Everyone but Rizzo: Using the Arts to Transform Communities

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Abstract

Issues that contribute to the conversations about the connections between religion, peace, and conflict are clearly complex. The majority of discussions on this topic have been conducted at the theoretical, meta-level as scholars debate the "concept" of peace and the roles religion can play in conflict and the search for peace.

The paper suggests it may be more rewarding to study specific communities where conflict has been resolved and community has been enabled than to engage in yet another theoretical construction of the nature of peace. Using a "postmodern hermeneutical theology" as the form of analysis, the paper investigates ways the arts have been used in three very diverse international communities as a means of giving voice, identity, and value to those who have traditionally been at the "margins" of society. The Philadelphia Mural Arts Program has engaged in community organization as well as artistic activity to transform gang-ridden and graffiti-spoiled neighborhoods with expressive, meaning-filled murals. The "Mother's Clubs" of Lima, Peru's slum area known as the Pamplona Alta have transformed incredibly poor, voiceless women into persons of worth and dignity through the production of colorful three-dimensional fabric art called *cuadros* and *arpilleras*. And a non-scripted, improvisational approach to theatre called "Playback Theatre" has given attention to the stories brought by members of the audience as means of experiencing truth, grace, and redemption around the world. These three examples each illustrate the claims of postmodern hermeneutical theology that it is in the small, local, personal experience of peacemaking and the practices of redemption that peace can overcome conflict.

Everyone But Rizzo: Using The Arts To Transform Communities

The topic of our meeting has intrigued me personally for many years, going back to my undergraduate days in the Viet Nam War era. My double major of religion and political science should be an indication of this long-term involvement in the matter. I usually tell persons that I had that double major so no one would talk to me at cocktail parties. While I have not completely abandoned the systemic solutions to international conflict we sought in the late 60s and early 70s, I have resolved for myself that it is **far** more important for theologians, religious educators, and other persons of faith to become engaged in hands-on, interpersonal practices of peacemaking than to focus on creating a constructive "theory" of peace. It no longer makes sense to me to talk about justice, redemption, forgiveness, or duty as universal concepts *alone*; I believe I am only acting faithfully when I act justly in community, when I engage in practices that empower reconciliation and redemption of relationships, when I model forgiveness, and when I live loyally and in solidarity with others. The task of religion in this process must be working in partnership with persons and institutions to, in Parker Palmer's wonderfully evocative phrase, "create a space where the community of truth is practiced." (Palmer 1998, 90)

I have always been engaged in the arts. I began my college education as a music education major at Florida State University and still play my saxophone regularly. Our son and daughter-in-law are musicians. I began writing poetry when I was quite young. While my attempts at drawing more closely resemble something produced by a committee than "art", I have become quite interested in art, sculpture, and (partially because of our campus' connection with Frank Lloyd Wright) architecture. Through our daughter, I have become a student of dance and theatre as well. So, it would come as little surprise to those who know me that I have been drawn to ways in which the arts can help one live faithfully in community. My experience with the arts has convinced me that the arts have a power to transform persons and communities in ways our more typical scientific and assessment-centered approaches to problem-solving cannot. As Jo Salas, one of the founders of "Playback Theatre," has said, "The arts weave our lives with others, not only our contemporaries but our forebears. Through the arts we find and communicate meaning, reassurance, healing, vision: we move toward fulfilling ourselves, individually and as a society." (Salas 2007, 10)

My approach to the topic of our Round Table will be to examine three specific communities in which the arts have contributed to healing, reconciling, and redeeming the brokenness that has affected them. The three approaches to be addressed are the Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia, a women's cooperative in Peru that produces fabric sculptures known as *arpilleras* or*cuadros*, and a form of non-scripted theatre known as Playback Theatre. I will use a form of postmodern analysis as an organizing as well as a hermeneutical device in addressing the three subjects.

A Postmodern Hermeneutical Theology

The modern era of theology, philosophy, and social interaction which began with the Enlightenment emphasized human reason freed from the hegemony of church and state, the autonomous self as a knowing subject, the emergence of "consciousness" as a scientific understanding of self and all knowledge, and a top-down, hierarchical flow of authority from "centers" of knowledge. Biblical theologian Walter Brueggemann claims the modern world's focus on reason, universal principles, method, and logic was undergirded by a male, Western, largely-White cultural hegemony. (Brueggemann 1993, 10-11) "Truth" was regarded as having an objective, absolute status that could be accessed by humans through the application of scientific principles of investigation. The modern approach to virtually all intellectual pursuits required an "objectification" of the "other" that allowed the pre-eminence of the investigating self.

A Postmodern Response to Modernism

A shift in this perspective began to emerge in the latter quarter of the twentieth century. Jean François Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) presented postmodernism's basic challenge to the assumptions of modernism. Lyotard's critique of modernism in this work was threefold:

- "Knowledge" is a form of discourse associated only with its **particular** intellectual area of investigation, rather than with any sense of "ultimate meaning" or "absolute truth"
- The several "metanarratives" that characterized modernism ("scientism," Christianity's "salvation history," Wagner's "Ring Cycle" of Germanic myths, Marx's "class struggle") no longer hold. Only **local** narratives that tell the story of the particular community have meaning
- The "de-centering" of older forms of hegemony by the challenges of feminism, third-world liberation theologies, and alternate theories of science (such as Thomas Kuhn's 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*) brought attention to the role of "power" in sustaining the former hegemonies

Thus, postmodernism began a move away from "grand narratives" and toward "small narratives." Rather than **a** center for the human condition, the "postmodern condition" recognized **multiple** centers and celebrated the "plurality" of truth. Paul Lakeland says, "philosophy does not so much abandon the search for truth as discover that there is a multiplicity of perspectives from which to view the same set of data." (Lakeland 1997, 37) Richard Rorty further developed this theme, claiming that the search for universal moral truth is futile and that the only source of authority for moral decision-making is the agreement of "everyone in the room" (Rorty 1985, 217-218.)

