Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts: A Virtual Collection

Synthesis

By Lesley Yalen

Copyright Brandeis University, Lesley Yalen

II. What We Have Learned

1. The defining qualities of aesthetic experience make it uniquely well suited for supporting the learning required for reconciliation.

Because artistic and cultural forms are bounded in space and time, they can support people as they address traumatic memories and difficult feelings.

Unlike life's uncomposed, infinite, and sometimes-chaotic flow of thoughts, feelings, and events, artistic and cultural forms — by definition — are bounded in space and time. They have a material, and in some cases a temporal, beginning and end, and what is between the beginning and the end has been composed with the aim (usually) of communicating or reaching an audience. No matter how chaotically arranged the elements that comprise a form may seem to be, they are still bound within the form and do not pose a physical threat to the perceiver/audience.

In fact, the perceiver/audience has a great deal of agency in terms of how and when to approach and retreat from the form, not only physically but psychically as well. For example, an audience member can watch a performance of a play, but if it at any point the performance becomes too powerful or overwhelming he can get up and leave or simply "tune out."
The makers of cultural and artistic forms can rely on the boundedness of the forms to compose and give manageable shape to the feelings and thoughts they express. And, like perceivers, they can walk away from or decrease their engagement with the form if the feelings that arise threaten to overwhelm. This is not to say that one avoids powerful feelings in engaging with culture and the arts. On the contrary, the benefit for reconciliation of working with such forms is that they allow people who have experienced severe trauma to become aware of and communicate powerful feelings in ways that are less threatening than ordinary speech.

We see this in the case of drumming in Burundi and Rwanda, as described by Lena and Nicholas. The drumming circle as a form is bounded in both space and time and has a clear structure – pre-established seating arrangements, orders of operation, and rhythms – which becomes, for many, a safe space in which they can express and cope with difficult emotions. In Lena's paper, drummers give testimony again and again to the catharsis and transformation that they experience within the drumming circle. In his portfolio, Nicholas describes how people were able to access and express their painful feelings about the Rwandan genocide through the bounded form of a drumming performance.

Because artistic and cultural forms work with elements of abstraction, metaphor, and symbol, engagement with these forms can allow for an indirect approach to difficult emotions, memories, and perceptions.

The work required for reconciliation – revisiting painful memories, mourning losses, acknowledging harms, etc. – can be extremely difficult, and there are cases in which the best (or only) way for people to approach the work is indirectly; that is, in a way that does not inspire so much pain and discomfort that the process cannot go forward.

Because cultural and artistic forms rely on symbols, metaphors, and abstraction, they are well suited for this indirect approach to difficult subjects. Through the use of abstraction, for example, people are freed from strictly representational forms of expression; memories, feelings, and concepts can be investigated and communicated through shapes, sounds, movements, and colors that do not necessarily correspond in a one-to-one fashion to real-life referents. We see, for example, in Lena and Nicholas's work, the way the non-representational sound and rhythm of the drum can be both a cathartic expression of painful feelings for the individual drummer and a means of communicating solidarity between drummers. We see, also, that in Bev and Jenny's work with playback theatre, they use elements of abstraction in the otherwise representational act of "playing back" someone's story. Their work allows for the possibility that abstract sounds and movements might sometimes speak to the essence of a moment or a memory more powerfully and less painfully than a concrete dramatization of the particulars of that moment, and in ways that resonate for people who might not find shared meaning in discursive language.

Artistic and cultural forms are externalizations or embodiments of meaning. Because they require people to create or enact something with the body, these forms allow for a deep and sustainable kind of learning that is not always possible through purely cognitive processes.

In life, we learn many skills through action, rather than through observation or discussion alone. There are concepts as well – love, faith, loss, friendship – that we cannot fully define or
understand except through action. It is not surprising, then, that some of the learning required for reconciliation – learning, for example, to trust others and, importantly, to be able to discern when trust is warranted – must at least partially be accomplished through doing. Aspects of reconciliation must be felt, practiced, acted out with the body. Artistic and cultural forms can provide safe venues in which to do this.

