workable Peace were available only through articles and videos that compiled several classes together in the same documents. Therefore one evaluation is presented, and it includes a number of different cases. They are based on information gathered from observing youtube videos (created by CBI) made of actual classroom lessons as they occurred and interviews with students and

teachers. Another source of reporting was from a professional evaluation created by an independent firm (not by CBI, the founders of WP). The author offers apologies for any errors in interpretation that may have been made in analyzing any of them. The author and title of each article sourced for the study, is in the bibliography.

Information on cases in the grid comes under the following categories:

Title; Context (topic, place, community); Practitioners

Impact -- lists from the change criteria above of all elements, positive and negative, that were found to be present

Quantity - degree of intensity for ascribed impacts

Each grid will be followed by:

Notes -- a reflective narrative description and analysis of salient details and key factors in the report of the event.

## 4.2 PLAYBACK THEATRE CASES

### 4.2.1 Tears, Education; torture, villagers, rural India; Indian PB group

	IMPACTS	QUANTITY
	turning point	strong
	new perspectives	strong
	web with enemies	some

	IMPACTS	QUANTITY
	simplicity	strong
	create desire	strong
	transform suffering	strong

#### Notes – Tears, Education

This case, even with very little information given, illustrates well, on examination, key elements of the work, embedded in a scene of life that does not at first lend itself to obvious analysis.

An NGO invited the playback group to work with the villagers. The first important point is the value of being invited by the people who will comprise the Audience seeking change. It is common and helpful for Playback to be invited to work within a community, as compared to a PB event where the public is invited. An invitation shows a degree of investment and desire for change already working in the people. If the Playback group comes from outside the community, this gives them, from the beginning, a positive connection with the people they are to work with. When a theater ensemble offers its services and invites the public to attend, audience members may come less committed and more skeptical, which could impact results.

Another factor to take into account, is that the Audience group was made up of a homogenous community. This does not guarantee that they will not have disagreements. There can be problems stemming from the past, not known to the Players, or differences that become apparent through the theatrical experience. In this case, the group remained cohesive and supportive. The Playback ensemble was also from the same culture as the audience, so they would be more likely to automatically keep the work in harmony with the group's way of communicating.

The Teller was a man who began to cry as soon as he started telling his story. As in other approaches to peacebuilding, theater practitioners are dealing with the emotions of the population, and need the same sensitivity, wisdom and skills any other peace worker brings. Lederach pointed out the importance of being willing to remain present with the discomfort of contradictions. The program designed to alleviate suffering became the occasion to experience the pain again. The Teller's story was about being tortured by the police, who wanted to get information concerning a local smuggler. The man simply didn't know anything about it, and the police tried to beat it out of him. The other people present had had the same experience of being tortured and harassed by the police. They all started to weep, too. The Teller never lifted his head.

The second important point, is that the Conductor had to decide what to do about a roomful of people crying. The aim is to support the community, cultivating insight, and alleviating suffering. They could remain together in quiet dialogue about the problem, and not perform the enactment, or they could continue the program as usual, risking 'getting it wrong' among a very tender population. They went ahead with the Playback performance, showing their faith in the form, and their courage to do what they knew to help.

The actors were said, by audience members, to have been very empathetic in their portrayal. When it was finished, there was a long silence, and only then did the man look up. He said, "I think that now we have wept enough. Now I feel we can go forward and now for the first time I can begin to think about the education of my grandson."<sup>89</sup>

It appears the man did not actually see the enactment (unless he was peeking), yet he got the transformation he came for. He was ready for

---

<sup>89</sup> Jenny Hutt and Bev Hosking, "Playback Theatre: A Creative Resource for Reconciliation", *Peacebuilding and the Arts*, Brandeis University, 2004, p. 12.

healing, and it came in a simple way, even though the behavior of the police is not likely to change from this intervention. This demonstrates the next important point, that performers are a vehicle at the service of a problem and the people who have the problem. If they do their job, and avoid getting in the way, the process itself can be successful.

Although the problem with police brutality is not solved in this instance, the fact that the whole community found a new resolve and outlook may turn out to be a first step that could lead to other changes later on. By returning home strengthened to live for the future of their children, not overwhelmed by the present difficulty, the people acknowledged their relationship with their enemy had shifted. They had altered their identity as 'victim'. Perhaps through the complementarity of cognitive interventions, structural problems will eventually be addressed, as a result of this shift in attitude.

If the Teller did not see the image enacted by Playback, the Audience surely did. People are acutely interested in their own problems, and in what the actors will do with it. Just as the Conductor and the Players must be exceedingly attentive to the Teller's story, the Teller and the Audience pay close attention to the Playback. This phenomenon offers, in theater, a way for peace workers to make a deep connection to the people they are working with. Theater can be a non-verbal expression of their love (a quality emphasized by Paolo Freire as a powerful element to critical learning), empathy, and cognizance of the people's predicament, among other things.

The Audience did express that they felt the Playback accurately showed what they had endured. They said they felt understood, and that now they were not alone. The PB ensemble had cared enough to come to help them. Knowing they had a witness contributed to their sense of resolution. The villagers arrived at reconciliation, not with their persecutors, but with themselves and their future.

It matters that the players did a good job (according to the Audience), but this case also illustrates that the performance is just one aspect of the entire practice of Playback. The Audience was sincere, and played their part well, as did the Teller, and the Conductor. This is why it is said there is no separation, and that everyone present shares the risk, the responsibility and the outcomes of Playback.

This is a case where complementary approaches, addressing the structural violence from the policing of the community, are still called for. Theater helped to alleviate some of the emotional suffering of the people, and give them courage to face their problem situation with a generative approach to living.

#### 4.2.2 Asylum Child; Australia, Iraqi refugees, migrants, government workers, sympathetic community; Brisbane PB Theater Co.

	IMPACTS	QUANTITY
	turning points	strong
	new perspectives	some
	intersections	strong
	attentive to contradictions	strong
	taking offense	some

Notes – Asylum Child

The author of the article on which this account is based, is an experienced Player. She was invited to join a professional Playback company for a well-publicized event about a topic prominent in the news: refugees at Christmas Island, and the difficult conditions there. Apparently it was a large gathering, drawing a mix of people together, that by itself was an accomplishment (meeting the 'intersections' criteria). It is also a greater shared risk, to work with a large number of people from different groups.

It seems the Players were also mixed, some who worked together regularly, and guests with varying preparation for the work. This might be another risk, compared to working with a fixed ensemble who rehearse together. But it is a practice common among the worldwide Playback community and international peace workers, to support and enrich the work, just as mixed teams collaborate in other peacebuilding contexts.

