

**Memory of Violence and Drama in Peru:
The Experience of the Truth Commission and Grupo
Cultural Yuyachkani**

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*"Memoria de la violencia y dramaturgia en el Perú:
La experiencia de la Comisión de la Verdad y el Grupo Yuyachkani "*

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Dr. Lerner Febres was born in Lima Peru in 1944 and received a PhD in Philosophy from Université Catholique de Louvain. He was Rector of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Peru (PUCP) from 1994-1999, and from 1999-2004 when he became Rector Emeritus. He is a member of the Jury for the Ethics Tribunal of the Peruvian Media Council, and most notably he was the Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru from 2001 to 2003. After two decades of armed conflict, political violence, and suffering due to an authoritarian regime, the Commission, created by the government of Peru, was established to address the factors which made violence possible, and to the consequences of destruction and of physical and moral suffering, especially in the most humble and impoverished sectors of Peruvian society. The Commission published its report in April, 2003.

From 1999 to 2004, Dr. Lerner Febres was President of the Union of Latin American Universities (UDUAL). He was the President of the Lima Philharmonic Society in 2008 and is currently the Chairman of the Board of the Peruvian Film Institute.

Dr. Lerner Febres has received several awards for his long and impressive academic background and his work with human rights, from the governments of Peru, Poland, Germany, France, and Chile, among others. He has participated in various lectures and conferences in Peru and abroad on violence and peacemaking in addition to serving as a speaker and panelist at numerous seminars and panel discussions on the experiences and findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.

Dr. Lerner Febres wrote the Foreword to *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict Volume II: Building Just and Inclusive Communities* (New Village Press: 2011).

Dear Friends:

I sincerely thank you for the invitation to participate in this interesting event and to share with you our experience in Peru confronting a violent past through artistic, and particularly theatrical, modes. In these remarks I will offer you a succinct idea of this experience as it unfolded in one particular context: the search for truth about the massive human rights violations committed during the armed conflict that broke out in Peru between 1980 and 2000.

To this end, I will present first a few reflections on the phenomenon of violence and its inherent dehumanizing character. This is important to understanding how the arts in general and the dramatic arts in particular are not only valid but indispensable in a comprehensive critical approach to the legacy of violence. Next, I will discuss in more detail the particular historical context in which memory was cultivated in Peru and, central to this, the memory work carried out by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission between 2001 and 2003. Finally, I will touch on the way in which one theater company in particular, *Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani*, contributed to the work of the Commission, and to a conception of memory and the search for peace and justice more broadly—efforts powerfully supported by Yuyachkani’s symbolic work and creative representation of the dilemmas and tragedies which engulfed Peru during the tumultuous years of violence.

With this brief presentation, necessarily schematic, I hope to communicate to you a reasonable understanding of what it has meant for Peru to reckon with the past through artistic modes, an approach that has far from exhausted its full potential in our country. My remarks, then, will attempt to contribute to the symposium’s discussion through the introduction of a specific case.

Violence and Dehumanization

Human dignity, inherent to all people, is not fulfilled in the experience of the isolated individual but through the bonds linking him to others, his fellow human beings, who grant him recognition. Notions such as freedom, self-realization and esteem only become meaningful, as elements of our radical humanity, in view of our relationships with others. When we consider the integrity of human beings in this light we understand the deep severity of violence. Any act of violence constitutes the denial of the identity of its object and as a consequence involves the breaking down of the sufferer. Any violent act entails a depersonalization of the victim, who becomes, suddenly, an object without dignity. Likewise any violent act implies the degradation of he who performs it. When in common parlance we apply the label “inhumane” to perpetrators of cruel and treacherous acts, we are placing the aggressors outside humanity, presupposing that their crimes prove an absence of those sensibilities that distinguish us from animals, known as “empathy” and “solidarity.” We perceive violence as an act contrary to the nature of our species. The perpetrator is someone incapable of putting himself in the place of his victim, who has meanwhile been stripped of his personhood. We understand further that the denigrating consequences of violence don’t end with the incident itself but rather endure in the absence of a restorative act to punish those responsible and repair the damage caused to those who suffered.