For example, in describing the collective nature of the Khmer Buddhist ritual Pchum Ben, in which individuals make balls of rice which they then contribute to a collective ceremony, Daravuth says that, "The shaping of the rice ball directly in the hand of each participant suggests a sort of embodied contribution. The rice balls can almost be seen as a piece of people's bodies." In this case, collaboration and interdependence are taking place on a bodily level – through action. While people participating in the ritual may not be explicitly speaking about or thinking about reconciliation, they are doing and feeling an act of reconciliation, of interdependence. This action and feeling can perhaps be recalled and drawn on in the future, when interdependence and trust in the community feels fragile.

Many artistic and cultural forms are able "to hold" – that is, to have coexisting within them – contradictions and complexities that, in rational modes of expression, might seem mutually exclusive or incompatible.

Artistic and cultural forms are compositions that bring together diverse elements into a unified whole. Some forms – including collages, multi-voice narratives, disjunctive poems, and polyrhythmic music – very overtly juxtapose disparate, seemingly contradictory elements in a way that allows them to be in relationship with one another. This possibility within the forms makes them extremely powerful resources for reconciliation. Through engagement with these forms, people can observe and become more comfortable with the coexistence of multiple (even contradictory) voices and perspectives, and they can begin to acknowledge the complexity and interdependence of their histories, their actions, and their values. Bev and Jenny's paper illuminated this aspect of their work with playback theatre – the way in which it helps people to listen to and incorporate into their worldview multiple perspectives and narratives.

The telling of stories and personal narratives to a community of listeners is a powerful tool for bringing people out of isolation and helping them process, reflect upon, and cope with their own feelings.

In almost every culture, people tell stories from their own lives in various contexts – formal and informal, serious and silly, among family and friends and for wider audiences. Composing a personal narrative (either through extensive forethought or in a moment of spontaneity) from the complex, variable, sometimes overwhelming facts and feelings of our lives, can be an extremely difficult but also extremely satisfying experience, particularly when the narrative is laced with violence and trauma. This cultural form affords people the agency to give shape to their own experiences, to define their own perspective(s) and values, and to share not only the events of their lives, but their way of arranging and connecting them, with others. This can be extremely important for the work of reconciliation, which often requires a getting-acquainted (or reacquainted) process among people who have been alienated from one another. It also requires an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of others, an exploration of values and
What We Have Learned contexts, and a kind of deep listening that are all fostered in working with stories and personal narratives.

We see this form being drawn upon in the work of almost all of the Fellows: Stompie asked his students to gather and reflect upon stories of ubuntu as the basis for visual art projects; Ingrid engaged her students in a discussion of Buddhist stories to help them reflect upon their own values; Lisa's and Iffat's films juxtapose similar narratives from people ostensibly on opposite sides of the Sri Lankan conflict: inviting former enemies to empathize with each other's suffering; through playback theatre, Bev and Jenny help people to tell and perform personal stories in order to promote social dialogue; and Nicholas choreographed a drumming performance that told the story of the Rwandan genocide. Even though the latter was done in a nonverbal medium, it made use of the power of (performing) personal narrative.

2. Engagement with artistic and cultural forms can nourish peoples' capacities to be present rather than distracted by feelings of anxiety about the past and the future.

Engagement with artistic and cultural forms can foster in people a meditative presence, in which anxiety over the past and future gives way to calm awareness of the present moment.

It is not unusual for people to get stuck in rigid patterns of thought, remembering the past in static ways and thinking narrowly about possibilities for the future. For people who have experienced violence and trauma, these patterns often become even more deeply ingrained. And yet our abilities to be present, focused, and alert, to see ourselves and the world around us as evolving entities, and to be flexible and spontaneous in our thinking, are often essential for the work of reconciliation. Artistic and cultural practices can help people by inviting them to be present - to listen, to see, to feel the moment. Lively and powerful art, after all, requires that the creator be keenly aware of and involved in the process of creation, and that she, at least to some extent, lets go of control over the outcome of the process. A work becomes interesting, enlivening, and rich, when its creator lets herself go in unexpected directions and is open to the possibility that she can surprise even herself.

