The Moral Imagination

The Art and Soul of Building Peace

JOHN PAUL LEDERACH

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2005

7

On Aesthetics

The Art of Social Change

One Autumn day when Bashó and one of his ten disciples, Kikaku, were going through a rice field, Kikaku composed a haiku on a red dragonfly that caught his fancy. And he showed the following haiku to Bashó:

Take a pair of wings
From a dragonfly, you would
Make a pepper pod.

"No," said Bashó, "that is not a haiku. You kill the dragonfly. If you want to compose a haiku and give life to it, you must say:

Add a pair of wings
To a pepper pod, you would
Make a dragonfly.

—Kenneth Yasuda, *The Japanese Haiku*

When I was younger, many more years ago than I care to think about, I wrote poetry. It was not earth-shaking verse. The only thing it shook was probably my own heart and head, though during my early college days I did have several accepted for publication in some obscure poetry journal that no longer exists. Then came the years of earnest study, intellectual inquiry, and the pursuit of professionalism. Poetry fell by the wayside. I stopped writing poetry, by my account, for just short of twenty years. In the early 1990s, most likely because my life was filled with too much activity, poetry crept back

into some margins of notes and got scribbled onto napkins and eventually into travel journals I had started to keep. I have often wondered what it was about higher education and becoming a professional that took the poetry out of me.

By the time I reached a sabbatical year in 1998, I decided to meet once a week with a poet-teacher whom I asked to help me work on and understand what I was doing with "this stuff that pops out." He was kind and patient, but did not waste much time getting to the point. The whole of his advice I still have scribbled on the top edge of a poem I was working on the particular morning he gave it. "You are writing poetry," he said, "as if you are producing a book." He went to his shelf and pulled down a book called *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, a copy of which now sits on my poetry shelf, and turned to page 483 (Charters, 1995). Under the chapter heading "Belief & Technique for Modern Prose" was a list of Kerouac's thirty essentials. The teacher's finger stopped at number 22, and he read: "Dont [*sic*] think of words when you stop but to see picture better."[1]

During that sabbatical, I, a peacebuilder who had spent most of his professional life working with deep-rooted conflicts and violence, now took up the joy of coffee shop doodles, the utter frustration of shifting one small word for another, and the occasional "Whoa, where did that come from?" that is the experience of writing poetry. I was in for a complete surprise. Rather than being a personal diversion to feed my spirit, which is what I thought I was doing on sabbatical, poetry became a pathway to peacebuilding. In my classes and teaching, usually at some point when we are all feeling overwhelmed with the complexity of studying a seemingly impossible violent conflict, I go to the blackboard and write in large letters: "Dont think of words when you stop but to see picture better." And then I say, "The hardest challenge of peacebuilding is to see the essence. If you do nothing else, take time to get a picture, an image. When you see the picture better, you will have achieved a synthesis. The key to complexity is finding the elegant beauty of simplicity."

From that period, during which I let poetry back into my life, I have taken up certain pleasurable disciplines. For example, several times a year when I face longer trips to troubled regions of the world, I have a little ritual. I go to a bookstore, head for the poetry section, and give myself the gift of a new volume. Yeats or Hughes, Rumi or Neruda, I often sit late at night when I can't sleep and read the black-on-white mini-canvasses of life. I write poetry regularly, though I have not yet ventured to publish any of it. I pay attention to the little "pops" of words that seem to capture something that is happening on the trip. On rare occasions, I read what I write in the classroom and training seminars. I feel as if I am literally finding my way across an uncharted sea. At times the parallels are remarkable, for the process of paying attention to poetry, listening to a voice that seems to come from nowhere in the midst of turbulent inner seas, is very much like sorting through the storms of protracted conflicts.

During our last session of that sabbatical year, I showed my poet-teacher

some of the new things I was writing. Paraphrased in my memory, his comment was the observation, "Your short poems seem to work. The long ones need work." He was, as usual, keen in his observation. I noticed that I even liked shorter poems better than longer ones. If I read a really long poem I have to stop and take it in doses. It is as if something calls out for the shorter synthesis.

One day in the middle of the Summer Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University, Mary Ann Cejka, a seasoned social researcher masquerading as a student, led our opening classroom reflection to start the day. "Today," she said, "we are going to write haiku." She explained the simple rules and structure of haiku. For about fifteen minutes we all wrote structurally correct but artistically challenged haiku. Though I had read and knew about this form of poetry, something caught my attention that morning and sparked my adventure with haiku.

Bashó, the famous Japanese master of Haiku, once remarked, "[H]e who creates three to five haiku poems in a lifetime is a haiku poet. He who attains to ten, is a haiku master" (Yasuda, 2000:25). In the past few years I have tried my hand at haiku. Just like Mary Ann, I even teach it as an exercise in my peacebuilding classes. I am relieved that perhaps in the course of the next twenty years I may "attain" one haiku. So far I have found this form of poetry a most intriguing challenge. Haiku, if you let it, will take you on a journey through difficult terrain in search of a place with great promise but where it is hardly possible to live except in short, extraordinary moments. It is the place where simplicity and complexity meet. I happen to believe that this is also the place where the heart of peacebuilding pounds a steady but not often perceived rhythm and where the source of the moral imagination finds inspiration.

While there exist a historical evolution and a number of variations, traditional haiku traces to Japan and has very simple guidelines or rules of thumb. The structure of a haiku is created in three lines and the syllables of each line are counted. The most commonly accepted standard requires that the first line have five syllables, the second seven, and the third five. Five-seven-five, in seventeen syllables, the haiku must capture the fullness of a human experience. For those wishing to see a haiku, the two poems quoted from Yasuda that open this chapter are both in five-seven-five format. A haiku must capture in a few words the complex fullness of a moment, a setting, or as the poets themselves are fond of saying, an experience. I have come to see the haiku challenge as a metaphor. The practice of haiku is this: to embrace complexity through simplicity. I believe this is a core practice of peacebuilding, both discipline and art, but before we explore that understanding, let us be clearer about the nature of haiku by turning to experts and haiku poets themselves.

