

## **‘Here on the Edge’: Community-Building Theatre During World War II**

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### **Abstract**

Theatre at its best reminds us of our shared identity. What I call “community-building theatre” takes a specific group with a pre-existing identity and effectively “reminds” the individuals what they all share. Through this process, the group is strengthened to look together toward the future. Grounded in Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas* and drawing on Phil Bartle’s ideal of community empowerment, I develop this definition as a specialized and productive form of community-based theatre. This definition emphasizes the importance of communal context, blending the aesthetic and the political, and finding hope in challenging circumstances. Bartle’s emphasis on common values, altruism, and skills point us toward effective interventions which may lead to increased community trust and unity. Such work must take on issues of meaning to the local community, engage its members as participants, and help them come once again “to consciousness of [themselves],” as John O’Neal has written. As an example I offer the story of the performance of a courtroom drama entitled *Tennessee Justice* by a group of pacifists in a Civilian Public Service camp in Oregon in 1945.

Here on the edge we look east to the West, west to the East, and cannot resolve them. We can only watch; watch and prepare; and bide on the time when what we are, and that for which we have taken this stand, can be tangent again to the world.

--William Everson, *The Untide* 1.10 (March 13, 1943)

[The liminal individual] has been divested of the outward attributes of structural position, set aside from the main arenas of social life in a seclusion lodge or camp, and reduced to an equality with his fellow initiands regardless of their preritual status [...]

it is in liminality that *communitas* emerges.

--Victor Turner, ‘Passages’ 97.

### **Introduction: A Trial in Tennessee**

An article in the May 1944 edition of the pacifist journal *Fellowship*<sup>1</sup> tells the story of the conscientious objection and imprisonment of ten pacifists during World War II. Nine drafted African-Americans applied for conscientious objector (hereafter CO) status, with the support

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<sup>1</sup> *Fellowship* is the journal of a pacifist group by the name of The Fellowship of Reconciliation.

of their pastor, Reverend John Marshall of Jackson, Tennessee. Although the men's applications were approved, they refused their assignment to do 'work of national importance under civilian direction' (Roosevelt) and were promptly arrested. Accordingly, the church members were put on trial for resisting the draft, and the pastor for 'violating the Selective Service Act' by helping them. All ten were convicted in early 1944 and sentenced to three years in prison, along with a \$1000 fine for Reverend Marshall (Fellowship of Reconciliation 92). The unnamed author of the *Fellowship* article references a report in the local paper, then offers additional details drawn from individuals who witnessed the trial, in the form of a two-page 'transcript' of the trial's key exchanges and speeches. In the writer's view, the transcript 'reveals vividly the sincerity of the defendants and the prejudice of the prosecution' (92).

Martin Ponch, a trained theatre artist who was himself an imprisoned CO, read this material. Incarcerated at Camp Waldport in Oregon, Ponch created a play based on the trial transcript for production as part of the camp's 'Fine Arts Group'. That play, which he called *Tennessee Justice*, was performed at two Oregon Civilian Public Service (hereafter CPS) camps and a Eugene church in early 1945. The audience was made up primarily of other COs. This production, by showing the experience of other COs, focused each man's attention on his own moment of pacifist commitment. As such, it brought a degree of unity to a camp splintered over ideology, religion, and daily living and working arrangements. That unity was built upon the shared choice of objection, and the shared vision of a future in which pacifists might be neither warehoused nor imprisoned during wartime. The play's social message and function make it an early example of community-based theatre.

In this paper, I will outline the ways in which *Tennessee Justice* helped tighten the community at Waldport by reminding individuals in the play and in the audience *not* of their differences but of all that they had in common. As I examine *Tennessee Justice*, I will

combine the basic definitions of community-based theatre with Victor Turner's concept of 'communitas,' arguing that most, if not all, community-based theatre reaches for this intense and effective form of community. What I call 'community-building theatre' comes about when audience and performers share an offstage identity which is reinforced in and through a production. This form of theatre can be particularly successful in establishing communitas. My definition also draws on 'community empowerment' strategies articulated by community development expert Phil Bartle. I will demonstrate that community-building performance events such as *Tennessee Justice* make use of several key 'elements of strength' found in growing communities. Contemporary theatre work which pursues this particular blend of aesthetic commitment and social engagement may find a useful model in the achievements—both realized and potential—of *Tennessee Justice* and its participants.