We see evidence of this focused presence, this freedom from worries about anything outside of the moment, in Nicholas' descriptions of drumming sessions with people new to the drum as well as in many of the testimonies of drummers gathered in Lena's paper. We also see, in Bev and Jenny's paper, the essential role that spontaneity plays in the work of playback theatre.

Engagement with cultural and artistic forms allows for and encourages the kind of flexibility and spontaneity in group facilitators that is essential for reconciliation work. The work of reconciliation requires that facilitators be able to respond to the moment, to be present with a group, and to act based on the immediate dynamics of that group. Certainly, in working with groups of people that have experienced long-standing conflict or alienation, we cannot decide upon all of our strategies ahead of time, but rather we must be able to work spontaneously. Artistic and cultural forms can be ideal for supporting this kind of flexibility in a peacebuilding practice, partly because the forms themselves are flexible (and often able to be tailored to the situation at hand) and partly because of the meditative presence they invite. Because it helps people to become especially aware of the present moment, engagement with artistic and cultural
forms can help people go more deeply into and better understand what they are feeling right now.

This can be particularly important when an unexpected conflict or difficult situation arises in a group. Other forms of intervention (a mediated discussion, for example) can also be useful in such situations, but because the act of creation itself often begins in a place of not-knowing and a desire to discover, engagement with artistic and cultural forms is particularly well suited for helping both facilitator and group members to focus on listening and expressing and to refrain from diagnosing or problem-solving too quickly. We saw this in Stompie's use of music to help his students work through conflicts and tension that arose as they worked on collaborative art projects, and in the collaborative work that Artist Proof Studio artists did immediately following the suicide of one of their peers.

The aesthetic distance through which people can engage with an artistic or cultural form allows them to feel and simultaneously observe or reflect on what they are feeling. Part of the work of reconciliation is increased self-awareness: a greater ability to identify, witness, and understand one's feelings and their roots. Another part is broadening the options one has for how to engage with and act on these feelings so that cycles of hurt and harm can eventually be broken. Because of the bounded nature of artistic and cultural forms, when people engage with these forms they do so from a distance that feels safe. When we watch a violent scene in a well-crafted play, for example, we are not as close to the trauma as we would be if we were experiencing violence directly. From this distance, we can more easily stay with our feelings—modulate, observe, and reflect upon them—as opposed to shutting them down because they threaten to overwhelm. This can allow for the increased awareness and the changes in response that are important in the work of reconciliation. We see this in the work of playback theatre, in which the structured performance, stage, and other aspects of the form afford people a safe distance from which to watch performances of their own painful stories, to feel their feelings, and to observe and reflect on those feelings. Lisa's and Iffat's films also rely on the mediation of the film to allow viewers to be present to stories of great suffering.

Through engagement with artistic and cultural forms, the imagination is stimulated and stretched, and the capacity for play is nourished, helping people to be spontaneous and flexible, and to think creatively about themselves and their relationships. Basic to all creation is the ability to imagine: to pretend, to play, to discover, to take on new perspectives, and to tap into one's originality. Basic to the process of reconciliation is the ability to break out of violent or oppressive patterns that are familiar, to move away from the habits of conflict. Engagement with artistic and cultural forms allows people to imagine a different way of being and relating, to try on new moral positions and voices, to blend autobiography with fantasy, and to bring the seemingly impossible into being. The first step in creating change is this ability to imagine a world different from the present one. We see this capacity being developed in all of the Fellows' work. Bev and Jenny, in particular, emphasize the important role of play and imagination in their improvisational theatre work.

By supporting people to be wholly and attentively present, engagement with artistic and cultural forms can help individuals restore their wounded relationships with themselves, a process inextricably linked to the process of restoring their relationships with others. While reconciliation is a process primarily aimed at restoring trust and a sense of interdependence
What We Have Learned

between people, that work requires that trust and a sense of independence is restored within people as well. Individuals who have lived through protracted oppression, violence, and war – those who have been victims, those who have been perpetrators, and those who have been both – often suffer from feelings of shame, grief, fear and anger so strong that they close off a part of themselves to keep from being overwhelmed by emotions. This can lead to a feeling of being not only alienated from one's adversary and one's community but also from oneself. The repression of feelings and memories and the inability to feel and process them can lead to diminished senses of self-esteem and agency and to a loss of trust in one's own judgments. Thus, reconciliation is often a process of individuals learning to have empathy for, receptivity toward, and trust in themselves as they are learning to have empathy for, receptivity toward, and trust in others.