The venue was an auditorium, implying it might be a challenge for the Conductor to create a sense of intimacy. This was ameliorated by the fact that the people in attendance were people who really cared about the topic. That is a good thing, but it also means that there may be strong feelings with the possibility of differences of opinion. All these factors are considered in designing an intervention.

The program was following a normal arc described in Chapter 3, and had progressed to the middle point where the main stories of the evening would be told. The Teller who volunteered was a 10-year-old Iraqi girl. She calmly shared a disturbing story of her family being split apart, brothers going to Europe, no one knowing the fate of her father, who had been arrested. She, along with her mother and sister, ended up in Australia by way of two other countries, through frightening ordeals. She ended the story saying "when we arrived in Australia we are welcome with open arms."<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Rea Dennis, "Big Clumsy Feet Stomping all Over: Shame, Caution and Fear in Performance for Peace Building", *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2009, p. 58.



The “poise and grace” of the child Teller, as well as the celebratory tone of the event (part of Refugee Week), and the fact that they were on a stage in an auditorium (similar to ordinary theatre), may have contributed to the choices made by the Players to add to her story, dramatic background material, based on facts generally known, but not given by the child, about the war they were fleeing. This is permissible in Playback and can enrich the story effectively, but it adds to the risk of problems associated with secondary re-enactments, and “getting it wrong,” as the author of this article put it. A part of the re-enactment, faithful to the child’s story, about when her father was taken away, was dramatized by harsh, loud voices and footfall. Choices between realism or abstraction are made intuitively and rapidly in Playback.

The happy ending was enacted precisely as the child delivered it in her story, and she seemed pleased and empowered to see it played on the stage. Her demeanor, as described, indicated a positive outcome that may be incorporated into her personal biography, initiating a connection with the people of her adopted land. But before the Players released their final tableau image, someone from the audience shouted angrily, “These are not stories! This is somebody’s life.”<sup>91</sup> Naturally, even if other people present may have discounted this expression of anger, the players themselves felt the burden of apparently causing hard feelings, in at least one person, instead of alleviating them.

There is no indication in the account, that this outburst caused a significant disruption to the program. The child went back to sit with her mother. The article does not describe how the Conductor handled the event, but the program did continue, with other stories that followed. Still the incident bears consideration.

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p. 59.

A critical remark may not reflect on the performance at all. It may reflect, instead, on an individual person's objection to the entire premise of the event, or to a personal problem of one's own, or cultural conditioning which does not discourage free, rowdy expression (like the British Parliament). Public comportment can serve as a buffer to a singular outburst, especially if it does not represent a widely shared sentiment. There is no way to know what others were thinking, but in PB, the experience of the Audience is considered as important as that of the Teller. In any case, the poignant remark caused a lot of self-reflection on the part of the players, and one improviser, described as inexperienced, felt disturbed enough to drop out of the program for the rest of the evening.

Even when there is a problem, the event as a whole may be generally successful in meeting its objectives (as seen in the grid above). The dissatisfied person (noted in the grid as having taken offense, because we have been given no reason to believe the feelings expressed were transformed), had a positive (even if uncomfortable) impact on the thinking of the author, whose powers of analysis and self-criticism were stimulated. The criteria 'turning point' is attributed to the Players, who seem to have been deeply affected by the over-all experience.

The story told by the refugee child was described as 'childlike', 'not real'. In Playback, the story is delivered in a conversation with the Conductor, who may have been surprised to see a child volunteer to come on the stage. Information was not given about how the Conductor elicited the story and offered it to the Players. It has been noted how crucial is the role of Conductor, in mitigating the unexpected in the Playback program. This case is a reminder that the elicitation of the story and the way it is delivered to the Players is one of the fundamental processes in the form, perhaps even more so when at least some of the Players are new to each other. Creative decisions have to be made very quickly in Playback.

The article does not say if, afterward, the Conductor addressed the disturbed person directly, or indirectly through conversational contextualization with the audience, or not at all. It is common for the Conductor to be in conversation with members of the audience, but in a large venue, the conversation would most likely have been focused mainly with the Teller. In viewing many Playback performances, it became evident to the author that much can be left unsaid, which has the effect of keeping the impacts based mainly in the multisensory experience of images and sound, and avoiding shifting all the thinking back to the cognitive.

The author of the article, experienced in Playback, devoted a great deal to considering every aspect of what had occurred, through deeply analytical research and reasoning. The value of this case, in the present study, is a glimpse into the vulnerability of the Players. It is inherent in the work of all peacebuilding that there will be disappointments and experiences of falling short of all aims. Theater interventions are no different in that regard.

Players, like other peaceworkers, do make mistakes. It is a part of the Playback ethos, and of improvisation generally, that perfection is not an aim. There is an aspiration to offer best efforts, creatively, empathetically, skillfully, and to accept mistakes as freely as accepting the good luck of an action well-received. There is analysis in improvisation, but also an intention to refrain from judging. What constitutes a mistake may be subjective. Mistakes are usually absorbed inconsequentially into the whole. A rule of improvisation is to reject nothing.

Paradoxically, though at least some Players were left feeling remorse for the reaction they received, the benefits to the Players may have also been greater than usual. Doubting choices, soul-searching about the well-being of everyone else involved, and a deeper examination of the greater context are sometimes lost in the rush to successful conclusions, and the afterglow of a performance people are pleased to receive.

The author reflected on the horror stories everyone had been reading in the news about conditions and conflicts at Christmas Island. These aspects may have been lost on the child, who had survived with her mother and her sister, and who appeared hopeful about her future. She may not have even heard the audience member's criticism. But the adults in the audience came with a lot on their minds concerning the situation, which is why the event was produced in the first place. The opinion expressed may have been formed before the program began.

One normally thinks of the vulnerability of people in the audience. Some may even see the Players as showing off, or benefitting from their role of 'doing good', or making a living, if they are a professional company. The great heart that it takes to be onstage (indeed, to do any type of peace work) is not always recognized. Players take emotional risks to offer back the stories of the oppressed, and, as peace workers, they need a lot of personal humility and resilience and self-forgiveness to do so.

**4.2.3 Citizens Cuba; public/private life under state control; periodic trainings in Havana, community-based PB; citizen practitioners, stage actors, visiting international trainers**

	IMPACTS	QUANTITY
	new perspectives	some
	intersections	some
	in web with enemy	some
	attend to contradictions	strong
	community ownership	strong

#### Notes – Citizens Cuba:

Nearly 15 years ago an individual Playback practitioner from New York City went to Cuba and began to attract groups and to teach anyone who was interested in how to work with Playback.