Michel Foucault's "poststructuralist" critique challenged the modernist concentration on individual consciousness and claimed that **any** social phenomenon is the result of a complex interrelationship of factors. Like Lyotard, Foucault called attention to the existence of "power" relations inherent in each of these factors (see, especially, Foucault's 1980 work *Power/Knowledge* and *The Order of Things.*) According to Foucault, "knowledge" is an instrument of power; in knowing, we control and in controlling, we know (see his 1971 article, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.") Jessica Kulynych states that Foucault has described a "new" kind of power: "disciplinary power":

> Power can no longer be understood primarily as a repressive mechanism that acts upon subjects from above, stifling their activities and limiting their options. Instead, modern power is primarily productive. It is no longer above us but within us. Such power works through the production of knowledge and the emergence of techniques of surveillance, examination, and classification (Kulynych 1998, 144-5)

"Liberation Theologies" and Transformation

Contemporary feminist theologians, such as Rebecca Chopp (Chopp 1989b, 63-76) and Sharon Welch have focused on the ways the power structures of church, state, and society have kept women among those who have **not** been invited "into the room" that Rorty discussed. Welch contends that theology must attend to the actual historical **practices** of faith communities, rather than simply focusing on their symbols and doctrines. (Welch 1985, 18)

Similarly, third-world forms of liberation theology have begun their critiques of church and society with an analysis of power relations similar to postmodern philosophy and theology. The Brazilian educator, Paolo Freire , developed what he called "education for critical consciousness" from an analysis of power and knowledge. Freire's well-known concept of "conscientization" (what he called *conscientizaçao*) goes beyond the modernist understanding of "consciousness" as a form of internalizing cognitive awareness to a "raising of one's consciousness" that empowers transformation of self and community through action. (Freire 1973, 3-4) Freire states, "consciousness is not changed by lessons, lectures and eloquent sermons, but by the action of human beings on the world." (2) "Conscientization" is not simply changing one's knowledge; it also involves changing how one thinks about oneself **in** the world and leads one to engage in critical dialogue with others that leads to action to transform the world in which one lives.

Freire's "problem-posing" approach to education opposed the top-down, vertical "banking method" of teaching which made the learner nothing more than a passive recipient of knowledge. (Freire 1987, 57-74) In the "banking method," information became little more than a commodity and the student became an object acted upon by the teacher.

In "problem-posing" education, teacher and learner engage one another as fellow subjects who each enter into dialogue around a shared subject matter, with a shared goal that new knowledge about the subject matter will emerge from the dialectic. He states, "Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the- one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow." (Freire 1987, 67) Thus Freire's approach to education for "critical consciousness" is a "horizontal" one, rather than a hierarchical "vertical" approach. (Freire 1987, 45)

A second contribution Freire offers is the development of what he called "generative words." (Freire 1987, 49) "Generative words" refer to the words that persons in a community use to name their world and make sense of their experience. After experiencing the failure of the state-sponsored reading curriculum he was supposed to teach, Freire moved into the communities of the Amazon and the Atlantic coast as a "participant-observer." Rather than trying to force an external language system onto the consciousness of the persons in these communities, Freire engaged in **dialogue** with them, worked alongside them, ate with them—and, most of all, **listened** to them. In the long-term dialogue he established with these communities, numerous words that expressed their personal and communal experience began to appear frequently as representative of the consciousness of the people—"generative" words. Freire then organized the "generative" words into a series of "generative themes." Freire led the people in learning **their** experience, rather than learning the experience of the Brazilian Education Ministry and its educational "experts." Learning was purposive in Freire's approach; it was directed toward naming the experience of those within the particular community and engaging in dialogue on how to change the conditions that kept the people poor, powerless, and forgotten—as well as illiterate.

Thirdly, Freire's concept of "conscientization" engaged person in critical reflection and action to humanize one's world. (Wingeier 1980, 564) Freire believed that, when persons in community are given a voice and are valued as subjects, rather than treated as objects, and are then allowed to learn through their own, restored voices, they can begin to not only break down the myths of their objectifications but can begin to re-mythologize their worlds and participate in transforming their experience. (Wingeier 575) Traditional approaches to education cannot accomplish this kind of "critical consciousness."

A Hermeneutical Theology of Transformation

Hans-Georg Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics" has not been considered a "postmodern" philosophy, due in large part to his connection with the modern German philosophers Husserl and Heidegger. However, Gadamer's form of "intersubjective dialogue" shares many of the themes developed by postmodernism and the various liberation theologies.

Gadamer believed that the major problem with modernism was the "subject/object dichotomy" that began with Descartes. This dichotomy essentially claimed that, through rational, scientific investigation the knowing "subject" could at least gain a glimpse of universal truth.

Gadamer claimed this elevation of the knowing “subject” simultaneously resulted in the “objectification” of the “other,” whether that “other” is a lab specimen, an idea, or another person. Modernism created an “I-It” relationship that essentially gave all the power of “knowledge” to the knowing “subject.” Gadamer argued for an “intersubjective” relationship in which both partners in a relationship have “subject” status. In the interchange that exists in intersubjective conversation there is a radical “I-THOU” relationship that exists. Intersubjectivity is most likely to flourish when one is open to the voice of the “other,” treats the partner with a basic sense of respect, listens intently to what the “other” is saying as though it might actually be **true** , and attempts to be in a sense of solidarity with the “other.” (Smith 1993)

Gadamer uses “dialogue” as the means by which truth and meaning come into being in human experience. Each partner in dialogue is a subject who has her or his unique “horizon” as the perspective from which that person makes sense of the world and brings that “horizon” into the dialogue. (Stover 1975-1976, 35) Meaning and truth emerge when one subject listens to the truth claim of the other subject and opens herself or himself to a dialogue with the “other” that moves back and forth between the subjects and each subject’s “horizon.” The “truth” that emerges is not the truth brought by either partner in the dialogue; it is a **new** truth that emerges as the two separate horizons are “fused” to create a **new** truth and meaning. This “intersubjective dialogue” operates for Gadamer, whether the “other” is a person, a text, or a doctrinal statement. Attention to the voice of the “other,” the “truth claim” of the “other,” and the “subjectivity” of the “other” is central to what Gadamer claims.

A “postmodern hermeneutical theology,” then, includes a handful of interconnected claims:

- The “de-centering” of postmodernism places the emphasis on the “other” rather than upon traditional power “centers”
- The “metanarratives” of modernism are rejected in favor of the claims of local personal and community narratives
- All forms of knowledge have an inherent element of power connected with them, especially as it concerns the question of those who have access to that power
- It is more important to focus on the practices of a faith community than solely upon that community’s doctrinal claims
- Transformation of the person is only possible alongside action for the transformation of one’s community—which is an action of “conscientization”
- Intersubjective dialogue is a pre-condition for the emergence of truth and meaning

Philadelphia’s “Mural Arts Program”

What is now the “Mural Arts Program” began in 1984 as one part of a city-wide Anti-Graffiti Network. Mayor Wilson Goode devoted energy and money to ridding the city of the Cubist-inspired wall writing style its artists called “tagging,” as well controlling the gang territory-marking it indicated. One of the first persons hired was a young graduate of Stanford who had been trained in the Los Angeles mural tradition inspired by Diego Rivera and WPA artists like