Engagement with artistic and cultural forms can be particularly helpful in drawing people out of their isolation from themselves and in breaking down the distinction between "self" and "other." A good example of this is the drumming circle, as described by Nicholas and Lena. Even in this collaborative process, some of the important work that is being done is intra-personal. Each individual is brought into the present by the action and the sound of drumming. Each individual has the intimate, private experience of self-exploration and self-expression through her drum. Each individual's self-esteem and self-confidence may increase as she feels the importance of her contribution to the music made by the whole group. We see this in many of the anecdotes in Lena's paper, in which people said that drumming makes their feelings and problems seem "manageable and tolerable" and that through the drum they can carry their feelings "with dignity."

Meanwhile, being present in a drumming circle also means being present to the others in the group, listening to their drums, and being receptive to what they are expressing. Here, the line between self and other is blurred. As each individual expresses, she also listens. As she affirms her own being, she acknowledges the other beings with whom she plays. Similarly, we can see individuals regaining trust in, respect for, and peace with themselves – and in doing so regaining their community – in the work Artist Proof Studio did after the studio burned down in a fire. And in Sri Lanka, the presence of the camera and filmmakers' attention restored peoples' capacities to speak, to trust their own voices.

3. Engagement with artistic and cultural forms can open up in people new ways of perceiving, thinking, and expressing.

Engagement with non-verbal artistic and cultural forms allows people to communicate with themselves and with others in innovative ways that are not possible through strictly verbal forms. While some artistic and cultural forms – including literature, theatre, and music – can include important verbal components, some unique work can be done through non-verbal forms – including dance, instrumental music, and visual arts. By definition, these non-verbal forms communicate through and with parts of peoples' brains and bodies that are different from the ones that they typically use in verbal communication. While engagement with the arts in general can be powerful because of the simultaneous stimulation of cognitive and sensory faculties, engagement with non-verbal forms allows the sensory self to take precedence and puts the rational self in the back seat. In this process, people discover new ways of communicating, new parts of their bodies to communicate with, and often new ideas and feelings that want to be
communicated. They discover thoughts and emotions and ways of being that they might not have expressed or even acknowledged had they stayed within the limited palette of expressive forms they normally use.

Among the drummers interviewed in Lena's paper, people over and over again spoke of drumming bringing them to a "deeper part of themselves" or a "different part of [their] being." One person spoke of a "spiritual communication that happens between people when they're in the same rhythm." Others spoke of a kind of unity, a trust that is built in the drumming circle that they are unable to achieve through other means. We see this deep, non-verbal communication also in Stompie's work with his students at Artist Proof Studio. When tension and conflict arose in the classroom, Stompie had the students make music together, each one playing a different musical instrument, the class improvising to find its own rhythm and harmony. After playing together for a while, Stompie's students were able to notice and feel the "communication, respect, and internal rhythm" that existed among them.

Through engagement with artistic and cultural forms, people can explore, revise, and express their values. What is it that we, as individuals and as members of communities, most value? Part of the work of reconciliation is for people to become more aware of, more able to think critically about, and more able to constructively express their own core values. By reflecting on what it is that we value, the ways in which we enact our values, and the ways in which we may feel that our values are threatened, we can better understand ourselves. We can then create more options for ourselves in terms of our beliefs and actions. Stompie's exploration with his art students of the concept of ubuntu is a strong example of this kind of work. He asked his students to interview members of their community about the meaning of ubuntu, and then to reflect upon and artistically express ubuntu. While most students initially felt that ubuntu no longer existed in their communities, the process of reflection on and expression of the concept helped them to reconnect to their own values and to see where ubuntu did and could exist in their lives. This process of value exploration also helped Artist Proof Studio to enact ubuntu as a core organizational principle.