Kenneth Yasuda, in what is probably the most accessible book for the uninitiated, *The Japanese Haiku*, suggests that this discipline of poetry is best understood as attitude and moment. Haiku *attitude* is the discipline of prepa-

ration, a predisposition for touching and being touched by the aesthetic, in other words, to perceive and be touched by beauty. Haiku requires a state of readiness for such perception, in both its writing and its reading. As such, haiku poets talk of humility and sincerity as the two guiding values that underpin their work as they face life and seek to see the true nature of things. Asó, a poet and theorist, wrote of the master, Bashó, that he had "found the way of art in the common modes of living" (Yasuda, 2000:18).

The Haiku *moment*, Yasuda suggests, happens with the appearance of resonance. Something resonates deeply. It connects. What it connects is the eternity of truth with the immediacy of experience. He calls this "ah-ness," which I might render in my experience as the "ah-hah" moment, the "I see exactly what you mean." Theorists about poetry quote poets who quote poets, so in this regard, it is not long until Ezra Pound appears and weighs in with similar observations and is cited by the haiku theorists. "Image" he wrote, "is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." He continued, "[I]t is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous work" (Pound, 1913:200). Following this idea, Yasuda (2000:25) concludes, "[T]he haiku moment results . . . in a new insight or vision which the haiku poet must render as an organic whole."

The origin of the length of haiku appears to be that of a breath-length. It explores the complexity of what is experienced in the timeframe of what can be pronounced easily in a single breath. As such, haiku poets connect the core of their art to gut intuition. Yasuda explains this with the idea of the ah-ness. Including a citation from well-known theorist Otsuji, he states, "[T]here is here no time or place explicitly for reflection, for judgments, or for the observer's feelings. There is only the speaking, impassioned object, with its 'extraordinary powers to set up echoes in the reader's mind.' " (Yasuda, 2000:31). The core of the practice of haiku is to find your way to intuition unfettered by logic, explanation, or even emotion.

Intuition is a funny thing. Most of us don't trust it. In fact, most training about conflict resolution and peacebuilding seems to be built on skills that reduce, circumvent, or ignore intuition. But if you have ever talked at length with good practitioners about how they know what they should or should not do next, or even more if you talk with people working on peacebuilding who are from the setting of violence, you will hear that what they circumvent are the rules of proper procedure. What they follow is their gut.

With its emphasis on aesthetics, haiku suggests that lived experience and intuition are related. "The nature of things is grasped in clear intuition," Yasuda writes. "The world, in the haiku moment stands revealed for what it is." (2000:62). Asó, the gifted haiku poet, wrote of his work, "[I]t is not the art of passion; it is an art that attempts to grasp the intimations of things or the atmosphere arising from the tension of emotion rather than the emotion itself. Consequently it is the art of synthesis rather than analysis, of intimation rather than realism" (Yasuda 2000:63). This suggests something we have been slow to fully embrace in the field of peacebuilding: Knowing and understanding conflict does not take place exclusively, nor perhaps primarily, through processes of cognitive analysis, the breaking down of complexity into manageable pieces. Knowledge and, perhaps more important, understanding and deep insight are achieved through aesthetics and ways of knowing that see the whole rather than the parts, a capacity and pathway that rely on intuition more than cognition.

Etymologically, the word *aesthetic* traces to Greek and is defined as "being sharp in the senses." Haiku is after this quality of sharpness. It connects intuition, observation, and experience. Not a feeling like emotion, intuition constitutes the sense of something. Sense touches. It sees and experiences things as a whole, not as pieces. Sense creates meaning. It puts things together and holds them there. By its very nature, intuition synthesizes. This kind of intuition is an "essential," as Kerouac stated, precisely because it "sees picture better."

This may well be why my short poems got closer to aesthetics than my long ones. They were finding their way down the slippery slope toward intuition. I say "toward" because the trail is long, and I have yet to write my haiku, much less the one image of which Pound speaks. But the discipline of writing poetry and haiku more specifically has brought me closer to the art, and the art has brought me closer to the discipline of touching intuition as a resource rather than considering it a distracting disturbance.

This kind of discussion is not prevalent in much of the technical, skill-based, and process-oriented writing common in the field of peacebuilding. Yet I have found that transformative moments in conflict are many times those filled with a haiku-like quality that floods a particular process or space. We might call them the moments of the aesthetic imagination, a place where suddenly, out of complexity and historic difficulty, the clarity of great insight makes an unexpected appearance in the form of an image or in a way of putting something that can only be described as artistic. Take the young Konkomba man in our opening story, who in a moment of great tension, in a short phrase with the use of the image "father" captured the sense of historical conflict but in such a way that it created whole new meaning. His few words penetrated historically yet transcended in the immediate. The same happened with the Wajir women. In the grounded simplicity of creating a safe market, they found the imagination through which the whole of the situation could be addressed.

These are not moments defined by the analytical endeavor. They are deeply intuitive—short, sweet, and synthetic to the core. What they synthesize are the complexities of experience and the challenges of addressing deep human dilemmas. When they happen, it is almost as if you are gazing at a piece of art,

listening to a piece of music, or hearing a line of a poem that, as Osutji put it, "echoes in your head" (Yasuda, 2000:31). These are moments when all involved feel a collective ah-hah.

I have participated and conducted a lot of training programs on conflict resolution, particularly around the process and skills of mediation. In all of them at some point we teach the necessity of developing listening skills. These often involve the skill of paraphrasing, of finding a way to feed back to the speaker what has been said. There is of course a technical side to this process, but it is not the technique that creates listening. In fact the inverse is true. Many people are put off by the technology of listening. I have increasingly come to believe that listening is not about technique or paraphrasing but about aesthetics. Listening, if understood from this direction, is akin to the haiku attitude and the haiku moment. Listening is the discipline and art of capturing the complexity of history in the simplicity of deep intuition. It is attending to a sharp sense of what things mean.