This case study of Playback is mainly about a specific training workshop, but also includes a general analysis of Playback across Cuba, where the emphasis is on self-leadership, the original model for Playback groups. Many of the participants, however, are professional actors, looking for a fresh approach and alternative application for their work. People meet together regularly to work with their own personal and community problems and hopes. Occasionally international trainers come to lead a workshop that may include people from any of these different Playback groups. The impacts ascribed above are those described by the individual Cuban citizens, teachers, psychologists, and professional actors, as well as visiting trainers from USA, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and England, about their experience using Playback.

In the early days of PB in Cuba, and still somewhat today, the practice was not officially sanctioned in the state-controlled society. People kept their

meetings private. Groups were especially interested in dealing with taboo topics, like homosexuality and HIV/AIDS, which has since been admitted into the public discourse, but at one time was forbidden. Playback may have played a role in bringing about more openness, as the government attempts to reconcile its communist revolution with limited freedoms. There are signs that the presence of Playback in the country has actually moved the official discourse on freedom of expression concerning some topics.

In Cuba, where professional actors are on a state payroll, it is a risk to engage in activities that the government has not fully accepted. "Masking is a strategy for survival and self-preservation in a society with a history of 'reeducation camps' and blacklists."<sup>92</sup> Yet actors are taking that chance, hungry for the freedom to explore and express, and to embrace improvisation's 'perfection is not an aim' motto, in contrast to their training and expectations for standards of excellence, and a high degree of professionalism.

In Playback, members sometimes share stories they have never told anyone, especially in Cuba where people sometimes critically watch each other's lifestyle. Even anecdotes which sound ordinary to people who live in open societies, may make someone uneasy there. Some of their stories sound normal in Cuba, such as tales about excessive waiting, or long separations within families, but are unfamiliar to the foreign ears of visiting PB participants. When Playback workshops bring about encounters between foreigners and Cubans, some of their stories do not translate well with each other. Cubans cannot relate to owning and caring for household pets, for instance, as North Americans and Britons do. Real misunderstandings can develop over self-censorship, between those for whom it is necessary, and those for whom it is not respected, because it seems inauthentic. In Cuban theater, scripts have to pass through a censor before they can be publicly

---

<sup>92</sup> Laurie Frederik Meer, "Playback Theatre in Cuba, The Politics of Improvisation and Free Expression", *The Drama Review* 51:4, Winter 2007, p. 110.

performed, while Playback is, by definition, improvised without script (Meer, 2007). For all of these reasons, simply to engage in Playback is a courageous and complex political non-violent action.

“Though there has been a perceived ‘flexibilization of culture’ since 1990, Playback still makes the censors anxious.”<sup>93</sup> Even bold Playback practitioners know where to draw the line. In the context of revolutionary Cuba, Playback was another revolution. More than a decade later, it enjoys “institutional affiliation”, partly because the government wants to avoid a face-off. Playback seems to have had a significant impact in Cuba. Not just in Havana, but all over the island, communities are engaging and being empowered through Playback. The people involved seem to intuitively gauge how much they need to keep it private and how much they can work in the open, as well as how far they can go with candor and how much to self-censor. To a lesser extent perhaps, these factors are operative in Playback contexts in other countries as well. In being the Teller, each person makes countless choices about what to put in and what to leave out of their story.

Playback in Cuba seems to exemplify all of the criteria given by Lederach: a high degree of awareness of the interdependence with one’s ‘enemy’; a paradoxical curiosity to remain present with apparent contradictions; opening spaces for creative acts; the willingness to risk; expecting the unexpected; creating something desired; increasing intersections among people, and more. They also follow the original Playback model of citizen actors grappling with their own problems, and leading themselves.

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 116.

### 4.3 WORKABLE PEACE COMPOSITE CASES

As in the previous case, WP evaluation is made of a composite of several cases taken together. The information comes from available data that pertains to several undifferentiated classes, from multiple classes at different high schools. Role plays used were about Hebron, Guatemala, Rwanda and American social studies.

#### 4.3.1 CBI; history, conflict management, USA; high school students and teachers

	IMPACTS	QUANTITY
	accepting risks	some
	turning points	strong
	new perspectives	strong
	web with enemy	some
	community own	some
	attendees not engaged	some

Notes – CBI composite cases:

It is striking to see how empowered these children feel when they first recognize they must, in a disagreement, seriously consider the view of the other side, and their delight in having some conflict resolution tools with which to engage more skillfully in finding changes that will benefit both. They soon begin to generalize this knowledge in contexts outside the classroom, with their parents and friends. But individual temperaments remain the same. Whether they will use their new found skills to truly build consensus for the



good of the collective, or to find a way to get what they want by cleverly conceding as little as possible, varies. In videos of actual classroom lessons, empathy for the opposing side did not seem as strong as the pragmatism undergirding fair negotiations. There is a clear arc of progress, among the students, from the early stages of learning to negotiate, to becoming pretty good at it, to demonstrating respectable skill and feeling quite proud of it, at least for many of the students. They noticeably increased their capacity over time to control impulses, frame the discourse, critique their own approaches, and to set aside their personal position to identify with how their cause can improve the common good.

Particularly as a result of examining *Workable Peace* in the context of two, more overtly theatrical, theater disciplines, it was found that increasing the theatrical aspects of the curriculum might strengthen some of its weaknesses. For instance, analysis of *WP* reveals problems in student motivation, especially early in the process, when there is an overload of material which has to be mastered through reading. The curriculum emphasizes cognitive learning, seemingly based on loading in a quantity of knowledge through reading in the beginning, and then releasing that into behaviors through role play later. This was described by Freire as the 'banking' model. Adding more theater, and sooner, might help counteract some of the boredom and being overwhelmed with homework. Study can be supported by taking advantage of the layering, and gradual building of knowledge and behavior skills, that characterize learning found in Forum Theater through critical questions and short skits that try out different possibilities quickly, rather than seeing one process through to one final conclusion.

*WP's* fictional role play, that is used to introduce the students to the model, was not found by the students to be either inspiring or compelling, partly because they knew it was not real. Forum Theater might be a good replacement, using real issues common to their own experience, and short skits to catch on to the form, especially for students whose preferred learning

styles are not cognitive. One teacher complained that some of the weaker students “were probably ... picking up from their friends and colleagues on teams, rather than coming to the understanding simply by the written word,”<sup>94</sup> Instead of being seen as some form of ‘cheating’, this could be seen as a positive, valid learning style, to be built on.