Thomas Hart Benton. Jane Golden was asked to re-direct the energies of the "taggers" from destructive graffiti to constructive murals. (Golden, Rice and Pompilio 2006, 12)

In 1996, the Mural Arts Program was moved from a rather free-form city program to the Mayor's Office of Community Services and the mission of the program changed from eradicating blight to using the arts to transform individuals and the communities in which they lived. (Golden, Rice, and Kinney 2002, 80) "In some ways, MAP has become more about changing lives than about art. Don't get me wrong: the art we're producing is still beautiful and inspiring and important to us. But the changes I see in the people we work with are also beautiful and inspiring and important. I've seen art provide comfort to troubled lives. I've seen art inspire people to change and do better. I've seen art become a way to rebuild community. And I've seen art serve as a tool of redemption." (Golden, Rice and Pompilio 2006, 10)

It is a sense of marginalization that drives "taggers" to target "offending" billboards and the culture of branding in poor urban neighborhoods. In addition to this act of protest, there is the unmistakable use of graffiti to express gang identity and the marking of territory. As Golden states, "In impoverished neighborhoods, people see graffiti as a symbol of hopelessness—a manifestation of the forces threatening their survival. They have to worry about their kids getting shot, and the fact that quite literally every exterior surface is covered with graffiti is a reminder that their neighborhood is out of control." (Golden, Rice, and Kinney 2002, 42)

The Mural Arts Program has become a form of community art that attempts to reflect the voices of those in the Philadelphia communities where the murals have been developed. Where graffiti "tagged" commercial symbols with a dramatic "NO!" and protested abandoned buildings and poverty with visual counter-claims, the murals developed by Golden and her associates transformed ugliness and neglect with beauty and hope. As Brendan Lowe has pointed out, the murals created by MAP are pro-art, not anti-graffiti. (Lowe 2007, 1) The murals of MAP employ some of the nation's best known mural artists, many of whom began their careers as "taggers" recruited by Jane Golden and others with MAP. From the beginning of the organization, MAP has taken the attitude that "they as artists simply facilitated the community's mural-making, claiming no pride of ownership." (Golden, Rice and Pompilio 2006, 27)

Community Art, Not Public Art

In his foreword to *Philadelphia Murals and the Stories They Tell*, Timothy W. Drescher emphasizes that early U.S. murals were an example of public art, in which an artist like Thomas Hart Benton would create art work that reflected a public theme and be installed in a public place such as a school, library, or post office. MAP represents what Drescher calls a "democratic creative process" in which the "just plain folks" of a community have been given the opportunity "to express themselves and have a say in what they wanted to see every day in their neighborhoods." (Golden, Rice and Pompilio 2006, 7)

Drescher continues, "In seemingly endless community meetings, MAP demonstrates respect for people who are largely excluded from government and traditional vehicles of public expression such as the mass media. Nevertheless, these people know what they believe and have strong opinions about what should (and should not) be represented on the walls of their communities. MAP's greatest strength is in knowing how to listen at sometimes raucous community meetings, derive useful unifying kernels from often vaguely stated wishes, and turn them into positive visual images worthy of wall-scale public expression." (8) Only communities willing to engage in dialogue, commit themselves to maintaining the property, and work toward community transformation are considered for the MAP grants. (How to Request a Mural 2008)

Peace Wall, Gray's Ferry

In 1997, the South Philadelphia neighborhood known as Gray's Ferry was the site of nationally-publicized racial unrest. Jane Golden and Lillian Ray began holding a series of community meetings with sparse attendance and little energy until they began knocking on doors and speaking with children and adults on the streets. They seemed to be competing with two opposing community groups: one largely Caucasian, the other predominantly African American—mutual animosity seemed to be the only thing the two groups had in common. Through the tireless effort of the two MAP leaders, a new group called "Grays Ferry United" was formed with the mission of bringing the neighborhood back together. (Golden, Rice, and Kinney 2002, 52) The idea of a mural as an answer to the neighborhood tension seemed shallow to many, but Golden and Ray pressed on with meeting after meeting.

Members of the community met to discuss the issues that led to the tension. Some shared images that symbolized their frustration and anger; others brought ideas and designs that demonstrated their hope for a renewed community. Some wanted expressly religious imagery. Others suggested more metaphorical images. In the midst of the dialogue, Ray suggested a mix of hands—young, old, multiple colors—as a theme that seemed to represent what she heard from the participants.

When the group met again a couple of weeks later, Golden brought several sketches, based on the dialogue from the previous meeting, and solicited the input of the group. "I see murals as a sort of autobiography of the city," she said. "Murals provide people with a voice. It's their statement, their history, their future." (55) The residents of Gray's Ferry loved the idea of the hands because it symbolized the diversity of the community as well as the amount of hard work that would be required for the troubled community to reconcile. Photographs were taken of numerous hands from those in the neighborhood, manipulated into the artist's design, projected on a wall, twenty-two feet high by forty-feet wide, sketched, and then painted with a partnership that included Golden, Ray, their co-workers from MAP, and members—young and old, black and white—of the neighborhood. "Peace workshops" were held with neighborhood children of all races, and these workshops resulted in three mini-murals the children painted at area recreation centers.

When the mural was finished in December 1997, the entire community gathered for a formal dedication of the project. The juxtaposition of the diverse hands with a white dove and the words, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" led Ray to declare, "The mural was a symbol of the love that was here in Grays Ferry, as opposed to the hate. It's utopia." (57)

Healing Walls

Crime is an ever-present concern in many urban areas, and Philadelphia is no different from its peer cities. As Maureen O'Connell states, "Philadelphia is not always a city of brotherly love. It recently registered the highest number of homicides in the nation." (O'Connell 2008, 1) Through

MAP programs like ARTscape! and artWORKS, dozens of young offenders have been led to use art to reflect on the lifestyle and personal choices that had put them in the Corrections system. A part of both programs has been bringing some of the students to Graterford prison, the sixth largest maximum security prison in the nation, where they work with inmates in dialogue as well as in collaborative art. (Golden, Rice and Pompilio 2006, 108) In 1992, the long-standing program led to an idea: to create a ”Healing Wall” that would bring together inmates, youth in the various MAP programs, victims, and the communities that had been harmed by the actions of the inmates.