When I look back across personal experiences of mediating or accompanying people struggling in settings of deep violence and loss, I can recognize this. In those places people are anxious, angry, and fearful for the loss of life—literally and metaphorically—and listening requires the discipline of very few words and enormous patience to penetrate the great clouds of ambiguity while living in them. People talk at and then around things, and they go around and around again. So many things are said and then repeated. Whole timeframes are anachronistically leap-frogged, one over the top of the other and back again. Anger, bitterness, regret, sadness, loss, and misunderstanding are all mixed in a bundle of messages made up of words and images, spoken and unspoken. In the midst of that very human mess, listening is the art of connecting and finding the essence. More often than not the spring that bubbles from intuition flows toward this kind of deep listening. In those settings a mediator with too many words does not hear the bubbling. A mediator incapable of touching intuition misses the flow. But when a participant or mediator captures the complexity of the experience in a few words, it is as if a haiku has been written, a small canvas painted, the notes of melody floated. And there is an organic sense of "ah-hah. That is it." Listening, in that instant, becomes a haiku moment built from a haiku attitude. Picture is clear. Image emerges.

The challenge for invoking the moral imagination as a peacebuilder is not found in perfecting or applying the techniques or the skills of a process. My feeling, is that we have overemphasized the technical aspects and political content to the detriment of the art of giving birth to and keeping a process creatively alive. In so doing we have missed the core of what creates and sustains constructive social change. The corrective is not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. It is to seek the genuine connection of discipline and art, the integration of skill and aesthetics.

We work with a profession that has sought to deal with the social challenges of complexity almost exclusively through the improvement of processes by means of the technology of change. But we have neglected and poorly attended to the aesthetics of change, the art of life. This is where moral imagination comes into play. It attends to intuition. It listens for what Yeats called the "heart's core" (Yeats, 1993:28). This kind of imagination captures the depth of the challenge and at the same time casts light on the way forward. As aesthetics, the moral imagination seeks to connect with the deep intuition that creates the capacity to penetrate and transcend the challenges of violent conflict. Recognizing and nurturing this capacity is the ingredient that forges and sustains authentic constructive change.

How do we practice the aesthetics of peacebuilding? Like art itself, there is no single technique by which it can be pursued and at the same time it cannot be created without discipline. Let me share a few simple things I have found useful in my practice.

Whenever I find myself in the middle of a tense conversation, working with or between groups involved in a serious conflict, and the situation seems endlessly complex, I ask myself a simple question: If you were to capture the heart of this thing in a sentence of fewer than eight words, what would you say? This is the haiku attitude and moment. Can I find the image? Remember, haiku is not reductionism. The discipline is not to reduce complexity to facts. Haiku is synthesis. It captures the complexity of an organic whole by reaching its simplest composition. It sees things in the heart. When you capture the heart of complex experience, you have arrived at insight and often at ways forward. The discipline is to hold complexity and simplicity together. The art is to capture both in an ah-hah image.

I listen for poetry in conversation. I can be talking with a warlord, a commander, a taxi driver, or a housewife, but I listen for the poetry. I have for some years made an effort to keep a journal. Among other things in the journal I collect phrases, thoughts, statements, and conversations that popped out of my travels and encounters with people struggling to make their way through human conflict. I often take these pieces of conversations and let them breathe in black and white on paper. These don't always succeed, but what I have found is this: There is a poetry to conflict embedded in everyday conversation. Sometimes a single conversational poem captures the complexity of a whole situation.[2]

I watch spoken images. In common parlance these might be referred to as metaphors, which in everyday conversation they are, and more commonly we say that we *listen* for metaphors. I prefer to *watch* metaphors. What I have found in many settings of conflict is this: People rarely talk about conflict analytically, unless they feel they are compelled or required to do so in the formality of explaining the mess they are in to a specialist who is analyzing their conflict. People talk in images. Much literature has attended to the importance of metaphor for creating and shaping reality and experience. But less

has been discussed about the aesthetics of metaphor. I have come to treat metaphor as if it were a canvas. Metaphor is a creative act. The spontaneous way it is formulated brings something new into the world. This something new interacts with the world and has a life. It creates an image of what the experience of living in the world is like. When I watch a metaphor, I take care not to approach it with instrumentalist purposes in mind. I approach it as a creation. The metaphor—like a movie, a painting, or a poem—invites interaction, probing, and echoes. Sometimes I find that rather than moving quickly to understand the metaphor, it is much better to sit with it for a while. Let it roll around in your head and heart. I write metaphors down on anything I have handy, a dinner receipt, the stub of a ticket, and I carry them in my pockets. At some point I go back and take a more careful look, a second listen. In conflict conversations I don't just listen for metaphors, I watch them. They take on lives of their own and they speak to the conflict, to the problems, and to the ways forward. Metaphors are like a living museum of conflict resources. They usually lead me toward an aesthetic appreciation of the context, the process, and the challenges of change.

I doodle. I would not call it drawing; doodle is a more accurate description. This typically happens in the middle of conversations with people. As a peacebuilder I spend a lot of time talking with people, more often than not around an informal table, at lunches, hotel and airport snack shops, during mid-afternoon tea and late evening coffee. Some of the most significant conversations with Basques, Irish, Somalis, Filipinos, Colombians, and East and West Africans have happened around an informal table. The histories shared and the problems discussed are long and complex. I can't sit for very long and listen well unless I have a pencil or a pen in hand and some piece of paper, often a napkin or the back of a paper placemat. I rarely take notes. I generally find that note taking distracts from listening. I doodle and maybe jot an occasional word or phrase that pops out of the conversation.