Forum Theater could also be a good introduction to characters and their historic background. It would make it possible to get started with role play earlier, before mastering all the information given. Improvised role plays could begin using script outlines, such as the set-ups in Forum Theater. The pleasure in the early role plays might motivate students to go back to the history books for more factual enrichment of their character, gradually enhancing their identification with their role and the predicament of their character through a layering process. Forum Theater could help resolve the paralyzing tension students felt when they had to play a role that did not match their personal beliefs, because, in the FT model, these roles can be tried by different people with different ideas about what will work.

Another advantage to Forum Theater role play, is that it would alleviate the problem of too few ‘starring’ roles to go around. There is more opportunity for democratic participation in FT. Students have a chance to switch roles and gain flexibility and insight. Just as the main stream of the field of peace and conflict does not take full advantage of the resource of collaborating with artists, there is no evidence that a drama teacher was involved with the role plays in *Workable Peace*. Drama teachers know how to enhance the actors’ desire to know more background on their character, help get the actors into character, to prepare for their roles and make them more vivid.

Not only beginning dramatic role play sooner, but augmenting the way it is done later would be a way of addressing the problem of coming to class unprepared. If these negotiations were to take place in front of an audience

---

<sup>94</sup> Debra Donahue-Keegan and Maria LaRusso, *Independent Evaluation of Workable Peace* commissioned by CBI, Cambridge, MA., 1999, p. 13.

of their peers, or any other audience (such as parents and faculty), it might also stimulate the learning process, and inspire commitment to the work. Teenagers don't want to look bad, and are motivated to look good for each other. They would want to know their material. Involving the audience in a Forum Theater dialogical process would also alleviate the pressure for students who get stuck and cease to function in the scenario, because someone else could take over. Solutions can come from everywhere; ideas for solutions flow more freely in Forum Theater. This has the added advantage, at a more advanced stage of the proceedings, of engendering flexibility, as players actually assume each other's roles, and have to switch their thinking. A peer audience has the potential to enlarge the exposure to the knowledge, the behaviors, and the issues, to expand the dialogue, and to reinforce learning, as well.

Artful staging of the desks, such as a circle, or sitting on the floor, could be explored for the effect on more friendly outcomes (recalling Mandela's choice). It would stimulate another dialogue about all the different non-cognitive elements that communicate in any environment, to either support or detract from goals. Even if these arrangements are not used in conventional conflict management settings, the experience of seeing what impact it had on the relationships would be instructive and memorable for students.

If visual cues were added to distinguish the characters more, it could make it easier to think of each other as characters instead of as their teenage classmates. Dressing in a shawl or a suit jacket, carrying a brown paper bag or a briefcase, using a cane or holding a baby, positioning characters with regard to the amount of power they have or don't have (in the back or in the front), all create heightened realism, and make more vivid the social divisions among people. It is a way of making visible the economic differences of the characters, their differences in education, interests, vulnerabilities, power, social status, etc., by exploiting theater more fully. The experience of seeing

these non-verbal signals impact outcomes would add another layer of learning.

It is evident that the idea of 'winning' is very tenacious in the minds of the students. If they did not mind conceding something, it was sometimes because they felt it a clever way to get something else that they wanted more. A session in Playback Theater, might engender more empathy and insight into what these outcomes really mean in peoples' lives. Another way Playback might be useful, is in mitigating the overwhelming emotions some students felt when they began to learn about atrocities, such as those that occurred in Rwanda, and injustices from which they had previously been sheltered.

Both students and teachers complained of the burden of complexity in this curriculum. Theater has been shown to be an effective way of synthesizing complexity, in a deceptively simple form. More trust could have been shown in the layering approach to learning found in Forum Theater. Reviewing *Workable Peace* one is struck by a sense of the urgent pressure of insufficient time (a ubiquitous quality of American or simply modern life, at school, at work, and at home). The curriculum is comprehensive, and its full potential might be better realized in a context of a summer workshop, or even a refugee camp, where life has been reduced, making it possible to focus and enrich the learning process, exploiting more of the theatrical possibilities that tight school schedules do not allow.

After coming to class unprepared, and seeing how it throws off the entire process for everyone, students said they wish they could do it again, better. But they would not have that opportunity. This is another big life lesson, coming through the curriculum. It is also true, that the layering in Forum Theater, mentioned above, would offer more second chances, because of the built-in rounds of repetition. Second and third and fourth chances are built into the form, opening the way to better options.

Although the teachers do attend a workshop to prepare them to teach Workable Peace, it appeared that they sometimes felt insufficiently qualified in the skills of conflict resolution to confidently intervene and support during the role play. Even if the orientation cannot be extended, if the Forum Theater model were implemented, it would give them a chance to step away from the hierarchical 'banking' model of pedagogy, and join in as 'spectator', both learning and teaching.

The journaling aspect of the curriculum reinforced investment in some of the characters portrayed, processed some of the feelings, and invited reflection. Through the role plays, too, students came to grips with their emotions, recognizing how deleterious anger and high emotions can be to clear thinking. Even so, some students were not convinced of the assumed efficacy of conflict resolutions at all. One student asked (concerning the Israeli/Palestinian conflict), "Even if they do come to peace, who are they after that? They are so used to fighting each other, what are they going to do now?"<sup>95</sup> This brings to mind Lederach's emphasis on the importance of "creating something desired", because the student has understood correctly, that the absence of something desired can be an obstacle. This is another instance of how the fluid medium of Forum Theater can generate visions of new strategies for the future. On top of that, Forum Theater's stylistic approaches could help students, after the lesson is over, to practice the transfer of these skills into their own lives.

Depending on the system within which a curriculum is based, any changes face enormous challenges to be implemented. Changes that differ too radically from the institutionalized norm may never be accepted. This curriculum is a dramatic innovation, and still within bounds of the context, that people can understand and find worthy of trying. From the examples, the overall efficacy of WP was demonstrated to instill negotiation skills that will be

---

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

good for a lifetime, and a more personal encounter with history, far beyond what lessons usually offer.

#### 4.4 THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED CASES

##### 4.4.1 Body Forum; eating habits, body image, USA; university students from an elective performance class, professor/director/ Joker

	IMPACTS	QUANTITY
	accepting risks	strong
	turning points	strong
	new perspectives	strong
	intersections	some

Notes – Body Forum:

Augusto Boal was constantly innovating, and making up new forms of theater for different applications, by adjusting previous inventions to match a new situation. This case is adapting Forum Theater rehearsal improvisations as a way to develop a script for repeat public performance. The performance was presented in a few evening programs at a university.