Violence, then, attacks meaning by breaking down the bonds between people and dehumanizing them. For this reason, the violent act is unintelligible. It defies understanding because it goes against our natural inclination to recognize the dignity in our fellow human beings. Nonetheless (and sadly), it continues to be a human act. Indeed, only we human beings are capable of creating, through meticulous and perverse methods, such complex—now direct, now so subtle—mechanisms for provoking suffering in fellow members of our species. Not for nothing is our history so filled with acts of such indescribable cruelty: Ahead of our virtues and our capacity for tolerance and solidarity, it would seem that slaughter, exterminations, tyrannies, wars, segregation, and racial and social denigration are the watchword of human existence on Earth. We are, we must recognize, two-faced beings, each contrary and unrecognizable to the other. On the one hand, we are capable of acting in a spirit of solidarity and charity: undertaking the great deeds which pave the way for moral progress, achieving stunning advances in the development of science, which in turn have led to answers to the grand questions about our nature and universe. On the other hand, however, we have demonstrated time and again a capacity for becoming the most dangerous threat to our fellow men, perpetrating spectacles filled with indignity and ferocity. It is no accident that in our universal history the names and faces of those infamously linked to cruelty and infamy number in the thousands.

The precariousness of human beings, the fragility of our morals and of our feelings, is thus evident. How can we with our privileged glimpse into the enigmas of the universe, we the great dominators and transformers of nature, be at the same time the primary destroyers of dignity, and the greatest threat to the survival of our species?

The answer is that perhaps, despite the complexity of our knowledge of the world, despite the magnificence of our civilizations, we have yet to learn to act to secure our future and endow our existence with a higher meaning.

Since ancient times, art has emerged as a means of addressing these questions. The cultivation of art is not, as many still believe, a superfluous practice meant to decorate or cover up lesser ambitions. Art is divorced from both efficiency and efficacy; its inspiration is not the pursuit of profit nor can its worth be established by its value in the market. Rather, its aim is to dignify all human beings—its business to shake us out of passive conformity to what *is*, and provoke us to dare explore what we can and should be.

Of the various arts, the dramatic arts in particular possess this quality allowing for the purification of our lives, spurring us to rise above the everyday. True theater involves a questioning, an estrangement from our own lives that lets us examine them as something momentarily alien. It is artifice that does not hide but rather *exposes* its own artificiality, helping us to likewise see ourselves, to observe ourselves as a kind of other, and thus submit to judgment our existences and understand our reality with new clarity. If theater becomes dangerous, provoking reproach and suspicion, that's because it has awakened the ghosts of a community. That theater which deals authentically with what it is to be human, which refuses to be a frivolous spectacle, does not distort reality but rather expresses and

renders it intelligible. It seeks therefore not to reproduce the facts but rather to stage the symbols that shape experience.

To re-present, in theatrical terms, is not merely to return to or re-perform the events of the past. What happened happened, and there would be no added gain in its occurring again. What is at issue with theater has less to do with reproduction and more to do with the revelation of the meaning of what happened—and with atonement, through a ceremony involving the audience. It is in this interaction with the audience that the besieged meaning is recovered. Until a certain sense has been made of the past, the past acts understood and atoned for, they stand as no more than fragments of incidents, cut-outs, worthless fractures—that is to say, illusions. One of the most renowned artists of the stage of our time, Eugenio Barba, asserted keenly that he loved theater because he loathed illusion. “I don’t think,” he said, “that our discontent can be appeased. When it seems reduced to silence, I smell the odor of lies in my nostrils. If the discontent were to fade, I would not know what to do with theater.”

Barba’s words echo clearly the influence of Antonin Artaud. Theater, while it is clearly representation and without a doubt an exercise in fiction, is not to be confused with illusion or lies. Real theater is the exposure of truth through the potent act of exhibiting the symbols that give shape to experience. This occurs through repetition and, therein, ritual. It is the persistence in this ritual, the willed return in the name of rediscovering and reconstituting our human bond, that bestows upon it its great dignity, and empowers it to recover some of the meaning lost in the maelstrom of events.

If, in a staged performance, we the audience are confronted with horror and monstrosity, with farce and comedy, these effects do not owe to a disintegration of the real but rather to the success of the actors at having revealed an area of life that was hidden.

The magic of the theater does not consist, then, in an evasion, but rather in a clear and disturbing return to the facts. It is a masking that unmask us, a fiction that restores to us, whole and legible, a set of previously scattered facts.