What I doodle are images that the talk invokes. I try to let the many words that I am hearing make their way from my head through my heart to my hand. As I listen I keep asking myself these questions: What does this thing they are describing look and feel like? What is at the heart of the matter? Where is this thing going? Where would they like it to go? What is getting in the way? How are people, groups, and activities linked? What pictures are they painting with their words? What is missing from the pictures? Questions like these are endless, but they all have a graphic, organic side to them. They lend themselves to doodles. I draw what I feel and hear. Many times they are circles and lines, although sometimes an actual picture crops up. I show people the doodle. They add to the picture. If we don't have pen and paper, I arrange sugar, salt, pepper, ketchup jars, coffee cups, and silverware on the table—anything to get a picture of the space, the relationships, the process, and the change that people are struggling to describe and create. What I find is this: If I can see it, I can

understand it better. If I can understand it, I can find ways to shape and nudge it. "Dont think of words when you stop but to see picture better" emerges on the napkin or the table.

I once thought I would write a book titled *The Napkin Doodles* in which I would explore this feature of my work. The idea was that I would use actual napkins, placemats, and dinner receipts from the conversations as illustrations in the book. My problem turned out to be that I have very few of my original napkin doodles. It is not that I have misplaced or thrown them away. Nine times out of ten, the person with whom I am speaking will say at the end of the conversation, "Would you mind if I kept that napkin?"

Conclusion

The aesthetics of social change proposes a simple idea: Building adaptive and responsive processes requires a creative act, which at its core is more art than technique. The creative act brings into existence processes that have not existed before. To sustain themselves over time, processes of change need constant innovation. As the study and practice around social change in violent contexts have evolved, we have pushed for acceptance and legitimacy mostly by making the case that these fields are professional. Professional excellence increasingly has emphasized the technology, the technique and the skills of process management as tools that legitimate and make possible training, replication, and dissemination. This is not bad, but it also is not the only source of knowledge, understanding, and sustenance. In the process of professionalization we too often have lost a sense of the art, the creative act that underpins the birth and growth of personal and social change. I fear we see ourselves to be—and have therefore become—more technicians than artists. By virtue of this shift of perception our approaches have become too cookie-cutter-like, too reliant on what proper technique suggests as a frame of reference, and as a result our processes are too rigid and fragile.

We need to envision ourselves as artists. We need a return to aesthetics, to what Mills called the place of imagination in science that creates a "playfulness of mind . . . a truly fierce drive to make sense of the world which the technician as such usually lacks" (Mills, 1959:211). Time and again, social change that sticks and makes a difference has behind it the artist's intuition: the complexity of human experience captured in a simple image and in a way that moves individuals and whole societies. The true genius of the moral imagination is the ability to touch the art and soul of the matter.

The challenge of peacebuilding and the moral imagination is precisely what Bashó posed for his disciple as he described the challenge of haiku: How do we compose and give life to that which we create? Aesthetics helps those who attempt to move from cycles of violence to new relationships and those

of us who wish to support such movement to see ourselves for whom we are: artists bringing to life and keeping alive something that has not existed. As artists, aesthetics requires certain disciplines from us. Be attentive to image. Listen for the core. Trust and follow intuition. Watch metaphor. Avoid clutter and busy-ness. See picture better. Find the elegant beauty where complexity meets simplicity. Imagine the canvas of social change.

13

On Pied Pipers

Imagination and Creativity

Everywhere I go I find a poet has been there before me.

—Sigmund Freud

"Bring me a musician," the Prophet Elisha called. And while the musician played, the power of the Lord came on him.

—2 Kings 3:15

As a young child I remember hearing the fairy tale of the Pied Piper.[1] A town was beset with a great rat infestation and had no hope on the horizon that it would change soon. Experts and advisors came and went but nobody could move the rats. Then a stranger showed up and promised, for a considerable sum of money, to clean the town of this life-destroying problem. The mayor agreed. The following day the stranger turned out to be a piper, a flutist of sorts, and lifting the pipe to his lips, he played a melody that floated out across the streets. The rats began to move, drawn to the music. More and more rats gathered, following the sounds of the music. He led them out of town and straight into a river where the rats drowned. Back in town, celebrations were breaking out everywhere. The piper, pleased with his work, approached the mayor for his due compensation. With the problem now gone the mayor hemmed, hawed, feigned financial difficulties, and finally turned the piper away without a single coin. Disgruntled, the piper returned the next day to the streets and lifted his flute in melody again. This time, the children came and then followed the piper out of town, leaving the community without the joys of young voices or life for the future.

The moral of the story seemed clear: When you give a promise, you had best keep your word.

Four decades later, when I read the story again, this was not the moral that caught my attention. What I saw was the power of a flutist to move a town, address an evil, and bring the powerful to accountability. Without any visible power or even prestige, much less a violent weapon, a flutist transformed a whole community. I was struck with the nonviolent power of music and the creative act. The moral of the story now seemed to be: Watch out for the flutist and his creative music for, like the invisible wind, they touch and move all that they encounter in their path.

Artful Change

In 1996 I found myself sitting in the Killyhevlin Hotel in Fermanagh, Northern Ireland. I was a keynote speaker at a conference titled "Remember and Change," a phrase that had been pulled from a talk I had given in Belfast a year earlier (Lederach, 1995). In 1994, at the time of the ceasefire declarations by both republican and loyalist paramilitary groups, people engaged in conflict transformation and peacebuilding work had requested some reflections on what might beset them as they entered a post-accord phase of violent conflict. In that talk I suggested that reconciliation was not "forgive and forget." It was "remember and change." A year later I was in Enniskillen to address a conference. Delegates attended from peace and reconciliation partnerships across Northern Ireland, representing all sides of the conflict and a wide range of community, economic, and political interests, now trying to move toward a new horizon.