The second departure from FT is that there was a conventional division between spectators and actors, instead of everyone involved being 'spectators'. The goal was to focus on the impact the experience had on the performers primarily. Although Boal wrote a lot about his work, his models deliberately leave a lot of choices left open to the practitioners, giving the work a unique and local character wherever it is done.

The professor admitted that she found the role of Joker challenging, and would like to have had more guidance (from Boal) on how to handle it (Howard 2004). If Boal was a dynamic magician, the Joker in this case, played the role more like a scientist and an academic, thoroughly examining, testing, questioning every aspect of the process. The project became an experiment on how to invent, as Boal did, and how to use theater in a democratic collaboration to determine the effects on the performers, as a result of focusing on the issue of body image and eating. The concerns raised by the professor underline the challenges described in Chapter 3, about the large responsibility resting in the role of Conductor, Joker or Difficultator, as well as the teacher in WP.

The impact of 'increasing intersections', above, refers, surprisingly, to the function this performance ended up having within the performers' families. Several young women improved relations with their mothers as a result of doing this work and having it witnessed by their families. Afterwards, they became more able to discuss body image issues, such as diet and weight, within the family. Where they had previously avoided this topic, they became more open and conversational on the subject, which led to other communication.

This case revealed youthful adult women to have, as may be common in America and other countries, a lot of unconscious notions about eating and body image. In fact, among the strongest impacts was that they became more aware of their own feelings, and even changed their habits and attitudes

concerning their own eating, as a result of this project. The players also reported that they had become more respectful of the choices other people make about the way they choose to eat, and that they now have a better understanding of the influence cultural pressures have on how people eat. The teacher had intuited the problem in her students, and designed this FT to raise their awareness.

Boal called theatre 'rehearsal for life', and the performative part of this program was therapeutic, personally and in relationships. In one scene, a young woman, while on stage, removed all her make-up and performed before her peers and family, without it. This act won respect from her mother, who had never in her life since childhood, had the courage to go out of the house without makeup.

The audience was not tracked for their responses and impacts. They watched the performance and left, as one would for ordinary theater. It would have been very worth the trouble to create a questionnaire, and request that they fill it out and leave it at the theater before departing, especially because the topic is relevant to many people in the college age group. Not only would the study have gleaned more information, but the act of reading and answering well-formed questions would have increased the thoughtfulness of audience members, and deepened their own reflections concerning the topic. Without a vehicle for expressing responses, someone complained about the ensemble's choice to depict the characters with agency instead of as victims (which was the point of view of the speaker). A questionnaire might have made evident the value of this choice, or given a constructive outlet for comments.

Since the audience is usually engaged in a Forum Theater performance (but not in this one), providing an audience questionnaire would have been another way to activate them regarding the subject, in keeping with Boal's



original intentions for the form. He wanted to 'dynamize' everyone concerned, not just the performers.

In a campus setting, and with a topic many people have feelings about, there could have been open discussions with the audience after the performance. A great deal of time and work went into the production. Some of the results, regarding the audience, have been lost.

The importance of each level of effort, the designing of an action, the implementing, capturing the immediate and long term impacts and results, and sharing the work through analytical writing about the experience, were revealed through this work. The ensemble -- with thoroughness, dedication, and imagination -- tutored themselves into their first experience of Forum Theater, and whatever else they gained from it, a record of their process has been made available by the professor who initiated it.

#### 4.4.2 Image Critical Literacy; Omaha, USA; public school third graders, teachers, and school principal

	IMPACTS	QUANTITY
	new perspectives	strong
	simplicity in complexity	strong
	attend to contradictions	strong
	community ownership	strong
	create a desire	some

Notes – Image Critical Literacy:

The great understanding and imagination on the part of the teacher, to see the efficacy of Boal's Image Theater for increasing critical literacy in low achieving, impoverished, mixed race third graders is an example of accepting Lederach's advice to take advantage of the power of simplicity in approaching complex problems. Image Theater was a good choice for young children, who tend to be body-centered, and for low achievers who may perform better engaging other sense modalities. The method opened up the minds of low-performing children to reading, and revealed their innate abilities to comprehend deep psychological truths from the stories they were reading. All because the teacher did not want to "fall into the trap of [having] low expectations,"<sup>96</sup> from her students. Grasping the potential of Image Theater, she and a colleague designed a three-day classroom theater intervention, and implemented and documented it in video and writing, and thereby proved the form an effective tool for improving reading and critical literacy.

On the children's first reading of stories about a little boy being 'oppressed' by the teacher, the children had quick shallow opinions, using easy language such as 'mean', and grandiose claims about what they would do, like 'blast off into space'. Then they were shown, in small groups, how to discuss the story at length, and were given the time to come up with a physical image tableau (using themselves as characters or elements in the sculpture, in short, Image Theater), which expressed the complexity of the story. Then, after their image was observed by the rest of the class (as a work of art, like sculpture), everyone discussed it again.

The fact that the children were given the autonomy to perform a creative act, to deliberate among themselves, to use multisensory experience (when reading, a primarily cognitive task, was their weak point) to bring out contradictions and possibilities from the text, stimulated mature and nuanced

---

<sup>96</sup> Carol Lloyd Rozansky, and Caroline Santos, "Boal's Image Theatre Creates a Space for Critical Literacy in Third-Graders", *Reading Improvement*, p. 179.

interpretations that distinguished the ambiguities and speculative aspects of the story. After the intervention, these 8 year old children did not fall into the trap of cliched answers. They brought to reading the same awareness and analysis that they had previously applied only to real life.

These little students, who had not been very stimulated by reading before, might soon be left behind in the educational system if they did not catch up with their peers. They had not been responding well to primarily cognitive classroom methods. Now they were suddenly invited physically into the story (reading became associated with moving and imagining), and for the first time they made the connection between reading (something they were failing at) and thinking critically (something they were capable of doing already, in contexts other than reading). For the first time they had a reason to feel proud regarding reading. And they had fun. It sparked a new desire for reading. The analysis that they had to apply to the stories, in order to perform Image Theater, is an approach they continued to use after Image Theater was no longer part of the lesson. The lesson generalized in their minds. This case exploited the benefits of Image Theater to the maximum.

Of Lederach's change criteria in the above table, 'simplicity becoming a source of energy at the core of complexity', can be attributed to the teachers' imagination and follow through. She developed a complex intervention, based on a simple idea, and followed through with thorough, nuanced steps in the execution. Without over-simplifying or rushing over the whole, she created several steps that were in themselves simple, and together created a 'wholeness', such as Lederach described.