Art, understood thus, is a restoration of truth, and therefore stands in opposition to a contemporary culture which privileges the illusory. Jean Baudrillard characterized ours as a culture based on simulacra. Umberto Eco, for his part, deconstructed, ingeniously, the obsession with illusion characteristic of late capitalism. Today, undeniably, we live in a moment of breakdown of that simulacra and those illusions. The current global situation is fragile indeed in an economic sense—but exceedingly rich in the opportunity it offers to interrogate the ‘reality’ upon which the global order has propped itself up. The prophesied end of history seems rather to be pushing toward a rebirth of history: nothing less than the recovery of our right to dream. But in order to build a truly shared, universal world in which these dreams are possible, we must demand—forcefully, as an urgent matter—justice for all people, and especially those who have been violently torn from history. If, as William Shakespeare writes, all the world’s a stage, then all of humanity should be cued to take a place in the story. By the same token, the construction of a free, universally just and supportive society must be founded in the recovery of all voices,

especially those which have been excluded; this means, furthermore, a constant struggle against forgetting and against the illusion that human destiny can only unfurl in a single direction.

This illusion, the illusion of progress as a unidirectional and unquestionable march, has been at the root of the greatest catastrophes of the twentieth century, as well as those that have occurred and continue to occur in the twenty-first. Under the banner of fighting underdevelopment, under the banners of progress or revolution, human beings have always erected borders to divide us, borders drawn under illusory notions of the superiority of some over others. In these chronic excuses, in these vain lies that fuel exclusivity, lurks violence. In the form of racial superiority, class hatred, ethnic enmity, the domination of men over women, horrific acts are committed—repulsive to our consciences and yet close and present. Atrocities owing to blind conviction have sealed the sad fate of millions, in nations around the world. This trend has clearly not spared Peru; throughout history its territory has been the stage for many forms of collective violence. One of the most terrible stretches in this history was the armed conflict that bloodied the country from the year 1980 to 2000, and about which the country held, nearly ten years back now, an official truth-seeking process, by means of the already-mentioned Truth and Reconciliation Commission over which I had the honor to preside. I'd like to continue with a brief discussion of this process.

Seeking Truth in Peru

In 2001, the members of Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission were faced with the challenge of narrating the unspeakable. For two decades, the country had been ravaged by violence, a conflict bearing the clear marks of the same social fractures that have plagued Peru since the founding of our Republic. One sector of the nation simply carried on, indifferent to the acts; indeed, it justified them. Another, and fortunately the greater, part of society shared with the Commission a feeling of indignation and bewilderment: the legacy of an absurd twenty-year domestic war that left thousands of families destroyed and hundreds of villages razed.

To provide a better understanding of the work carried out by the Commission over which I had the honor of presiding, a review of the historical context would serve us:

Between 1980 and 2000, an armed conflict broke out within Peru, during which massive human rights violations and crimes against humanity were committed. This conflict was started by an armed Maoist organization called the Communist Party of Peru, better known as the Shining Path. The armed uprising took place in 1980, just when Peru was restoring democracy after 12 years of military dictatorship. The group was joined, three years later, by another, much smaller organization, known as the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. From the start of their violent campaign, the Shining Path resorted to terrorist methods and very soon gave over to indiscriminate attacks on the nation's populace. The logical response of the State was swift. Regrettably, state security forces soon entered into a competition of brutality with the revolutionary organizations, and from early on made abuse of the people a common practice.

The armed conflict coincided with other serious problems in Peruvian society, such as a rise in inflation that caused one of the greatest economic crises the nation has ever suffered, and the coup d'état of Alberto Fujimori in April of 1992. Thereafter, the escalation of corruption led to the fall of that president, and to his replacement by the congressionally-elected Valentín Paniagua, entrusted with leading the transition back to rule of law. It was during this transitional government that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was appointed, whose task it was to investigate the political violence that occurred in Peru between 1980 and 2000. The proceedings I chaired took 26 months and engaged a multidisciplinary team of professionals dedicated to the study of the past from a variety of perspectives, but always with the aim of shedding light on the dynamics of the human rights violations and providing some relief to the victims of that abuse.

The task was wide-ranging and complex, due to the great range and complexity of the issues. The final report spanned nine volumes in which the events covered by our mandate were laid out in as much detail as possible. The document also provides a historical analysis of the violent process and states the hard facts describing the extent of the tragedy experienced by the Peruvian people. The data lets us sum up one of the main conclusions reached by the Commission: that the violent decades served as opportunity for the manifestation of one of the cruelest patterns of contempt for a traditionally excluded population: that is, the indigenous population. More than 69,000 Peruvians were killed in this period and, of these, 70 percent were rural Quechua speakers—that is to say, members of a group that for centuries has been marginalized in the official history.