The Killyhevlin Hotel was the chosen site. It is located on the shore of Lough Erne, near Enniskillen. The venue was not without symbol and purpose. On a number of occasions, bombs had all but destroyed it. The conference was for the most part a series of talking heads like myself giving speeches and exchanging insights and ideas that were to translate into programs. The one exception was just following the lunch. The planners had decided to take a risk on what was considered a delicate addition. They had commissioned a troupe of dancers made up of young local Catholic and Protestant women to choreograph an expressive dance to music. The song chosen was Irish folk artist Paul Brady's "The Island." Behind the stage, there was a large screen. While the young women performed their dance, slides—pictures everyone knew and that captured the scenes of the thirty-two-year-old Troubles—would appear without comment.

The artistic process was not without its risks. Brady's song had first emerged a decade earlier, during the heat of the worst cycles of violence in the Irish conflict. "The Island" raised a question about the reasons for and logic of the violence and those who justified it on one side or another. Performed by a solo voice accompanied by a piano, the lyrics are profound, suggesting that violence is trying to "carve tomorrow from a tombstone" and is wasting our children's future "for the worn-out dreams of yesterday" (Brady, 1992).

When first played publicly, the song generated immediate controversy. Perceived as written by a well-known artist from one community criticizing people engaged in the violence, threats went out from the paramilitaries against the artist, radio stations that would play the music, and stores that would sell it. For years "The Island" was not played or circulated publicly.

In the early afternoon of the conference, I found myself seated between one of the highest standing officials of the police force in Northern Ireland and the mayor of the town, both fine and dedicated men, from different sides of the conflict, and both pleasant but also rather formal in demeanor, toughened, you might say, by the years of their experience and the nature of their positions. The song began and the dance troupe's graceful first steps brought hundreds in the audience to complete silence. The color slides of Belfast's troubled murals, children running from fire bombs, funeral processions, and parades riveted the eyes and captured the haunting feel of the music and lyrics juxtaposed against the ballet-like movements of these young women dancing together though from different sides of the violent divide. The whole of the Irish conflict was held in a public space, captured in a moment that lasted fewer than five minutes.

Near the end of the performance I suddenly noticed that the two men on either side of me were discreetly pulling handkerchiefs from pockets and wiping tears. Behind me I could hear and feel the same thing happening. One of the men leaned over and apologized to me, as if somehow it were a lack of professional etiquette to have displayed such emotion in public. The seminar proceeded. Speeches were given. Program initiatives were proposed and evaluated. It was a day in the process of a long, slow transformation. Looking back now, nearly a decade later, it would be interesting to know what people remember of that day. Without locating the specific documents I know that I cannot remember a single speech, proposal, or formal panel response. I do however remember, vividly, the image and feeling of those five minutes of combined music, lyrics, choreography, and photos. It created an echo in my head that has not gone away. It moved me.

In the larger picture of politics and social change many would say, "And so what? What difference does something like this artistic five minutes actually make?" I am not sure I can answer that question. On the other side of the coin I would ask a different but parallel question: How, when, and why did politics and developing responses to needed social change come to be seen as something separate from the whole of human experience? The artistic five minutes, I have found rather consistently, when it is given space and acknowledged as something far beyond entertainment, accomplishes what most of politics has

been unable to attain: It helps us return to our humanity, a transcendent journey that, like the moral imagination, can build a sense that we *are*, after all, a human community.

In the Old Testament there was a time when the prophet Elisha was summoned by two kings, Jehoram and Jehoshaphat. The two were surrounded by enemy forces, were facing a drought, and were nearing the end of all their resources. The prophet was to advise kings, which of course put him in a rather tough position. Needing to sort through what response should be given, Elisha cried, "Bring me a musician." A musician? This is the rough equivalent of President Bush and Prime Minister Blair contemplating a world war and calling on the great religious leaders of our day for guidance, and their response would be, "Bring us a musician." What does music have to do with the *real* world? The biblical text records that while the musician played, the power of the Lord came on the prophet. It also records that a great deal of bloodshed took place the following day. Music, it seems, has the power to push things either in the direction of greater violence or toward reconciliation. Is this yet another isolated incident? Perhaps. I have anecdotal, not scientific evidence.[2] But consider the anecdotes for a moment, from history remote and close.

Exhibit A. Through the research of Patricia Burdette (2003) I came across a text written by Chief Leon Shenandoah in 1946. He describes how the process of creating the Great League of Nations—sometimes called the Iroquois Confederacy—overcame one obstacle. The various chiefs of the nations had agreed to the peace with one important exception: Onondaga chief Tadodaho would not be persuaded. Led by an extraordinary woman, Jikonhsaseh, a delegation was formed to go and meet the resistant chief. Shenandoah (1946:12–13) writes:

> They discovered him in a swamp—rough, dirty place. His appearance, they said, was very frightening. Snakes were woven in his hair, and his body appeared crooked and misshapen, and everything about him was unpleasant to behold. The expression on his face let the people know he was unbearably cruel. They were singing a song, which was provided especially for this meeting. When he heard that song, Tadodaho at first felt threatened. But it was that song that turned him; and he melted when [he] heard that song. He agreed to listen to them. He had long been the worst human being in the world, so terrible that people had said, "The mind in that body is not the mind of a human being." And he was the last to reform, but they were able to comb the snakes from his hair and to transform his mind using songs and words to bring him health and peace. Jikonhsaseh had told them to use songs and words to transform his mind, and that he would be the leader—like the facilitator—of the Grand Council. That is the story of the remarkable leader of the Haudenosaunee—the Six Nations. His title has been handed down from generation to generation, like the title of the Dalai Lama or Pope. I am Tadodaho today.

This can of course be taken as a quaint folk story passed down through the generations. Or it could be taken for what it is: the capacity of the oral tradition to remember and keep alive the identity of peoplehood and how it came to be. A brief reminder is in order not to lose our sense of historical context. The crafting of the Great Peace, the formation of the six-nation confederacy led by Chief Tadodaho, was a forerunner to and inspired the writing of the U.S. Constitution (Brown Childs, 2003). At a given moment in time the Indian people of the six nations called on the Pied Pipers of their day, who had the moral imagination to transcend the challenge of their patterns while addressing the concrete challenges of their enemy through "song and words" to become "sane human beings." One could argue that a song changed a person and transformed our globe.