Another significant detail in their design was that they, the teachers and the principal of the school, personally demonstrated for the children how to go about creating the images. They chose a text, discussed their understanding of it, and together with their own bodies created an image reflecting concepts they found in the text. Seeing their teachers get up in front of them and

perform Image Theater did more than demonstrate the form. By doing what they were asking their students to do, they communicated a non-hierarchical approach to teaching and learning. The children were respected, in the Freirian tradition, as scholars capable of insight, empathy and analysis, and they proved themselves receptive to the ‘humanizing’ process Freire espoused.

#### 4.4.3 Bullying Forum; Bullying; Donegal, Ireland; citizen actors, school children, parents, social workers

	IMPACTS	QUANTITY
	turning points	strong
	new perspectives	some
	in a web with my enemy	some
	community ownership	strong
	create something desired	strong

## Notes – Bullying Forum:

This case is an example of Forum Theater, within the framework of government social work with an impoverished marginalized community in rural Ireland. The Social Workers wanted to move away from heavily bureaucratic interactions, and communicate directly with people who are in an ongoing, low-grade state of need and neglect. And they wanted to legitimize, to the agency, alternative forms of outreach. Through designing and implementing the intervention, and writing this article, the authors contextualized dialogical forms of social work within the system. This intervention was a step towards meeting long-term goals, in a three-stage design, regarding work with families and children.

This article communicated the complementary and reiterative value of different types of intervention in peacebuilding, as well as the beauty of a well-formed intervention. It showed, with an example of timing successive stages (over a three or four year period, including anticipatory funding) of programs that build on each other, how much foresight, patience, commitment and time can produce good results.

The year before, the agency had used an EU grant to give employment to the unemployed, with the offer of a stipend to work and train in an established theater group. Now the people who had taken advantage of that opportunity, with new experience and skills in theater studies, were able to function informally with Forum Theater for the benefit of their community's families and children, in the second stage of the initiative (described here).

In the rehearsal it was these citizen actors who came up with the topic, bullying, inspired by their own past experiences, and knowing it continued to be a problem in and out of school. When they performed at several schools, both parents and children were in the audience, and were told that after seeing the play once, they would be offered an opportunity to see it several

times more, enacted with whatever changes they, as 'spectators', would suggest. Everyone got very involved and invested, even, sometimes, the known bullies. The many suggestions tried showed that there are no right and wrong answers, and no easy answers for bullying, but it led to more options, and flexible thinking.

The follow-up interviews with the players, and the school personnel, did not include first-hand response from the children, but their reactions and comments were reported second-hand. The actors themselves, who were in a kind of recovery from 'redundancy' (unemployment) and other limitations (such as rehabilitation from alcoholism), reported experiencing challenges (for instance, the fact that improvisational acting is not always easy), and transformative catharsis (relating to improvements in other aspects of their lives), as a result of doing this work. They were full of ideas about how to carry it forward.

As marginalized citizen themselves, they appreciated being seen as having something worthy to contribute to the community. The social workers who instigated the program were proposing, based on this success, new topics for application (such as drug awareness among youth). And they were suggesting how their work could be replicated by other agencies in other areas, to achieve an overall "aim to achieve a fully democratized form of problem solving grounded in civil society".<sup>97</sup> Finally, the authors challenged the social work field, much the way Lederach challenged the peacebuilding field, to re-invent itself with methods offering more intimacy with the people they serve, as this theater intervention did.

---

<sup>97</sup>, Stan Houston, Tom Magill, Mark McCollum, and Trevor Spratt, "Developing Creative Solutions to the Problems of Children and their Families: Communicative Reason and the Use of Forum Theatre", *Child and Family Social Work*, 6., 2001, p. 292.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This investigation began by asking why and how can art processes, such as improvisational theater, impact peacebuilding? What is it about the make up and mechanisms of human beings that render artistic processes impactful in peacebuilding – why are humans responsive to art, how does art communicate to people, what do they make of it for themselves, and what can it offer in problem solving and peacebuilding? What intellectual theories claim that methods, pedagogy and tools from narrative, performative, improvisational arts have something to offer to people struggling with conflict? What is the practical evidence that the art of improvisational theater, as it is being used, is an effective tool in peacebuilding? If art is found to impact change, what is needed to put it into practice?

After examining intellectual theory, applying it to the history and practice of the art of improvisational theater, and tracking its effects, it has been demonstrated, intelligibly that the language of art has always been naturally understood by humans, in its genesis of gestures, pantomime, sentiment, beauty, ritual and all manner of instinctual and contrived acts, ways that address peace and conflict in a productively as a complement to cognitive peace work.

What is the intellectual evidence that art is needed in learning and communicating? By explaining in detail how we learn and communicate, Gregory Bateson showed that pretend, metaphor, metacommunication, and communicating in multiple logical levels (all elements that have been shown to be concentrated in art) are necessary for learning in complex interactions,

and in generating the 'unlearned' (new). He also clarified why whole systems (such as a person or a community), to survive and thrive, need to combine conserving characteristics with risking tendencies (traditional structures with the new).

James Hillman pointed out how, from a psychological perspective, art satisfies a human longing for another kind of language, found in art, a language that matches the mysterious inner life of individuals and the complexity of collective predicaments, to complement the language we use for discussing external affairs. He also posited that art can reach levels of passion that correspond to passions found in conflict, and that this partly accounts for why art can move us in ways that dry discourse does not.

Joseph Campbell examined myths and stories from all time and all cultures, and discovered that they have always been used to craft meaning for living, to adapt to change, and to master grave challenges, both internal and external, faced by human beings and communities. He believed that minimizing or not taking seriously these artistic forms contributes to modern malaise and conflict. All three of these scholars proposed that artists sometimes possess a shamanistic quality that makes their work valuable in processes of transformation and transcendence. The synonymous languages of these three scholars support the recommendations made by John Paul Lederach, to bring more art and art processes into the field of peacebuilding.

Historic precedents and founding theories of improvisational theater reveal that it was grounded in social work, psychology, pedagogy and problem-solving from the beginning. One can imagine that there are many unrecorded cases of improvisational theater that did not meet the objectives set for it, but the ones reviewed in these case studies demonstrated a high degree of ingenuity and efficacy for very tangible results, such as improving reading skills, overcoming crippling anger and fear of reprisal, raising awareness



about body image and improving intimate communication in families, including marginalized citizens in helping their community grapple with bullying, learning conflict negotiation skills and the attitudes that support win-win solutions for social problems, opening pathways to more freedom of speech in a closed society, and drawing refugees into the midst of the population which is hosting them. The varieties of successful and interesting cases not included in this study are limitless.