Therefore, this was a matter of people without a role of agency in the national drama. It was a matter, moreover, of people who were and continue to be seen by a large slice of more socioeconomically advantaged Peruvians as a burden, impeding the development of the nation. Their death and disappearance were thus easily digestible—because they didn't matter. The heaviest, most aggressive expressions of violence befell these indigenous peoples, at the hands of both the armed insurgents and the state forces. The color of their skin, their culture and language, their material poverty, clearly marked their membership in a group supposedly unfit to rule themselves, whose constituents could therefore be treated as means and never as ends in themselves.

In the name of a revolution that might satisfy the fantasies of a group megalomaniacal leaders, and likewise in the name of the fight to quell that insurgency, unspeakable atrocities were perpetrated—difficult to conceive of by a healthy moral conscience. Murders and massacres, forced disappearances, sexual violence against women, razings of villages, forced enlistment of girls and boys, torture and humiliating or inhumane treatment, and a variety of other types of crime ensued. In short, the unthinkable happened. But it is precisely this scandalous, this *inconceivable* quality to these acts that demanded, urgently, some way of rendering them expressible. Faced with a task that destabilized traditional concepts of justice and historical narrative, Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was assigned the duty of narrating the unspeakable.

The absurdity of the issues exposed the deep flaws in the Peruvian nation. Indeed, the violence made visible our fractured state. The acts of torture, humiliation and murder that

occurred appeared clearly as enactments of ancient grudges, traumatic resentments, deeply rooted disdain. There is no other way to explain the ferocity with which the violence was expressed. Detained students executed by dynamite; a community of rural farmers, including pregnant women and children, hacked to death by machete; the leveling of another village after forcing the inhabitants to dig the grave in which their bodies would be hidden. These are only some of the facts that will suffice to give you an idea of the indignity of the acts we were tasked to investigate and bring to light before a nation still divided.

Indeed, there remains in Peru a privileged minority culture that would dominate representations of the country as a whole and place communities of rural farmers and indigenous peoples at the margins. The violence enumerated in our report's stories and statistics shows in panorama a nation reaffirming, this time with impervious cruelty, its fissures and flaws.

We understood immediately that it would not be enough to simply report the facts: that to inform the public by offering volumes of data would be insufficient. We were engaged in a much more complex task, which, if we were to meet our goals, implied the greater mission of reconstructing memory, as a first step toward reparations for damages done and the beginnings of justice. This meant the reversal of two principles that facilitated the horror—namely, silence and forgetting. To this end, we invited a range of actors with something to share about these events. We needed a plural discourse and therefore included all those political leaders, military soldiers and heads of insurgent groups willing to participate. Those leading this process of memory preservation, however, were without a doubt the surviving victims, along with relatives of those disappeared and murdered. It was a basic act of justice, to redress the silencing of those voices. Therein lies the strength and meaning of the public hearings, through which the victims of violence or surviving family members had the chance to tell the public their version of events. These acts, of course, did not fail to provoke resistance from those sectors who favored, and still favor, the triumph of impunity and silence. However, we can say that despite opposition, the hearings contributed to a break with the narrow notions of justice that had until then prevailed. Ultimately, it was the victims themselves who taught us that in serving justice, legal proceedings—the simple trial and sentencing of perpetrators—would not be enough. It was essential as well that memory flourish and that the right to speak out be restored to those who had been silenced. Justice demanded not only straight criminal proceedings, but also profound changes in the national consciousness. Never again must Peruvians give in to discrimination and exclusion. Never again shall we believe that silence is necessary for society to move forward. There are still those who say the Commission's, and the victims', rigorous understanding of justice is the stuff of resentment and that those infamous chapters of our history should be skipped over forever. But it was the same people who convened to tell their stories in the public hearings who refuted, once and for all, this objection. And indeed, they were not seeking revenge, were not motivated by bitterness nor awaiting their moment of retaliation, nor clinging to their grudges. On the contrary, they testified that what they were calling for, ultimately, was justice, and a recognition on the part of the Peruvian state of wrongs committed. These testimonies were the voices of brave people who for years had fought against the pressure to forget.

The Truth Commission began its work of restitution, of breaking the silence and reconstructing memory, in the city of Huamanga, capital of the Ayacucho region. The choice of this place had powerful symbolic meaning. Huamanga was the city in which the Shining Path originally incubated. Furthermore, it is where, as a consequence, the violence was most ferocious. To begin the public hearings in Huamanga meant a revaluing of a city which had come under the sign of terror and death—to the point that even knowing that a migrant hailed from those parts was to suspect him of belonging to a terrorist group, to judge him as an object of suspicion, to make him, even, a potential victim of disappearance.