Exhibit B. In the 1980s, 200 years later, the countries of Burkina Faso and Mali exploded into war over border issues. International mediation efforts failed on numerous occasions to stop the fighting. Then the president of neighboring Guinea, Ahmed Sekou Toure, persuaded his fellow presidents Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso and Moussa Traore of Mali to attend a meeting at his palace. Samuel Doe and Emmanuel Bombande recount the unexpected events that followed:

> In front of the Presidential Palace in Conakry, one of West Africa's celebrated griots (praise singers), Kanja Kouyate, put on a spectacular performance before the host and visiting presidents.
>
> The performance took on the form of entertainment, but Kanja Kouyate was calling on the two presidents at war to make peace. He did this by evoking their ancestors and appealing to their inherent human goodness as leaders to lead their people out of conflict. Through poetry, song, and dance he brought out qualities that were a hallmark of a true African leader and challenged the two presidents to look to their ancestors and bring back dignity instead of shame and suffering to their peoples. So emotional was the performance that the two presidents not only shed tears and embraced publicly, but took a solemn oath before the public and witnessed by their ancestors not to return to war. (Doe and Bombande, 2002:164)

The story does not end there. In the next months, pushed by the presidents, a peace agreement was signed. It has not been violated since. It would seem that the peoples of Burkina Faso and Mali serendipitously received a visit from the Pied Piper.

Exhibit C. On May 27, 1992, in the center of Sarajevo, a bread shop opened

for a few short hours. A long queue snaked from the door out into the streets as people waited, anxious though patient, for the staple that had become a scarce resource during the horrific siege of the city. On a hill miles away, snipers locked their sights down on the bread line. A shell exploded at the feet of the people waiting. As people scrambled to help the injured, the snipers began to shoot emergency workers and anyone who ventured near the explosion. Twenty-two people died. The bread store was in the neighborhood of Vedran Smailovic, an internationally renowned cellist who had refused to leave Sarajevo during the war. He rushed to the square that afternoon and passed a frightful night of anguish watching more of his neighbors die senselessly. He recounted:

> Filled with sorrow, I eventually fell asleep at dawn, and was awakened by new explosions and [the] shouts of my neighbors, who were carrying children and blankets to shelters. I went to the shelter myself and returned home after the shelling was over. I washed my face and hands, shaved, and without thinking, put on my white shirt, black evening suit and white bow tie, took my cello and left home.
>
> Looking at the new ruins, I arrived at the place of the massacre. It was adorned with flowers, wreaths and peace messages; there were posters on local shops saying who had been killed. On a nearby table was a solemn book of condolences, which people were signing. I opened my cello case and sat down, not knowing what I would play. Full of sadness and grief, I lifted my bow and spontaneously made music. (Smailovic, 1998)

When his spontaneous playing was done, Smailovic discovered that people had gathered to listen near the square. Around coffee late that evening close friends told him how meaningful it was and begged him to play again, that they felt better when he played. "I understood then," he wrote, "that Albinoni's Adagio is healing music, that music heals, and that this was no longer a purely personal issue." He decided to return to the Bread Massacre Square and play every day for twenty-two days in a row, one day for each person killed in the massacre. Shelling never ceased during those days, but neither did his music. He became a symbol of civilian resistance against the tyranny of hatred and violence.

On one occasion, during a lull in the shelling, a TV news reporter approached the cellist seated in the square and asked, "Aren't you crazy for playing music while they are shelling Sarajevo?" Smailovic responded, "Playing music is not crazy. Why don't you go ask those people if they are not crazy, shelling Sarajevo while I sit here playing my cello." The moral imagination that gave hope and the strength to resist, a creative act that transcended the madness of violence, was found in the hands of a cellist who sat fast in the midst of the geography of hate. Sarajevo, it seems, found the gift of the Pied Piper.

Exhibit D. The last major bomb that destroyed buildings and lives during the Troubles of Northern Ireland came several years after the ceasefire had been declared. On August 15, 1998, in the town of Omagh, the warnings about the bomb were misleading. As a result, instead of people being directed away from the threat, they were evacuated into the path of the bomb. The hidden device exploded. Twenty-nine people and two unborn children died. More than 400 were injured. The events in the community of Omagh sent waves of shock across the world. Many feared the Irish peace process would collapse. Return to the cycles of violence seemed imminent.

The public—local and well beyond—responded much as they had to the death of Princess Diana the previous year. Flowers and wreaths arrived by the hundreds, filling the bomb site, the surrounding streets, and the grounds of the local hospital. It was an extraordinary outpouring of grief and solidarity. Some weeks later, still reeling with the devastation, town officials felt a certain quandary that was expressed openly by the mayor in a radio interview. "What are we going to do with all the flowers?" The flowers were now wilting, yet they were like a sacred shrine that could not be removed. Traveling in her car, artist Carole Kane listened to that interview and had an immediate idea: Make paper. She called Frank Sweeney, head of the Department of Arts and Tourism of the Omagh district. Thus began the healing journey that came to be known as the Petals of Hope (Kane, 1999).

Men, women, and children from all walks of life and both sides of the identity divide in Omagh participated in a series of workshops that saved the flower petals and processed the raw material of the wreaths and arrangements. Over time, the organic mush became textured paper of different hues. Common everyday people seeking for a way to respond became the artists that crafted small and large pieces from the paper, incorporating the preserved petals. Carole Kane developed a number of pieces alongside them. As people worked with their hands, they talked about where they had been when the bomb went off, what they remembered about what they had experienced. Touching and making something while talking began the healing.

On March 10, 1999, a private viewing of the paper pieces produced was opened for the families who had lost members in the bombing. Those who had worked and created the art chose one piece to give to each family who had lost someone in the bombing. In a book of condolences sent to Omagh, Nobel poet Seamus Heaney had written three stanzas from "The Cure of Troy." He gave permission for these lines to be used as titles of three pieces.