The idea was not without its problems. There was fear and distrust on all sides of the attempted partnership. Since the prisoners were in a maximum security facility, their work on the project would need to be portable from inside the Walls to the community’s walls. Kathy Buckley, director of victims’ services for the Office of the Victim Advocate, liked the idea of bringing together these groups that are generally kept apart. For victims or their families, such contact could be another step in their healing. “It’s hard to see offenders, some of whom have committed heinous crimes, are also human beings,” she says. “And for offenders, it’s seeing ‘Oh. We’re not totally hated by these people.’” (Golden, Rice and Pompilio 2006, 110)

The physical limitations of the inmates’ participation was handled through the use of parachute cloth and similar fabrics, onto which the inmates sketched, detailed, and painted the images they had developed in collaboration with the youth and with MAP artists. The finished fabric was then attached to the wall outside the Walls with gel mastic and sealed.

The emotional limitations of the project took a bit more work to solve than the physical ones. The original design met the needs of the inmates, but the families of the victims and the members of the community where the “Healing Wall” would be set felt the design only told the story from the perspective of the inmates. And they were correct. The solution was a second design process and a second “Healing Wall,” this one symbolizing the **victims’** journey. The continuous dialogue in this developing community led inmates and victims to realize that both had been guilty of objectifying the other. David DiGuglielmo, Superintendent of Graterford Prison, had his doubts about the project when it began. But following the completion of the murals, he said, “I don’t think sitting in a room and listening to a bunch of offenders talk does a lot of good, but this added a whole new dimension. The artwork is a medium to helping let down barriers. Art and creativity brings things out of people they may not be aware of.” (Golden, Rice and Pompilio 116)

But something still seemed unresolved to Golden: what about the youth from the detention centers? The “Balanced and Restorative Justice Project” was begun as a way of giving a voice to what the youth experienced in their dialogue on the “Healing Walls” project and a third mural, designed in this program, was erected a few months later, in 2005. (Golden, Rice and Pompilio, 118)

Every One but Rizzo

Over 25,000 citizens of Philadelphia have been involved in MAP in the two decades of its existence. There are more than 2,500 murals in virtually every urban area of the city, but primarily in the more troubled neighborhoods—more murals than any other city in the world. (Lowe 2007, 1) Some murals have been lost when buildings were torn down, but most survive. The themes of the murals run from tributes to local social, political, sports, and arts heroes; to metaphorical reflections on values; to landscapes; to abstract designs. For the most part, the themes of the murals arise from within the neighborhoods that sponsor them. Even those that are funded by foundations or governmental agencies work with the local artists and the contributions of the citizens where the mural will be painted.

I first heard about MAP at the 2007 AAR meeting in San Diego. A member of the audience in the session where MAP was being presented asked about vandalism to the completed murals. After all, the success of MAP had not resulted in eradicating crime, drugs, or gang activity—and the graffiti that had long-symbolized this malaise was still a problem in the city. Would those who seemingly had little value for public property not simply reclaim their territory and "tag" the murals?

Oddly, according to Maureen O'Connell—who presented MAP at the session-- there has been little vandalism to the completed murals in the twenty-four years of MAP. In fact, the mural that has been vandalized more frequently than any other over the years is the tribute to Frank Rizzo, the controversial former officer, police commissioner, and mayor, who grew up in the South Philadelphia neighborhood called the Italian Market. (Golden, Rice, and Kinney 99;) thus, the title of the paper. Golden and others believe that the program's commitment to engaging the community in the development of the murals has given the people who live in the neighborhoods ownership in the finished product. Since the faces in the images are taken from the children and the elderly from the neighborhoods and have grown from a collaborative approach to community organization, the neighborhoods see the murals as expressions of their hopes and dreams and the pride in their histories.

The MAP experience engaged in an educational approach that lived with the community, engaged the people living there in reflecting on their own experience, and listened for the "generative" words and themes that were being used over and over again by the people. The almost interminable sketches—in many ways, the step Freire called "codification" —and community meetings probably felt like no progress was being made. But the process also allowed what was designed to be the words and images and concepts that named **their** world. Rather than trying to reflect on abstract universal "truths," the murals are the end-product of a community-based reflection on the practices of truth and meaning engaged in within the community itself. Rather than "metanarratives," the murals express the unique narratives of each community that produces them. Through the murals, truth and meaning emerge from the intentional dialogue of the stakeholders in each mural project. The "center" from which each mural is developed was once considered the "marginal" members of the community; the voices that are represented on the murals were once almost completely voiceless.

Finally, Freire, Gadamer, feminist theologians, and postmodern philosophers and theologians share a commitment to *praxis*. When the artists and MAP staffers take the community members with whom they work seriously as **persons** and as real **partners** in the projects on which they work they humanize the "other." In Nelle Morton's powerful phrase, they "hear one another to speech." (Morton 1985, 210-211) Treating the MAP participants as subjects, as persons, begins to give them their voices back. *Praxis* works through an intentional dialogue among fellow subjects engaged in reflection on a shared subject matter. It only works when the partners in dialogue treat one another as persons of worth and as ones who speak their own truth. The "community of truth" of which Palmer speaks empowers the partners in the dialogue to listen carefully to the other's claim to truth. And, when *praxis* works, what emerges from the dialogue is never the product of only one voice; it is the emergence of a **new**, intersubjective voice. The Cartesian subject/object dichotomy has been replaced by a dialogical community in which truth is **practiced**, rather than simply being talked about. The Mural Arts Program has begun to "clear a space where the community of truth can be practiced." (Palmer 1998, 90)

"Cuadros" from the "Mother's Clubs" of Pamplona Alta, Peru

A second arts program that has served to transform the community from which it emerged was discussed at the November 2007 meeting of the American Academy of Religion in San Diego. The Society for the Arts in Religious and Theological Studies awards a select number of grants each year to support projects encouraging the integration of the arts and religion. Among those receiving the 2006 grants was Rebecca Davis, from the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota, whose project investigated emerging women's collectives from the *pueblos jovenes* that surround Lima, Peru. In particular, Davis studied some of the collectives, known as "Mother's Clubs" (Vaso de Leche 2008, 1) in the Pamplona Alta that use scraps of material to create vibrantly-colored wall hangings and tapestries that are called *cuadros* or *arpilleras*. (Gianturco and Tuttle 2000, 72-83)

The *pueblos jovenes*, or "young towns" are a series of shanty-towns that have grown up on the sand and rock wastelands on the outskirts of Lima. Large portions of the population of Peru have been uprooted by the struggles between the "militia of the right-wing government and the guerilla tactics of the left-wing Shining Path" (Davis 2008, 1) and many of the displaced persons have made their way to the city. The extreme poverty and the unstable political environment of Peru's *altaplano* where these displaced persons once lived have led the United Nations to declare the region a "human disaster area. (The Pamplona Alta Cuadro 2008, 1)