The public hearings restored to the victims of violence their status as irreplaceable agents of history. They were acts of vindication, before a national audience not fully aware of the dimensions of the tragedy. Those events which had been buried were brought into public light by those who had suffered them. There was neither questioning nor commentary; the voices of the victims were the center of attention. For most, it was the first time they'd had a chance to speak publicly, uncensored, about what they had suffered.

To carry out these hearings was to spotlight disgraces that until then had been brushed off and lost in the abstraction of figures and forgotten newspaper articles. The mere fact that these people were finally heard constituted a first act of restitution.

A moment ago, I asserted that the choice of Huamanga for the opening of the public hearings sponsored by the Commission bore a strong symbolic value. I should rightly point out, however, that all the public hearings, held all over the country, were acts of symbolic reparation. To fully grasp what I've just said, one must understand symbolism not as mere substitution, nor as anything of lesser status than the real. On the contrary, a symbolic act in the true sense (that is, when it isn't farce), as a gesture of restoring truth and justice, does vital work toward atonement. Etymologically, a symbol referred originally to an act of matching two tickets or slips of paper: an ancient means of authenticating debts. A symbol, then, is tied up with a commitment to repay what is owed. The public hearings were precisely this: the recognition of a debt—in this case, a debt of justice. Because of its social import, the debt could not be met through the sentencing of the guilty nor through economic reparations to the victims alone. This debt called for the transformation of our country in a new direction, away from racism and exclusion. And that meant, importantly, work at the level of symbols, of representations, of images of ourselves from a point of view both critical and empathetic. Only then might Peru truly overcome its legacy of violence. Hence the importance for the Commission the collaboration of one of the leading theater companies in Peru, *Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani*.

Yuyachkani: symbolic paths of memory

Dialogue with the Yuyachkani artists was born of an awareness that our work for justice would and could not be limited to procedural matters of criminal law. To substantiate charges and exact punishment would not be enough, as it would not reach to the roots of the problem. On the one hand, there was the need to lend intelligibility to those horrendous acts; on the other hand, it was essential to raise awareness about the cracks and

divisions in Peruvian society that were, beyond the criminal will of certain individuals, the root cause of the violence, and which stood as an impediment to reconciliation—understood, by the Commission, as a re-establishing of the social contract among Peruvians.

The truth at which the country needed to arrive would not be contained in the register of collected statements. The listing of acts, the statistical calculation, was only a small part of the task. Just as important as the precise and objective examination of the facts was their reading and shaping—that is, a capture of their meaning in such a way as to convey a message to the country and, especially, to the victims. This message had to proceed from a recognition of injustice and a consequent sense of shame; meanwhile, its aim was reconciliation, through institutional mechanisms of justice but also through advocacy and protest, to make visible the social fissures that were at the root of those acts. To hide our shame for what happened, to continue to ignore the grave contradictions in our society, were and remain ways of repeating the wrongs inflicted; they are expressions of indifference and violence.

Yuyachkani, whose name is a Quechua word meaning “I am remembering,” had been following the violence through their various performances and therefore felt highly committed to the process of truth-seeking and the search for reconciliation. They were not, then, strangers to the history we were rediscovering when they offered to contribute to the process.

The performances of the *Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani* do not seek to reproduce the facts. They do not commit the naive error of certain realist art efforts, to portray social violence per se in a supposedly concrete way. Their tools are rather the symbols through which culture is expressed. It is not a matter so much of reproducing the facts as of producing effects, to reveal and convey the tragedies of Peruvian society. Performance heightens the senses and opens our imaginations to the deep truths that have gotten lost among the facts. The performance called “Untitled” is especially powerful in its capacity to tell a story based on characters that are, more than individuals, archetypes. Some represent suffering mothers; others, the dead who have been left voiceless and desperate to offer their testimony; another is a writer overcome by the passion and racing pace of history and who is also, like the characters he strives to capture, in a struggle to fulfill his writing mission before death catches up. Other characters are more recognizable, as real actors in public life. These are caricatures that, in the midst of the tragedy, act out a farce. The result is intensely dramatic, but at the same time comic and grotesque. The audience at which the piece was aimed could easily recognize the references to real people, but more important was that through the prism of the performance, these figures could be read symbolically, seen as representatives of the demons—of indignity, of infamy—that had shaped Peruvian history. The piece’s name itself, “Untitled,” taken from the visual arts, suggests a story that can’t be named, either because the artists themselves dare not put a name to the unnamable, or because a censor forbids its mention. In both senses, we understand that the truth chased by theater is not a value easily contained and labeled, but rather a constant search.