Ingrid's project, "The Goodness of Lives," was similarly based on the idea of encouraging young artists to examine and reflect upon traditional values, and then, through artistic expression, to breathe new life into them, re-imagining them in ways that are relevant to the work of reconciliation. This type of initiative can ideally support people to recognize the complexity of values and to think critically about the values handed down to and imposed upon them, though as Ingrid discovered in her work on "The Goodness of Lives," this task can be fraught with challenges and ethical dilemmas.

In certain artistic and cultural forms, past can mingle with present and future. Time can be traveled nonlinearly and non-chronologically, with the future informing the past and the past being as vital as the present. This disruption of chronology can allow for new ways of relating to one's history, one's present situation, and one's imagined future.

Much of what engagement with artistic and cultural forms offers to the work of reconciliation has to do, in one way or another, with opening up new perspectives, allowing for new ways of feeling, seeing, and listening, and helping people break out of rigid ways of thinking and knowing. One unique quality of some artistic and cultural forms is that they can allow people to
transcend, at least for the duration of their engagement with the form, the strict confines of chronological time. The forms can allow for an integration of past, present and future, which can be important for people who feel alienated from their own pasts because of traumatic experiences. They can allow for revisions and retellings of the past, which may otherwise seem immutable, and for re-envisionings of the future, which may seem predestined or set in stone.

This is illustrated perhaps most clearly in the collage work done at Artist Proof Studio after the studio building burned down in a fire. New works of art were made out of scraps of artwork recovered from the fire. Burned pieces of prints were collaged into two series of panels; one series addressed "past, present, and future" while another addressed "conflict, conversation, and reconciliation." Scraps of metal were also taken from the rubble and welded into new sculptural pieces. These acts were important for many of the artists who had lost their "home" as well as a good friend and colleague in the fire, partially because they allowed them to reconstitute the present and give shape to the future by drawing on and honoring, rather than discarding, the painful past.

4. Traditional artistic and cultural forms – deeply embedded in people's everyday lives, in their spiritual lives, in their sense of the world – may have within them significant resources for reconciliation.

Because traditional cultural and religious concepts and forms resonate deeply with people and have an ongoing and organic presence in peoples' lives, they can be powerful and sustainable resources for reconciliation.

Because reconciliation is a relentless process, which requires ongoing sustenance and maintenance, it is important to develop reconciliation work that is sustainable, that can be integrated into peoples' lives. One way to do this is to look to cultural and religious traditions – concepts and forms that are deeply embedded in a culture, in peoples' ways of making meaning – and to identify the resources for reconciliation within them. Thus, rather than importing stock practices, peacebuilders, artists, and cultural workers can look for the seeds of reconciliation that already exist in the communities in which they live and work, and, together with the community, water those seeds.

Many of the Fellows do this kind of work. In working with drumming as a resource for reconciliation in Burundi, Nicholas and Lena are both drawing on a cultural tradition that has both secular and spiritual connotations. Lena's interviews illustrate that, for many drummers, part of the powerful resonance of the drum comes from its deeply-rooted cultural meaning. For many drummers in Burundi the drum has an encouraging or hopeful sound; they feel connected to their ancestors when they play it. In addition, drums are available and familiar to people in Burundi to an extent that certain other instruments might not be. Thus, while the drum was not traditionally used explicitly as a tool for reconciliation, its prominence and positive significance in the culture (combined with the meditative presence it elicits, discussed elsewhere in this section) make it a potentially powerful and sustainable resource for reconciliation.

Similarly, in restructuring Artist Proof Studio along the core principle of ubuntu, Stompie and Kim have drawn on a traditional concept to promote reconciliation in the contemporary South
African context. While many of the APS staff and students initially felt that ubuntu no longer existed in their society, the concept was something that came from within their cultural context and still had resonance at least as an ideal for which to strive. As the students interviewed family members, collecting their definitions and stories of ubuntu, they began to reclaim and redefine the concept, to realize that the seeds of it were indeed still present and could be nourished in their community. As with drumming in Burundi, ubuntu has the potential to be very powerful for reconciliation in South Africa because it is deeply embedded in the culture.