Using pieces of scrap lumber and discarded sheets of corrugated metal as well as pieces of straw matting—called *esteras*—for the walls, approximately one-half of Lima's total population—three million persons or more by some estimations—live in this "Belt of Poverty." The communities in Pamplona Alta and other similar areas have few amenities; no running water or sewers, inconsistent supply of electricity, houses without substantial roofs. What began as semi-organized "invasions" by groups of "squatters" has, over the years resulted in many residents being given title to their land, allowing them to gain credit. (Gianturco and Tuttle 2000, 75)

With most of the men of these communities either unemployed or working in poorly-paid jobs, the women of the Pamplona Alta have banded together into the equivalent of medieval guilds to create *cuadros*, or "hanging pictures" and *arpilleras*, or three-dimensional, fabric-based scenes of Peruvian life. Many of these "Mother's Clubs" are named for holidays that were the occasion of the "invasions," for Peruvian "heroes," or after the women who founded and organized the groups. For example, one of the larger groups in the region is known as the "Michaela Bastidas" group. This fifty-member cooperative of women is named for a Peruvian woman who led a rebellion against the Spanish in 1781. (Meyer and Smith 1985, 1) The groups are formed as a way of giving the women both a way to contribute financially to the family income and as a way to develop a voice: "'We wanted to do something to help ourselves,' says Luzinda Florindez, a mother of three and the group's spokeswoman. 'We couldn't afford to sit around with our arms crossed.'" (Meyer and Smith 1985, 1)

The fabric work the women produce is similar to the *arpilleras* that "originated in Chile, where women political prisoners who were held during the Pinochet regime used them to camouflage notes sent to helpers outside." (Arpilleras 2008, 1) The Chilean regime did not check the *arpilleras* for banned messages since they considered them "just women's work." (Gianturco and Tuttle 2000, 75) Unlike the politically-charged Chilean *arpilleras,* the Peruvian version tends to romanticize the women's former lives in the *selva*, or jungles of the Amazonian region. In contrast to the barren, arid ring of slums surrounding Lima, many of the *cuadros* or *arpilleras* produced by the "Mother's Clubs" depict village life, the colorful market place, the verdant jungles—as Michael Meyer and Michael Smith suggest, "perhaps a subliminal compensation for the day-to-day scarcity of the shantytowns." (Meyer and Smith 1985, 2) While the Peruvian versions tend to be less directly political, they do depict the "social problems facing their community as well as the ways in which women have been struggling to improve their communities." (University of Detroit Mercy 2007, 2) As Barbara Cervenka of the University of Michigan School of Art claims:

> The cuadros depict life as it was and as it has become. They are texts which reveal, beneath their brilliant colors and playful exterior, both the intensity and darkness of life in Third World Peru. From religious festivals and processions, harvests and history, the cuadros celebrate traditions and connections to a rich past. But they also present life as the women experience it: strikes and marches, common kitchens and domestic violence, building huts and planting gardens in the desert. (Cervenka 2003, 1)

Cervenka calls the works of art "heroic texts of courage, solidarity, and survival" that serve as a "collective voice for those who…work to create a future for themselves and their children." Cervenka 2003, 1)

Since most of the residents of places like Pamplona Alta moved from sections of Peru where the languages spoken were Aymara or Quechua and where little, if any, formal education occurred, the daily work sessions of the women who create the *arpilleras* and *cuadros* involve more than discussion about themes to be illustrated in cloth or sewing techniques that might be used. Juliana Quijano also teaches the women to read and write and to speak Spanish, since their Quechua language saddles them with discrimination as well as poverty. The women discuss their personal lives, both in Pamplona Alta and in their native communities. The women share child care responsibilities, prepare their noon-time meals together, and become a community that works in common for the betterment of themselves, their families, and their community. (Gianturco and Tulle 2000, 80) As Rebecca Davis states, "In the process of negotiating safe public space, women have sought out each other as a means of support. Many women's groups that were initially created as a means of support and to share basic resources later evolved into associations that fostered consciousness-raising and empowerment. Here is where group identity was often shaped and a sense of common purpose was formed." (Davis 2008, 1)

The women meet in workshops or *tallers* that can produce appliquéd designs on sweaters, wall hangings and tapestries, small rugs, or potholders and eye-glass cases. Each piece is worked on by a single woman, and each product is unique and hand-made. (Standard 2007, 1) *Arpilleras* are traditionally backed by burlap (which is what *arpillera* means in English), onto which colored scraps of material, usually salvaged from dumps or open markets are skillfully arranged to depict common events of daily life, religious festivals (including the "Day of the Dead"), the bustle of city life, the calm of the countryside, or the transactions of the market. (Dalton 2007, 1) Many of the "Mother's Clubs" were originally funded by the government then later by U.N.-funded markets that helped them distribute their work. (Gianturco and Tuttle 2000, 80) The church has been present as a major partner in developing markets for the goods in the U.S. and elsewhere.

The women who work in the cooperatives rise at 6:00 A.M., fetch water, clean the house, go to the bakery, wake the children and ready them for school, and fix eggs for breakfast. After sending the children off to school, they work at their craft for three hours before shopping for lunch. Returning to the *taller* around 2:00 in the afternoon, they sew together until 8:00 or 9:00 at night. Many of the women have community kitchens that provide food for the *taller* and for their families. (Gianturco and Tuttle 2000, 79)

For many of the women in these cooperatives, the $1.50 a day they earn on a single wall hanging that will be sold to a wholesaler for $15 then retailed in the U.S. for $60 will be the only income received by the family. (Gianturco and Tuttle 2000, 83) A quick check of the internet reveals online markets that range from $200-$500 (www.crossroadstrade.com) for the various products created in the "Women's Clubs." At the very least, the additional income that may be received from the marketing of the work provides for the education for the children of these communities and keeps the children in the clean clothes that will allow them to continue in school. (Arpilleras 2008, 1) The women who engage in this work are not well-off, but they are off the subsistence level of those without such an income. In *Creative Women of Pamplona*, Rita Serapión claims, "The more we work, the more creativity we find in ourselves. The fact that (the *arpilleras*) are exported is a big compensation: it animates us. We all have a little art in our minds and in our hands; we will leave something as a legacy for society. It will stay behind us, in another place, in another time." (Gianturco and Tuttle 2000, 83)

"Mother's Clubs" as "Communities of Truth"

The work of the "Mother's Clubs" in the Pamplona Alta illustrates several of the themes of postmodern hermeneutical theology. As a result of the intentional work being done among the women of the poverty-stricken communities surrounding Lima, steps have been taken toward creating a "space where the community of truth can be practiced."