> So hope for a great sea-change
> On the far side of revenge.

Believe that a farther shore
Is reachable from here.

Believe in miracles
And cures and healing wells.'

The exhibit was then opened to the public and has since traveled around Ireland and Europe. Kane (1999:32) recounts her experience watching the families see the pieces for the first time:

> On the night of the private viewing there was a quietness about the exhibition space. It felt like a sanctuary. . . . families spoke quietly to each other. . . . This wasn't like an ordinary opening, where I'd be concerned about people liking the images and buying the work. None of the normal things mattered. . . . I spoke to Stanley McCombe about his picture as the lady who had made this piece had requested it would be given in memory of Stanley's wife. This was the picture of the dove, which was given from a Roman Catholic person to a Protestant person. This summed up what all my work was about and Stanley was touched by this gesture.

Belief in the creative act, as Heaney puts it, is belief in "cures and healing wells." How do we transcend the patterns that create such great pain and still attend to the difficult bogs where our feet seem mired? I have come to believe that it has something to do with the artistic endeavor more than the feat of engineering. It is a process that must breathe life, put wings on the pepper pod, and paint the canvas of what could be while not forgetting what has been. Omagh, too, found its Pied Piper.

Artful Application

What does all this mean for the world of conflict transformation and peacebuilding? There are two arenas I believe merit exploration. The first relates to our notion of process, change, and healing, particularly around the challenge of reconciliation. The second I will share through a personal journey, a look into what it might mean if we saw ourselves as artists.

The quality of my reflections on and interactions with art and peacebuilding was pushed forward through another of those serendipitous adventures—for the last place you really would expect to discover things about art and social change is by serving as a member of a Ph.D. dissertation committee. But such was the process of accident and sagacity with my close friend and professional colleague Herm Weaver, though both of us are still struggling to locate the sagacity.

Herm calls himself a husband, father, songwriter, roofer, and psychology professor, roughly in that order. He usually leaves off his informal resume that he was once a reverend. Some years back he decided to pursue his doctoral degree. He wanted to look into the psychological processes that underpin reconciliation and healing. As part of his research he began an inquiry into the nature of music and healing. Herm had peripheral vision so it was not long until the side interest came front and forward. He embarked on a journey to take his music as seriously as he took his intellectual studies and to focus more directly on music in the process of healing and reconciliation. In essence, he wrote songs and paid attention to how the creative process might be related to the process of healing.

There were of course many fascinating outcomes of this process, including the production of a musical CD, *Travellin' Home and Back*, and a full-blown thesis explaining it (Weaver, 1999a, 1999b). For me, however, one of the best elements of the entire process was the formation of a single question, which I would now frame as: What if reconciliation were more like a creative artistic process than a linear formula of cumulative activities aimed at producing a result? Sometimes, it takes a whole dissertation to formulate one good question.

Herm arrived at an intriguing summary of what came from the creative endeavor and empirical research. He concluded with the elements that he found guided the artistic process and then how these elements might explore pathways toward answering the question of the connection between art and reconciliation. The list was as follows, in his case, framed around the creation of music:

1. The music was to be guided by an *internal standard* rather than external.
2. The music was to be *honest*.
3. We valued *simplicity*.
4. We tried to make *space for the listener to participate*.
5. We aimed at creating music that *arose from the heart as much as from the head*.
6. We were committed to *having fun*. (Weaver, 1999b:105–106).

In relationship to reconciliation, this points us in a challenging direction. The artistic process is not linear; it moves around and pops out in all kinds of unexpected ways. Taking the relationship of art and reconciliation seriously would then suggest that reconciliation should not try to obligate people to think or act linearly, as in "if you do A and then B, you will get C."

The artistic process has its own sense of time and it is not chronological. When the creative process is forced or obligated, less than desirable and artificial outcomes emerge. People working with reconciliation need to rethink

healing as a process paced by its own inner timing, which cannot be programmed or pushed to fit a project. People and communities have their own clocks.

The artistic process rises to its highest level when it finds expression that is simple and honest. Elegance and beauty are often captured when complexity is reflected in the simplest of lines, curves, textures, melodies, or rhythms. Reconciliation that is framed as an intellectually complex process will too often create so much noise and distraction that the essence is missed. The key is to find the essence. Honesty of experience, ahead of correctness of perception, Weaver argued, is the key to reconciliation. Art and reconciliation may share this guideline: Be honest early. Be honest often. In healing, there is no replacement for straight honesty, even when it hurts.

The artistic process cannot be understood as something that mostly deals with the head. Intellectual rationality is but one element of the human experience but it is the element that most wishes to control the others. The artistic process initially breaks beyond what can be rationally understood and then returns to a place of understanding that may analyze, think it through, and attach meaning to it. This is much like the process of reconciliation. Brokenness wanders all over our souls. Healing requires a similar journey of wandering. It is not possible to cognitively plan and control the healing. "Healing," W. H. Auden quoted his papa's advice, "is not a science, but the intuitive art of wooing nature" (quoted in Cameron, 2002:247).

The artistic process is fun. The greatest artists of all time had a knack for playfulness, for seeing the life inside of things. Too much seriousness creates art with a message but rarely creates great art. There is no scientific evidence that seriousness leads to greater growth, maturity, or insight into the human condition than playfulness. This is even truer of healing—an understanding I first gained from Edwin Friedman (1990). Reconciliation is dealing with the worst of the human condition, the effort to repair the brokenness of relationships and life itself. It appears as a very serious business. Ironically, the pathway to healing may not lie with becoming more serious. This may explain one reason that people of so many geographies of violence have developed such extraordinary senses of humor and playfulness.