Certain artistic and cultural forms are drawn from or connotative of sacred rituals, and can therefore inspire in some people the same feelings of peacefulness and transcendence that arise in their sacred experiences. Sacred rituals and religious traditions are often defined by and enacted through cultural and artistic forms. Through ceremonies involving, for example, the lighting of candles, the singing of songs, and the performance of dances, people feel able to connect the present to the past, the mundane world to the spiritual, the living to the dead. Such rituals can inspire in those who participate in them feelings of peacefulness and of transcendence from the entrenched feelings and thoughts they may experience in their day-to-day lives.

These same forms (gesture, song, dance, etc.), engaged with in a secular context, may still resonate with sacred meanings for many people, allowing those qualities of peacefulness and transcendence – which have the potential to support and intensify the reconciliation process – to arise and enter into their experience. This can be seen in Nicholas's work in which he says that the drum "derives its power also from its connection with the forces beyond us, the spiritual world, the mysterious dimension of life that we can only begin to imagine, that is beyond human perception." It can also be seen in Lena's paper in which drumming is described as a form of "spiritual communication" and in which the importance of drumming as a connection to ancestors is explored.

Both Daravuth and Ingrid's papers also highlight the potential of drawing on religious and spiritual traditions as resources for reconciliation. Several of the Fellows’ works highlight the delicate ethical sensibilities required when “transplanting” sacred elements into religious contexts.

People can make symbolic and metaphorical meaning relevant to reconciliation by engaging in certain traditional forms and practices, even when reconciliation is not the primary (or intentional) goal of the engagement.

Daravuth writes that the form of the traditional Khmer Buddhist ritual, Pchum Ben, "suggests the interaction between the one and the multiple, the individual and the collective." While the ritual is primarily a way of mourning the dead, Daravuth identifies many of the elements that make it a metaphor for (and an act of) interconnectedness, trust, collaboration, and reconciliation. He points to the creation of the collective Ben out of individual rice balls which can be seen as a metaphor for the desired social construction, one in which individuals contribute to a composed and beautiful whole. He also notes that the ritual entails a kind of collective mourning in which there is no distinction between my dead and yours, between the blessed and the damned – a gesture which blurs the lines between self and other, between right and wrong, and one which acknowledges in a profound way human interconnectedness and empathy. These elements of
What We Have Learned

Pchum Ben make it, in many ways, a metaphor for reconciliation. Daravuth's paper suggests that if special attention is paid to the metaphorical or symbolic meaning inherent in traditional forms such as the Pchum Ben, they may be powerful resources for reconciliation at the communal and political levels as well.

5. Our inquiry into arts-and-culture-based reconciliation work has led to insights applicable to reconciliation work in general.

Reconciliation is a relentless, long-term process, not a finished product. Ongoing, sustainable work is necessary in communities devastated by protracted conflict.

In communities that have been devastated by conflict, reconciliation must be recognized as an ongoing process, rather than a state at which people arrive. While it is true that with significant time and work, trust can be (re)established, relationships can evolve to be more just and equitable, and people can move closer to recognizing their interdependence with "the other," this is very often a slow, painstaking process that takes place over generations and includes many setbacks along the way. Individuals and communities and nations do not change quickly, nor do they often progress forward in a linear fashion. Entrenched ideas, attitudes, and behaviors take a long time to change, and sometimes, just when it seems that progress is being made, an incident occurs to remind us that what we thought was past is still very present. Kim's paper demonstrates this with heart-wrenching clarity, as she documents Artist Proof Studio's struggles to create and sustain an ubuntu space in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Ingrid's paper also demonstrates the frustration of being part of a community that continually "backslides" from a state of relative trust, safety, and respect into one of violation and mistrust.

The implication of defining reconciliation as an ongoing process is that effective interventions must be ongoing and sustainable, rather than short-term and "dropped in." One way to improve the sustainability of reconciliation work is to look to existing cultural practices and forms as resources, rather than to import practices. (See point 4 of this section for a discussion of traditional forms and concepts as resources for reconciliation.)

If a resource is being brought in from elsewhere – as with the work of playback theatre in India – it is important, as Bev and Jenny indicate, that the work be done over a long period of time, with a commitment to the process and with adaptations appropriate for the setting. To increase sustainability, the practitioners leading such projects can work toward transferring skills to and mentoring the people with whom they are working as well as supporting local, community-based efforts.