Art has been demonstrated to be a profound and essential tool (especially when used as a complement to traditional formal methods) for designing interventions in peacebuilding. Courses preparing workers in the field to engage with artists and art processes would be an asset in nearly any program, including education, high level diplomatic negotiations, strengthening civil society at a structural level, reconciliation, dynamic generation of strategies, community level social programs, individual recovery from trauma, disrupting intractable patterns of dysfunction, celebration of what has endured and what is being achieved, and so on. As Lederach pointed out, artists bring another way of thinking. In conflict, what could be more needed than another way of thinking?

Looking at the case studies to identify the single most important factor which might account for what success they achieved towards resolving problems, it might be that the aspirations were moderate and the preparations were thorough (staged and sequenced). The artists and peacebuilders exhibited enough optimism and imagination to do the work, without being defeated by doubt. They recognized the value of unpretentious gestures and small improvements, within contexts of ambiguity and contradiction. They observed and listened to the participants to analyze what had been achieved, and to ascertain what problems persisted or arose from the work. Therefore, my conclusion is that in order to productively exploit the reasons given for human responsiveness to art (why) and the explanations given for artistic approaches and methods (how), art must not be seen as a mysterious or

trivial pursuit in peace training and field work. When taken seriously and used skillfully in terms of the attitudes and values that support all peacebuilding, and when artistic principles are understood and practiced, art can sometimes stand alone, and it may often be a necessary complement to cognitive strategies in peace work.

The quantity and quality of resources available through scholarship was both humbling and encouraging. This research has been primarily a discovery, analysis, and synthesis of work that has already been done, by the peacebuilder, John Paul Lederach, the scholar Joseph Campbell, the psychologist James Hillman, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson, and by artist peacebuilders using theater and writing about it, and their predecessors.

If this research contributes something new, it is to treat together the work from these different fields, to make apparent in synonymous languages, evidence of the efficacy of art in the field of peace and conflict, offering intricate explanations for why theater should affect change, as well as examples of how it has worked. As a result, the propositions set forth by John Paul Lederach are taken seriously in this thesis, and are supported and enlarged upon, both theoretically and practically. Written from an artist's voice, point of view, and way of thinking, the theorists and the practitioners have been understood and evaluated from the perspective of first-hand experience. The evidence is surprisingly abundant and strong how supportive, both intellectually and practically, art is in peacebuilding.

The overall conclusion from findings in this study suggest that art, as we have seen here in the form of improvisational theater, has been proving itself an effective tool in peacebuilding, throughout history, and worldwide, as well as in contemporary times. Like all others known, it is not a perfect tool, suited to all occasions, but what it has to offer, as evidenced in the case studies, is superior for and sometimes essential to aspects of certain problems, such as building rapport among groups, generating fresh energy and ideas for tackling

problems, connecting with emotional experiences for healing among afflicted people, introducing topics that have been publicly suppressed, communicating concepts and information in a variety of sense modalities beyond the didactic, and many more.

The case studies demonstrated examples of Lederach's criteria for meaningful change: capacity to see interdependence with an enemy, paradoxical curiosity to remain present with apparent contradictions, opening spaces for creative acts, willingness to risk, expecting the unexpected, creating something desired, creating intersections for exchange (Lederach 2005). In Lederach's search for what can make a difference, we find the language Hillman claimed was needed to speak on a level that matches deeply personal internal experience, as a complement to external strategies for living and problem solving.

The case studies leave unanswered questions about what has happened since the interventions took place. In Cuba, for instance, since Fidel Castro stepped down, how has the change in government affected the Playback Community? What role might Playback or Forum Theater have in Cuban communities going forward as the United States normalizes relations with Cuba, impacting its economy and culture? In the village in India, were there any follow-up measures taken, after the intervention, to help the community get relief from police brutality? In Ireland, has the system followed the lead of the social workers who led the theater programs instituted more of similar programs?

The theories and examples cited in the above text are reiterated from other sources. In 'Classical Mythology' (Morford and Lenardon, 2003), Dr. Robert J. Lenardon suggests that myths, (as well as other forms of story and performance, from the perspective of this study) perform an essential function in human life, as a complement to science and facts, because they constitute "a many-faceted personal and cultural phenomenon created to provide a

reality and a unity to what is transitory and fragmented in the world that we experience ... [that] provides us with absolutes in the place of ephemeral values and with a comforting perception of the world that is necessary to make the insecurity and terror of existence bearable. ... [where] Facts change [and become] soon out of date.”<sup>98</sup> A scholar and professor, he quotes, in the same book, the dancer/choreographer Martha Graham, when she referred to the inherent instability of established facts and the paradoxical stability of truths found in art. She said that scientific discoveries “will change and perhaps grow obsolete [whereas] ... art is eternal, for it reveals the inner landscape, which is the soul of man.”<sup>99</sup> Artists dare to use the word ‘soul’, given early in this writing as a synonym for essences (essential qualities that characterize). And they see essences as solid and ‘eternal’, compared to the fleeting qualities found in public policies.

Chapter 3 showed art, in the form of improvisational theater, to be learnable and teachable. The case studies in Chapter 4 showed examples of artist practitioners who were professionally trained and those who were self-tutored. Both demonstrated the capacity to stimulate change. This begs the question, why artistic approaches are not already more fully integrated in the field, as a complement to academic and diplomatic programs that are grounded in cognitive models. Why not offer a fully elaborated curriculum in these functions of art in peace and conflict training and university courses, for instance? When art is offered in these settings, why is the time allotted so often insufficient for a serious approach, which amounts to treating it as a diversion instead of an application? Further research might lead us to design better art curriculum and sufficient art interventions in peacebuilding.

Why are properly trained artists not deployed routinely in peacebuilding teams, where other skill sets are well represented? In this thesis, the theorists and the artist practitioners are each represented, but separately. An

---

<sup>98</sup> Mark Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (Seventh Edition), New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

interesting study to take up in the future might be to embed artist's with peacebuilding teams, to collaborate on designing interventions together, maximizing the complementarity of approaches. No doubt, this, too, is already being done, but the profile for such initiatives needs to be raised to the level of normal practice.

Recommendations based on the conclusions of this study are (1) to bring the quality of art processes into all aspects of peacebuilding, by deploying more artists to collaborate in peacebuilding, and by training more peace workers in artistic approaches; (2) to increase the quantity of arts interventions in the practice of conflict resolution, by offering in-depth courses to peacebuilders, and by choosing artistic approaches more often in the field of peacebuilding; and (3) to begin exploiting the complementary relationship and potential between artistic approaches and cognitive approaches to resolving problems, by designing sequenced and interdependent programs and interventions.