“Rosa Cuchillo,” another performance that was brought to the streets of Huamanga in preparation for the public hearings, tells the story of a mother searching for her disappeared son. Her search is so intense that it carries her not only to places in this world but to other worlds from Andean eschatology. Rosa Cuchillo is a mother and at the same time a ghost doomed to roam in death as in life in pursuit of her son. The constancy of her quest heightens the sadness of such a battered but bottomless love.

In bringing theater to public spaces, Yuyachkani demonstrated its commitment to justice. It was a way of underlining that it was not enough to be *on* the side of the victims and marginalized peoples. One had to be *at* their side. A theatrical act is not an event already endowed with authority and legitimacy but rather it acquires these through interaction with its audience. A theatrical performance is an emblematic example of how meaning in a work of art gets constructed through, with and for a community. Meaning emerges only then and is never predetermined. It is only fully fleshed out in action before an audience.

The Yuyachkani performances were, as I said, a preparation for the public hearings. They contributed to the fostering of an apt context in which to carry out the process—to the solemnity and ceremony appropriate to an act of symbolic reparations to the victims. Like these performances, the authority and legitimacy of the work of the Commission could not be taken for granted. A direct relationship with those who had suffered was essential, and especially with those for whom, because of the loss and violence they had lived through, the project of truth-seeking had begun long before the appointment of our Commission.

Theater is a natural ally to transitional justice in that both emphasize participation and only therein the emergence of meaning. Transitional justice must develop its authority and legitimacy in relationship with the community served. The justice process, in enacting reparations to victims, is itself a performance, insofar as it is a staging of the law in the public spotlight. That means that the convicting of the guilty must be carried out through a process of objective but also symbolic power. Not only must the guilty be punished but the facts must be laid out to be acknowledged by the community, so that amends might be made to the victims.

The compensation of victims is a ritual that involves the community. It implies a reconciliation and therein an affirmation that the human order, to which a spirit of solidarity is intrinsic but which has been broken down by violent acts, will prevail. This means that the justice process can be not only a restorative but also a transformative act. Justice, and especially transitional justice, can question the bases and make visible the injustice in laws and systems. [To borrow terms from classical theater], the exposure of wrongs can lead to pathos, to anagnorisis, [moments of discovery] and thus have an impact both purifying and transformational.

Acts of justice are capable, indeed, of producing changes in subjectivity, which in turn lead to significant social change. For example, those who previously felt marginalized and underrepresented by the law can afterward lift their faces and feel themselves full participants in civic life, aware of their rights. Others receive the message that they will not be able to perpetrate their crimes nor act out their racist and exclusive sentiments and escape punishment by society and its institutions.

Theatrical performance offers parallel benefits, in bringing similarly new faces onto its stages and into its scenes. This act of representation sends a new message to those historically excluded, conveying to them that their lives deserve to be told, and that their suffering, along with their dreams, merits a place on theater's stages. In giving, in a most powerful way, this leading role to those always before excluded from Peru's official history, the dramatic art of Yuyachkani became a very worthy complement to the efforts of the Commission, which might be summed up in a word: recognition. It is therefore that in speaking on the prospects for transformation through art in the aftermath of conflict, the work of this theater group comes to the fore, as a case worthy of taking into account on an international scale.

Friends, the case of Peru is far from unique, and hardly incomparable to others. It is useful therefore to bear the example in mind in broader international reflections on art and memory in the aftermath of violence. The reconstruction of memory will always call for words, for the discursive recovery of the past, for the formulation in terms of legislative norms and interpretive histories of the atrocious experience of violence. But that is not all. Facing the past also involves work in the domain of feelings, in the emotive realm, in reconstructing also the visual and auditory dimensions of the drama. What I hope to have illustrated with my comments about Peru are that art and memory dovetail naturally: Art restores meaning in bringing us, as responsible human beings, face to face with the undeniable facts and circumstances. Through this encounter with the undeniable, with our collective life as captured in a work of visual or dramatic art, we are perfecting our moral judgment and, above all, feeling the challenge and hearing the call to act, for the sake of our own ethical identities. This may be the key to the transformative power of art over a violent past that seems irredeemable, immutable, but which is always subject to the creative force of our imagination.

Thank you.

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