It is important to recognize and avoid the dangers of false reconciliation. Because reconciliation is a complex, long-term process, and because the process can be so painful, it is not uncommon for people – both peacebuilding practitioners and the people with whom they work – to want to see some positive results. People may wish for a sense that progress is being made; they may have a desire to believe that all the problems have been resolved. In addition, governments, corporations, media, or other entities may have political or economic reasons for wanting to create the illusion that reconciliation has "occurred" when in fact there is still much work to be done. It is important to recognize that false displays or claims of reconciliation can do more
damage than no reconciliation at all. If past injustices, grievances, and hurts have simply been glossed over rather than fully engaged and constructively addressed, they will only resurface, and the notion of reconciliation will become hollow.

Many of the Fellows grapple with this in their work. Daravuth's portfolio, "Where is Reconciliation?" laments the hypocrisy of official proclamations of reconciliation in Cambodia, where there is still so much pain and alienation. His words and images remind us to continue looking beneath the surface of such false proclamations for the places where we can engage in constructive reconciliation work. In her working paper, Kim describes her continual realization that the reconciliation work at Artist Proof Studio was not yet complete, and we see that honesty was essential to supporting the studio community to move to the next level of reconciliation. Bev and Jenny discuss how playback theatre seeks to reflect the complexity of conflicts rather than simplify it; to portray people's most difficult stories in a way that others can hear, rather than to portray only stories of peace and togetherness.

It is essential that practitioners who are facilitating reconciliation processes be highly skilled. While this may seem like a truism, it is worth stating that a facilitator of reconciliation processes must be highly skilled in working with groups, in working with communities in conflict, and in working with people who have experienced violence and trauma. No matter how well-intentioned and well-planned an initiative may be, the reconciliation process will be severely damaged if the facilitator re-traumatizes people, inspires mistrust, or in some other way causes harm to the group. Bev and Jenny, in particular, emphasize that the work of playback theatre requires highly skilled practitioners.

For the work of reconciliation to begin and to be sustained, purposeful social spaces must be created, spaces in which people who have been divided by conflict can have encounters and can work and play together. In collective rituals and collaborative art, we come together as members of a community to create or to witness creation. Sometimes, for people who have been in conflict with or alienated from one another for a long time, this act of coming together in and of itself is significant, and can begin to restore the trust and respect that has been broken.

In contrast to the destruction that has permeated so many communities, rituals and art can remind people of the possibility of creativity itself. The space that is created can be a much-needed "neutral" zone in which all are welcome and all are heard, in which people from communities that do not typically socialize together can have contact, and in which principles of caring and respect are valued. Once people have come together in such a space, the undertaking of collaborative work/play-making a collage, drumming, performing, listening – can deepen their sense of shared purpose and interdependence, allowing them both to grapple with the real differences between them and to feel a sense of unity. But all this must begin with a space – a physical but also a metaphorical space, a clearing which people are invited to step into and in which they feel safe.

Lena's paper describes how, over time, shared experiences in shared spaces (a group of drummers making music together over the course of years, for example) can lead to a shared identity that is as strong or even stronger than an ethnic identity. Bev and Jenny write about the importance of shared experience (which suggests shared space) for people who have been alienated from one another. It is important to note, too, that while a space can be a temporary
entity – a place in the grass where people can sit in a circle together – institutions like Artist Proof Studio and the Reyum Art School can become ongoing physical spaces, "homes" as it were, for the kind of encounter and engagement reconciliation requires.

1 In the following exploration of our learnings, we draw on illustrative examples from the fellows' work, as described at length in their papers, portfolios, and creative projects. In many cases, there were more examples within the fellows' work than we were able to discuss here. We encourage you to refer back to the gallery of papers and portfolios to find additional illustrations of each point.

2 While the power of story-telling and narrative was confirmed for us through this investigation, so indeed was the unique power of non-verbal artistic and cultural forms. We have discussed this further under point 3 of "What We Have Learned."

3 The value of working with verbal forms, particularly narrative, is discussed in point 1 of "What We Have Learned."