This study offers insight as to what it is about humans that gives art, and theater, the power to affect us in ways that can lead to changes in our wellbeing, our thinking, our decision, and our actions. Although art is not seen as a miracle cure, it is nevertheless a discipline that belongs at the core of peace work, not the periphery where it is usually found. This study sheds light on role of improvisational theater in peacebuilding, while many other art forms could be explored for their efficacy in the field.

Following Gregory Bateson's advice to build on the effects of synonymous languages, it became apparent that not only have we explored multiple voices to explore similar principles, but theater itself (as well as other art forms) utilizes synonymous languages. It communicates in multiple sensory modalities -- visual language, color, the language of sounds as well as words and vocal tones, physical movement, and touch -- each of which can strengthen, along with words, a message, and enrich it with layers of meaning. Artistic interventions, such as stories, images, dance, theater, and

music, when used effectively in peace and conflict work, might also be seen as a synonymous language, which reinforces cognitive messages from negotiators, social workers, legislators, educators, and others, addressing the same problems.

If the vision of a standing army of peace artists sounds grandiose, a more achievable direction for the future would be that many more schools, NGOs, civic and governmental organizations, and businesses invite artists in to collaborate. The lonely artist in a garret is not entirely a thing of the past, but artists, being natural catalysts, are much better at teamwork than they are seen to be. The case studies have shown that artists are natural collaborators in human solutions.

“What would happen,” asks John Paul Lederach, “if leaders of national and global politics invoked the artist, particularly at times when violence is present or its use is about to be justified?”<sup>100</sup> Rather than marginalizing artists, John Paul Lederach, James Hillman, Joseph Campbell, and Gregory Bateson all have called for them to be invited to engage fully in the center of solutions to human problems.

---

<sup>100</sup>Lederach, op. cit. p. 176

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bateson, Gregory, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution and Epistemology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, 2000.
- Bateson, Gregory, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity - Advances in Systems Theory, Complexity, and the Human Sciences*, New York: EP Dutton, 1979.
- Bateson, Gregory and Bateson, Catherine, *Angels Fear: Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred*, New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987.
- Benjamin, Robert (April 2005), "Confessions of a Tamed Cynic – Review of The Moral Imagination by John Paul Lederach", <http://www.mediate.com/articles/benjamin20.cfm> April 2005, (accessed June 12, 2014).
- Boal, Augusto, *Theater of the Oppressed*, London: Pluto Press, 1979, 2000.
- Boal, Augusto, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, London: Routledge, 1992.
- Campbell, Joseph, *The Power of Myth*, New York: Anchor Books, a division of Random House, 1991.
- Dennis, Rea, "Big Clumsy Feet Stomping all Over: Shame, Caution and Fear in Performance for Peace Building", *Studies in Theater and Performance*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2009; Intellect Ltd., 2009, p. 53-66.
- Donahue-Keegan, Debra, and Maria LaRusso, *Independent Evaluation of Workable Peace*, Cambridge, MA: commissioned by Consensus Building Institute, 1999.
- Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1970.
- Glassman, Michael, Gizem Erdem, and Mitchell Bartholomew, "Action Research and its History as an Adult Education Movement for Social Change", *Adult Education Quarterly* 63 (3), SAGE, 2012, p. 272-288.

Gibson, Mike. Personal Interview. March 13, 2014.

Hillman, James, *A Terrible Love of War*, New York: Penguin Press, 2004.

Hutt, Jenny and Bev Hosking, "Playback Theatre: A Creative Resource for Reconciliation", *Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts*, A virtual Collection, *Peacebuilding and the Arts*, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, 2004.

Houston, Stan, Tom Magill, Mark McCollum, and Trevor Spratt, "Developing Creative Solutions to the Problems of Children and their Families: Communicative Reason and the Use of Forum Theater", *Child and Family Social Work* 2001, 6, Blackwell Science Ltd., 2001, p. 285-193.

Howard, Leigh Anne, "Speaking Theater/Doing Pedagogy: Re-visiting Theater of the Oppressed", *Communication Education* Vol. 53 No. 3, Routledge, July 2004, p. 217-233.

Koppett, Kat, *Training to Imagine - Practical Improvisational Theater Techniques*, Sterling, Virginia, USA: Stylus Publishing, 2013.

Lederach, John Paul, *The Moral Imagination - The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Meer, Laurie Frederik, "Playback Theatre in Cuba, The Politics of Improvisation and Free Expression"; *TDR: The Drama Review* 51:4, NYU and MIT, Winter 2007, p. 106-120.

Morford, Mark, and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, Seventh Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Scheiffele, Dr. Eberhard, *The Theater of Truth: Psychodrama, Spontaneity and Improvisation – the Theatrical Theories and Influences of Jacob Levy Moreno*, 1995 PhD. dissertation University of California, Berkeley, privately published 2008.

Prepared by Simpson, A. and E.S.C. Weiner, *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, Oxford, New York, Toronto, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Karachi, Petaling Jaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Cape Town, Melbourne, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1989.



Pratt, Geraldine, and Caleb Johnston, "Turning Theater into Law, and Other Spaces of Politics", *Cultural Geographies* 14, Sage Publications, 2007, p. 94-95.

Rozansky, Carol Lloyd, and Caroline Santos, "Boal's Image Theater Creates a Space for Critical Literacy in Third-Graders", *Reading Improvement*, Vol 46, Issue 3, Fall 2009, p. 178-188.

Sapolsky, Robert (2010) "This is Your Brain on Metaphors", The Opinionator, The Stone, The Opinion Pages, *The New York Times* online, November 14, 2010, 4:32 p.m., <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/this-is-your-brain-on-metaphors/> (accessed December 18, 2014).

Shulman, Misha. Personal Interview. April 25, 2014.

Smith, Stacie Nicole, and David Fairman, "Normalizing Effective Conflict Management Through Academic Curriculum Integration: The Example of Workable Peace", *New Directions for Youth Development*, No. 102, Wiley Periodicals, Inc., Summer 2004, p. 47-68.

Sokolowski, Peter et al editors, Free Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> December 18, 2014.

Trafton, Anne (2014) "In the Blink of an Eye" MIT News Office; January 16, 2014 <http://newsoffice.mit.edu/2014/in-the-blink-of-an-eye-0116> (accessed May 10, 2014).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzhfA574Vil>

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=omETZmMHVp1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omETZmMHVp1)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4dGLxXXJDQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3l1u23BtaM>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXwo\\_iCnCag](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXwo_iCnCag)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLVDsaW1YEU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOUC6fQYYbc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmJK18H2Py8>