The work that has been done with these cooperatives among the women has begun within the community of women themselves. In Freire's language, the work has represented a "horizontal" approach to community formation, rather than a "vertical" one. Rather than "experts" from outside the communities injecting themselves and their world-views upon the women hierarchically, the "women's Clubs" have begun with a sense of shared leadership and partnership. Even though each *cuadro* or *arpillera* is sewn by a single woman, the work of the cooperative is done within a community of women who share their scraps of cloth, suggest ideas of ways of making the scene a striking one, watch one another's children, discuss their individual and shared conditions, and hope, dream, and plan for the future. Each group tends to have "leaders," but the style of leadership is that of a guide, rather than a "boss."

Secondly, each finished product has a story to tell. The *cuadros* and *arpilleras* do not use the arts to retell the "metanarratives" criticized by postmodern scholars. The stories are personal, local, and hopeful. Each work of art is an expression of the experience of the artisan. While there are several recurring themes in the work of the women, each piece represents the story of its weaver. The end-product of her labor expresses her memories of life before poverty and conflict uprooted her and her family. The careful, colorful combination of fabrics becomes an expression of joy in the midst of sorrow, peace in a time of conflict, and hope for a future of happiness and freedom. There is no attempt in these humble creations to accomplish large-scale efforts at theory or social transformation. The stories from the Pamplona Alta are about transforming their **own** experience using their own skills and their own hands to do so.

Thirdly, in a culture that has been male-dominated throughout its history, the "Women's Clubs" have given women the ability to contribute financially and socially to their families and their communities. The women learn to do more than simply make pretty fabric art. They also learn about marketing their products as they take their goods to "Mother's Markets" on the grounds of the National Art Gallery in Lima in May, July, and October and negotiate with international distributors of their creations. (Gianturco and Tuttle 2000, 79) The women of the Clubs are developing a sense of themselves as persons outside the "norm" of the larger society of Peru.

Fourthly, the dialogue among the women who work together on the projects becomes a combination of "consciousness-raising" and "conscientization." The intersubjective exchanges among the women of the cooperatives are based on a valuing of each woman as a person of worth. There are few persons in the world more marginalized than these women who are poor, displaced, linguistically and socially ostracized, and threatened. Yet, the regular dialogue that exists among the women who work alongside one another on a daily basis serves to empower them to name their oppression and to claim their voices to transform their local situations. The work of the "Women's Clubs" helps to give a "voice" to those who had previously been voiceless. The sense of self-worth increases with each *cuadro* or *arpillaera* that is finished and sold.

Finally, the work of the church in connection with the "Women's Clubs" has modeled what Freire called the "prophetic" church. (Freire 1973, 13-16) The work of persons like Rebecca Davis and Barbara Cervenka and Roman Catholic orders such as the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word has brought a reflective and collaborative approach to what is being done within these communities, rather than the top-down, hierarchical model of the "traditional" church or the hand-wringing angst of the "modernizing" church. (Freire 1973, 8-13) In the U.S., major art shows featuring the work of the cooperatives have been held at Princeton Theological Seminary, University of Detroit Mercy, Wesley Theological Seminary, and elsewhere. Freire called for the church to become involved with the struggle for identity and transformation that began with the communities of resistance. The "Women's Clubs" have made a strong witness to what happens when a group of women use the arts as a form of resistance that leads to their own transformation and that of their communities. These communities are an example of what Roman Catholic theologian Paul Lakeland calls "faithful sociality," in which each community develops its own narrative, expresses its own values, and its own way of regulating power. The power of society as a whole, and especially of religious communities, is that of the kind of intersubjective dialogue discussed by Gadamer, Freire, Palmer, and many others. (Lakeland 1997, 63)

"Playback Theatre" and "Theatre of the Audience"

A third art form that demonstrates the themes of postmodern hermeneutical theology is an approach to non-scripted theatre represented by "Playback Theatre" (which is frequently referred to as PT.) A Boston-based company of Playback, called "True Story Theater" was featured at the November 2007 annual meeting of the Religious Education Association. Playback Theatre was founded in 1975 by Jonathan Fox (who had been trained in the psychodrama techniques of J.L Moreno) and Fox's wife Jo Salas, who had been trained in music—and later music therapy. (Fox 1994; Fox 1987; Salas 1996 and Salas 2007) Fox's unique approach to theatre also owes much to his intensive study of the oral tradition of story-telling and its differences from "scripted" forms of theatre (About Playback Theatre 2008, 1), as well as by a two year service with the Peace Corps in Nepal.

Playback Theatre differs from traditional scripted theatre in several key ways. First, "PT" troupes are encouraged to devote only part-time to their work in theatre. Fox believes such a practice keeps the company from being "forced to become exotic, hothouse flowers… instead I wanted them to live in the world and be like their audiences, men and women of common work, family responsibilities, and civic duty." (Fox 1994, 2-3) The Web site for PT is filled with reflections on the experience of being members of various troupes throughout the world, and in virtually every one of the troupes, most of its company members are part-time actors and musicians who practice a variety of other vocations outside the work of PT.

A second distinguishing feature of PT is that its performances are un-scripted and improvised. The title of Fox's major book presenting the theoretical basis of PT is *Acts of Service: Spontaneity, Commitment, Tradition in the Nonscripted Theatre* (Fox 1994). Similarly, one of Jo Salas' written contributions is entitled *Improvising Real Life: Personal Story in Playback Theatre* (Salas 1996.) Fox claims the spontaneous nature of this approach to theatre is characterized by vitality, intuitiveness, and a kind of ecstasy similar to the trance that allows the shaman from primitive cultures to perform. (Fox 1994, 80-81) Drawing upon the work of Victor Turner, Fox claims the spontaneity of PT performances "can be thought of as a creative response to a liminal condition." (99) The spontaneity he describes is not just mindlessness. It is, rather, an openness to the environment of the performance (being "in the moment"), then stepping "outside" the moment to make sense of what is occurring. This step allows one to then "take action" which will allow a new action to occur and a new experience to emerge. "Spontaneity" becomes, then, a form of consciousness that leads to new action to transform the situation. (101)

A third characteristic of Playback Theatre is related to the previous discussion. The "script" for each performance does not come from a "faceless" playwright or author who is external to the performance situation. Rather, the actors and musicians—as well as the audience members themselves—**become** the playwrights. In PT, the "stories" that are presented are stories told by members of the audience which are then mirrored through an improvised **re-telling** by members of the troupe selected by the "teller" of the story. As Jo Salas states, PT is a "form of improvisation that is based on the stories of ordinary and not-so-ordinary life events told during a performance." (Salas 1996, 1)

The members of the company sit on plastic crates on the simple stage with minimal props and staging. On one side of the stage, there is a musician who has several instruments (usually acoustic) arranged nearby. To the left front stage is a single member of the company (identified as the "conductor") who sits in a chair with an empty chair alongside her or him. After an initial ritual of some "warm up exercises" the conductor turns to the audience and invites individuals from the audience to come onto the stage, sit in the empty chair, and share a story from her or his personal experience that becomes the "story" enacted by the actors and musician.