A few years after writing his thesis and reflecting back on his list, Weaver added this thought to his initial work:

> Reconciliation gets complicated and compounded when we try to address it purely on the intellectual level. Somewhere along the way we came to think of hurt as lodged in the cognitive memory. Hurt and brokenness are primarily found in the emotional memory. The reason I like the arts—music, drama, dance, whatever the form—is precisely because it has the capacity to build a bridge between the heart and the mind. (Weaver, 2003)

Without a doubt, there is something of a transcendent nature that takes place in both the artistic endeavor and authentic reconciliation. This transcendent nature is the challenge of the moral imagination: the art and soul of making room for and building the creative act, the birthing of the unexpected.

A second artful application comes in another simple question: What would it mean if peacebuilders saw themselves as artists? It would be an error if we thought only those who are artistically gifted in a particular discipline could pull this off. In her book *Walking in the World*, Julia Cameron called this the "scenario of leaving those we love and going somewhere lonely and perhaps exotic, where we will be Artists with a capital A" (Cameron, 2002:17). The goal of bridging art and peacebuilding is not that we endeavor to become something we are not. Nor is it the pursuit of the "Arts" in order to find a way to somehow become miraculously gifted in one of the forms, like music, poetry, or painting. Experimenting and working at those can create tremendous insight, inner strength, and sustenance. But I am not appealing for nor advocating that peacebuilders must be artists in the professional sense of the word in order to connect art and social change. The key is simpler than that: We must find a way to touch the sense of art that lies within us all. As an example, let me clarify the context from which my own sense of artful connection to the world emerges.

I am a Mennonite by family affiliation and adult choice. I grew up in rural communities in the West and I was lucky enough to know all of my grandparents and two of my great-grandmothers. My heritage was never far from the farm, so to say, from people who lived a relatively simple country life. In my living room corner sits a ceiling-high writing desk and cabinet that was made as a wedding present for my great-grandparents in 1888 by a Mennonite carpenter. In our kitchen is a cherry table my grandmother had commissioned from a local Amish man in eastern Pennsylvania. On our bed is a quilt my aunt bought as a gift for our wedding, sewn by Mennonite women and sold to raise money for humanitarian relief efforts overseas. On my wall a small fraktur hangs, hand printed by a Mennonite woman capturing the statement of one of our founders. Each of these pieces has a simple elegant beauty. Yet if you asked any one of the people who created them, "Are you an artist?" I doubt that any of them would say yes. Knowing my people, I would guess they might say, "No, I just enjoy working with my hands and taking care to do it well." Art is a form of love. It is finding beauty and connection in what we do.

I remember as a little child watching my grandmother Nona and great-aunt Leona making apple pies on the Miller farm in northern Indiana. Two memories stick with me to this day: how good those pies tasted and how those women made crusts. There was a craft to rolling the dough flat then flopping it into the pie pan, but it did not stop there. I can still hear the knife blade hit the side of the pie pan rim as the excess dough was cut. Then the edge of the crust was pinched, thumb and fingers bouncing along the rim, but an awesome

symmetry followed their fingers and stayed perched on the pan. Apple filling, probably with too much sugar, was poured to the edges. Then, the last movement, the top of the pie was covered with crisscrossed strips. To be honest, when the pie came out of the oven, anyone with any sense of aesthetics would have hesitated to eat it. That was never our problem. Mennonites are a pragmatic bunch. It may look good but the purpose is to eat!

That is my context. I grew up with a whole community of artistic pragmatics. They saw what was and generally said it. They saw work to be done and generally did it. But somewhere along the line they nurtured a sense of beauty. From housewife to farmer, barn builder to quilt maker, no matter how mundane the task, it could be filled with the respect of simple beauty. If you don't believe me, take a drive to your local Amish country in about the month of June, before the corn is too high. Stop and look for a minute or two at how a garden is laid out, cared for, and nurtured. There you will find love and art.

The challenge of the artful connection is how to respect what we create, nurture love for what we do, and bring beauty to what we build, even in the simplest tasks. We have come to see our work for social change and peacebuilding too much in the line of an intellectual journey, the cognitive processes of getting the analysis right and developing the technique that facilitates the management of the change process. We have failed to nurture the artist. To nurture the artist however does not require becoming whom we are not. The opposite is true. It requires that we pay attention to what already lies within us, within our capacity.

Conclusion

I am not sure that I can answer the questions raised in this chapter about the connection of art to the pragmatics of political change in the world. I do know this: Art and finding our way back to our humanity are connected. Politics as usual has not shown itself particularly capable of generating authentic change for the good of the human community. We have to recognize that constructive social change, like art, comes in fits and starts. The greatest movements forward, when you look really closely, often germinated from something that collapsed, fell to the ground, and then sprouted something that moved beyond what was then known. Those seeds, like the artistic process itself, touched the moral imagination. To believe in healing is to believe in the creative act.

14

On Vocation

The Mystery of Risk

Since I was cut from the reedbed,I have made this crying sound.

—Rumi, *The Reed Flute*

Along our way in the preceding pages, I have hinted at but not fully explored the fourth discipline: risk. Commitment to relationship always entails risk. Sitting in the messy ambiguity of complexity while refusing to frame it in dualistic terms requires risk. Belief that creativity can actually happen is an act of risk. Walking into the camp of a warlord is taking a risk. Meeting with all of the armed groups in Magdalena Medio was pure risk. But what exactly is risk?

Risk is mystery. It requires a journey. Risk means we take a step toward and into the unknown. By definition, risk accepts vulnerability and lets go of the need to a priori control the process or the outcome of human affairs. It is the journey of the great explorers for it chooses, like the images in the maps of old, to live at the edge of known cartography. Risk means stepping into a place where you are not sure what will come or what will happen.

The word *mystery* has been cropping up continuously in my work. In a recent research initiative, I could find no word other than *mystery* to explain certain kinds of attitudes, activities, and responses of people who live in settings of great violence. The Maryknoll Center for Research had taken up an effort to study grassroots community responses to violence. When I was first contacted by Tom Bamat, the research director at Maryknoll, I thought he had made a mistake. He wanted me to accompany the research process, listen to the findings, and then make *theological* comments on what I heard