This approach to storytelling avoids the sense of both theatre and story coming only from the "elite" **author**, giving the "common person" a story to share, and thus an identity when one's story is heard and affirmed. Every story should be heard; only time constraints might limit the selection of stories to four or five stories per performance. This centrifugal, egalitarian openness to the stories of the audience is a key to the experience of Playback Theatre: "[s]ince everyone's story is important, Playback Theatre disrupts our notions of whose stories are worth telling and worth hearing." (Park-Fuller 2004, 13)

This sense of affirmation of the "teller" as well as the story is reinforced at the conclusion of the enactment/ performance of the story. The performers turn, silently and intently, back to the teller and the "conductor" asks, respectfully, "Was that your story?" Thus, the story moves from (perhaps) unreflective personal experience, to verbalization as the "teller" shares the story, to objectification/ externalization/distanciation as "others" play the characters in one's story (including oneself), to reflection and, perhaps, internalization once again as the conductor turns the story back into the care of the "teller." "Was that **your** story?" On occasion, the actors miss the heart of the story and the "teller" says, "No. No, that wasn't it at all." The "teller" is asked for clarification and the performers once again act what has been heard. Having one's story enacted is a form of personal validation. As Jo Salas has said, "you, your personal experience, is **worthy** of this kind of attention" (Salas 1996, 7) and, later in the same book, "[t]elling our stories to others helps us to integrate the story's meaning for us personally." (19)

A fourth element of Playback Theatre is the intentional decision of this approach to eliminate the "fourth wall" of live theatre performance. In a traditional proscenium theater, the set creates three physical, tangible walls within which the carefully-wrought language of the play's story is presented. Even though the audience is witnessing the performance, the actors in traditional theatre are trained to act as thought they are performing to a fourth "imaginary" wall. The audience, essentially, sits outside that fourth wall as an almost collective passive observer of the action on the stage.

Playback Theatre removes that imaginary "fourth wall." Before the performance, members of the company are moving among audience members, chatting and socializing. Once they move to the stage and begin to get "in character," the fourth wall is breached several additional times. The "conductor" or another member of the company explains what will happen in the performance. The actors and musician introduce themselves to the audience members and share something about their own experiences. The "tellers" come from the audience itself, rather than from a disembodied "other" we call an "author." Thus, each "teller" breaches the fourth wall. During the feedback session that follows each story, audience members are encouraged to share what they heard in the performance and what they learned about themselves and about their community as a result of that hearing. Again, Salas states, "effective artistic expression is not the exclusive province of the professional performer…. Story itself is of the profoundest importance, that we need stories to construct meaning in our lives, and that our lives themselves are full of stories, if we can learn to discern them." (Salas 1996, 8)

David Charles claims that the removal of the fourth wall allows Playback Theatre to act as though "there is no necessary division of function between audience and performer." (Charles 2005, 4) The empty chair on the stage that is filled by the "teller" becomes, in essence, a "third space" for theatre: in addition to the "actors' space" and the "audience space," the "teller's" space becomes a symbolic disruption of the locus of action and meaning. (Park-Fuller 2005, 7; Stevenson 1995)

Finally, Playback Theatre is capable of fostering a sense of community. "It allows participants to see themselves in their neighbors' stories, and to share each others' joys and trials. It also allows audience members to tell stories from differing points of view, or stories that carry different messages." (Park-Fuller 2004, 13) Jonathan Fox begins his major book:

> In my eyes this new Playback Theatre, in which the people could see their stories acted out and share with their neighbors aspects of their lives and deeply felt concerns, was a way to bring an ancient way into the present, except that where traditional societies sang of Gods and Heroes known and revered by the entire clan, we would sing about ourselves, in all our ordinariness. My hope and deep conviction was that in this process we would feel elevated, as if in contact with 'the Gods,' and at the end a disparate community would cohere. (Fox 1994, 2)

Susan Metz agrees with Fox: "the story of an individual experience is personal, particular and specific. At the same time it is a social document about a culture and a moment. And each story absorbs an archetype that resonates with every human being. Watching her/his experience enacting is healing to the teller. Witnessing an experience made into art is unifying for the group." (Metz 2006, 9) Despite the seemingly random way in which stories are presented from the perspective of various "tellers" the Playback performance is frequently characterized by a certain similarity to the stories that are told. Folma Hoesch called this phenomenon the "red thread" that "connects one story to another as a counterpoint to or an amplification of an idea contained in a story told earlier." (Park-Fuller 2004, 12) One story heard can lead to a recognition by another in the audience, who shares her story as the next "teller."

Playback Theatre companies have been formed in Japan, Australia, Northern Ireland, Germany, Poland, and other places in Europe, with Hutu and Tutsi players working toward resolution of tribal conflicts in Burundi, among African-American communities, as training sessions for public school teachers, nurses, and health care, prison and mental health counselors, as well as in therapy sessions for children with severe emotional disorders. (Salas 2007) One group named "Chosen Power" has been formed from persons with "intellectual differences" in Hong Kong. (Fung and Tam 2005) Playback techniques have been employed to resolve local conflicts, to address community perceptions of Muslims (as well as their own self-understanding) following 9/11, and to combine with Augusto Boal's "theatre of the oppressed" to address situations of oppression in numerous localities. (Metz 2006; H. Fox 2007; Hayes 2007)

Playback Theatre and Postmodern Hermeneutical Theology

Linda Park-Fuller, who teaches in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University, is among the scholars of Playback Theatre who discusses its connections with postmodern philosophy and theology. She specifically mentions influences of Michel Foucault's post-structural analysis of power/knowledge (Park-Fuller 2005, 5-8), Lyotard's "incredulity of metanarratives," and Giroux and Freire's discussion of the "pedagogy of the oppressed." (Park-Fuller 2004, 5-9) Analysis of Playback Theatre suggests the following illustrations of the kind of theology being presented in the paper.

The central focus of Playback Theatre is directed toward the "story" that is brought by each "teller" who participates in the performance. Thus, as Bev Hosking and Christian Penny claim, this approach is based on a belief that "each person's experience is of value and that it is important to create a place for everyone to be heard and seen." (Hosking and Penny—no date, 1) A central commitment of PT is that each story, and thus each "teller" who brings a story, is a story and person of value and worth, thus disrupting traditional notions of whose stories are worth telling. (Salas 1993, 7-8) Rather than assuming that the actors or the playwrights are, in some way, the only ones in charge of meaning, truth, and experience, PT claims the audience and the actors are all "subjects." Every effort is made to insure that the voice of each "teller" is heard and that her or his claim to truth is taken seriously. As Nelle Morton has said, they "hear one another into speech." (Morton 1985, 210-211)

Secondly, the stories performed in a PT event do not come from an external, faceless authority outside the event itself. Rather, the content of what is shared in the performance emerges from the participants themselves. The power dynamic of theatre has been changed from the intellectual "elite" of the playwright, which is then interpreted and performed by the **actors** for the entertainment of a passive audience (an essentially "vertical" and hierarchical approach) to a **horizontal** sharing among fellow "subjects." (Fox 1994, 48) The voice of the "teller" becomes the subject matter enacted by the actors, who not only "mirror" the story of the "teller," but also "check back" with the "teller" to ensure the story the actors have enacted is, indeed, the story shared by the "teller." The "meaning" and "truth" of the story emerges in the interplay that occurs among the various "subjects" who have entered into a form of intersubjective dialogue. This "truth" can be therapeutic, emotional, and significant—but it is always personal. The process of performance allows the "teller" to achieve aesthetic distance (Adderley 2004, 7) and begin to learn about herself or himself by observing the "myself that is not myself." (Levinas 1947)

Thirdly, because the stories performed are being performed in the midst of a community of the audience, actors, musician, and conductor there is an inescapable "community" dimension to the occasion as well. Only a handful of stories can be told in the limited time frame of a performance. However, those in the audience frequently hear the stories of the "tellers" and nod in recognition, saying something like, "That's so much like **my** story." The interaction of the company with the audience members prior to, and frequently during the performance creates an environment of trust and openness that "clears a space where the community of truth can be practiced." (Palmer 1998, 90) As Tarquam McKenna states, "In this theatre form a community of memories is created where audiences are meeting together, becoming socially interdependent, participating in a ritual of discussion and decision-making, and sharing the practice of playback theatre as a way of defining their history with attention to the past and future.” (McKenna 1999, 6)

A fourth element of PT is the attention it gives to the stories that are unique to the **particular** community that is gathered in that place and time. Playback Theatre does not attempt to facilitate the audience’s engagement with “grand stories” or “metanarratives.” Rather, it pays attention to honestly, reverently, and respectfully performing the stories shared by the “tellers” who open themselves up to the community there and then. The stories are “personal” and “unique” to the community gathered in the theater itself; but the stories also have a “human” truthfulness that is recognizable. McKenna claims, “The playback performance brings the audience and actors to a place where their ‘search for grand narratives’ will be enmeshed with personal stories or ‘more local, small scale theories’ which are ‘tales of the field.’” (McKenna 1999, 3) Like other forms of improvisational theatre, PT “tends dramatically towards reflecting and representing specific, local communities.” (Charles 2005, 10) But, as “story” each experience shared touches upon shared, common human experiences as well.

A fifth dimension of Playback Theatre is that, by hearing the stories of those who do not usually have opportunities to gain their voice, PT can empower persons to heal their own brokenness and the brokenness of the community. (Charles 2005, 10) It is here that Playback Theatre connects with a wide variety of liberation theologies. Whereas Boal’s “theatre of the oppressed” intends to use theatre as a means to the end of societal transformation and liberation and begins the performance with the intention of finding the socio-political messages hidden behind the stories, PT is more interested in both the personal, healing, cathartic dimensions of the “tellers’” stories and the kinds of changes the telling might empower in each person and the immediate community of the audience. (H. Fox 2007, 2-3) Like other forms of *praxis*, PT constantly moves between a reflection on theory in light of new action and a participation in new forms of action engendered by new theory. Transformation in PT operates on personal, small community and societal levels simultaneously. Every discovery of personal catharsis leads one necessarily to reflections about the implications of that new discovery for the nature of community.

Finally, virtually every discussion about Playback Theatre discusses the spiritual and/or religious dimension of this approach to improvisational theatre. Fox (Fox 1994 and Dauber 2006) emphasize the “shaman-like” function of PT in general and of the “conductor” in particular. Dauber claims, “In pre-literary societies shamans had the personal task to establish a tie between the individual and its community, between the dead and the living people, between the past and the future, between all that has gone and all that is going to be.” (Dauber 2006, 2) In addition, the regular rituals of a PT performance serve to create an essentially “sacred space,” as has been mentioned frequently in the literature. Several of the articles on PT have discussed its role in churches, synagogues, ashrams, and other sacred spaces. (Kiely 2004) The role of “grace” is a common element of Jonathan Fox’s reflections on what happens in PT. Fox refers to Gustavo Gutierrez’ claim that “communion is more than anything else a gift” then continues by recognizing that any catharsis, healing, or transformation that emerges from a performance is also a gift of grace. (Fox 1994, 214) He remains convinced that all persons need to experience not only the “truth” that one experiences within community, but what Robert Bellah and others called the “community of memory” that retells that community’s “constitutive narratives.” These narratives do not just connect one with the past, but “turn us toward the future as communities of hope." (Bellah 1985, 153) When one participates in this kind of community, one may not only experience the "truth" from this performance, but develop the ability to **transcend** the limited, immediate truth. One is enabled to experience redemption. (Fox 1994, 215)

Conclusions

The three artistic examples that have been discussed all demonstrate a commitment to listening to the voices of those who are generally on the "margins" of society, the "others" who have not been among those with admission tickets "into the room" (to use Rorty's phrase.) All three groups demonstrate an approach to engagement with "truth" and "meaning" that disrupts the hierarchical, vertical, top-down models of access to knowledge that characterized modernism in favor of a "horizontal," egalitarian, democratic sharing of "stories" of struggle and transcendence, loss and recovery, grace and redemption. All three approaches studied have focused on the experience of persons living within specific, limited communities and experiencing truth and meaning as products of that experience. All share a sense that this kind of transcendent grace is made possible through the arts in ways that frequently elude left-brain, logical, sequential, scientific knowledge. And all three are based upon the conviction that, in coming to a form of consciousness that is not limited to cognitive knowledge alone one discovers that all new knowledge requires new actions to be developed to fully realize that knowledge.

We end where the paper began: with my conviction that it is far more important to engage in practices of peacemaking, community-building, and transformation at a local level than to simply theorize about peace, the nature of community, and the rationale for societal transformation. The arts, reflected through the three examples of the Philadelphia Mural Project, the Women's Clubs of the Pamplona Alta, Peru, and Playback Theatre, offer helpful models for developing practices that "clear a space where the community of truth can be practiced." (Palmer 1998, 90)

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