### **Defining Community-Building Theatre**

Community-building theatre is a particular approach to community-based theatre. Like all community-based theatre, it 'closely allies itself with a particular community, develops performances about that community's concerns, and involves some level of participation by community members' (Weinberg 186). Put another way, such theatre emphasizes local issues, involves community members, and addresses material community needs. Community-based theatre also tends to focus on those with little or no political power, giving what Roadside Theatre's Ron Short calls 'public voice' (Kilkelly 176) to the voiceless. Often that voice intends to address the community's material needs by appealing to relevant authorities for better housing, fairer treatment, or equal opportunities, and its social and political goals are pursued by aesthetic means and the creation of art that is defined both by its beauty and by its purpose. Performances intend to create a human connection

founded in honesty and integrity and centered in the realities of the community's life together.

These basic features were all characteristics of *Tennessee Justice*. The play was created within Camp Waldport, a community united by conscientious objection and by daily forestry work in the woods near the Oregon coast. This play told a story which was central to the experience of each of these pacifists: the choice to object and the consequences of such objection. It involved approximately ten percent of the campers, onstage and off. And it attempted to give voice to a group of individuals with very limited opportunities to be heard in 1945: African-American pacifists. This production, like the best activist theatre, wanted its aesthetics to be tightly connected with social objectives, not just 'propaganda.' The Spring 1944 edition of *Compass*, a CPS journal edited by Martin Ponch and published from Waldport, featured a section on each of the Fine Arts programs. In that issue, the Waldport artists wrote:

We are not propagandists. Art does not explain, it simply reveals. [...] In so far as it does that the function of art is the truest application of the pacifist principle. Yet neither art nor pacifism are essentially programs....And we believe that in practice we respect each of them enough to preserve the essential dignity and worth they both possess. ('Fine Arts' 21-2)

Community-building theatre in particular takes place in situations where the participants and artists share a common experience. The work of art brings about a particular sense of unity and connection by reminding the audience of that connection. By focusing attention on ten African-American objectors who were imprisoned, *Tennessee Justice* brought each man back to his own moment of decision: a moment which he relived every day as he decided whether to stay in CPS, go into alternative military service, or 'walk out' of CPS and potentially be arrested and tried like the characters in the play. Because the

participants and audience were part of the same group, with a common experience as well as a common location, it was more likely that they would be emotionally affected by the story at hand, feeling empathy for the characters. More than that, they were encouraged and inspired to continue to make their individual decisions, knowing that every other man in the room had been and was doing the same.

Victor Turner refers to the relationships within effective communities as ‘communitas,’ which he describes in relation to rituals. In rituals we ‘try out’ concepts and relationships which then influence our lived political reality. Theatre and other arts are significant examples of these kinds of rituals, as they, through aesthetic distance, ask us to ‘set aside’ our current reality for a limited term, and to imagine a world which may be far different from our own. Communitas is a ‘liminal’ experience in which ‘rules of law, politics and religion [...] are [...] suspended’ (*From Ritual to Theatre* 48). Such experiences are more likely for people in what Turner calls a ‘marginal’ position. COs in CPS fit this definition, as individuals who were ‘simultaneously members [...] of [...] groups whose social definitions and cultural norms [were] distinct from, and even opposed to, one another’ (Turner, ‘Passages’ 97). Among Turner’s examples of ‘marginal’ groups are ‘migrant foreigners, second-generation Americans, [and] persons of mixed ethnic origin’ (97).

As both Americans and pacifists, the COs’ very geographical position illustrated their separation from mainstream American culture. The artists felt even more ‘in-between’ as they negotiated their position within CPS, within the Waldport community, and in the larger world. Turner writes that ‘marginals [...] have no cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity’ (97). COs initially expected to serve limited terms of service, but these were quickly extended to the length of the war and beyond.

The CO poem published in 1943 with which this paper opens aptly captures this sense of working ‘on the edge’:

Here on the edge we look east to the West, west to the East, and cannot resolve them. We can only watch; watch and prepare; and bide on the time when what we are, and that for which we have taken this stand, can be tangent again to the world. (Everson 46)

This writer's description aptly captures Turner's sense of being marginal or liminal, while clearly articulating the COs' geographical and ideological position. Living together in such an exposed and uncertain situation may well have made these pacifists more susceptible to experiences of 'communitas,' and to finding ways to build community within their existing situation. One source of that community was theatre, and theatre which reminded them of 'the larger cause' could reinforce their shared pacifist identity.

Turner describes three elements or stages of communitas. In 'spontaneous communitas,' a group of individuals becomes bonded more or less randomly, becoming 'free from [...] culturally defined encumbrances' (*From Ritual to Theatre* 48). Elsewhere, Turner calls this 'a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals' who 'confront one another rather in the manner of Martin Buber's 'I and Thou'' (*Ritual Process* 131). In theatrical terms, an audience becomes 'one' in the context of the play as the social divisions of the outside world melt away. But communitas for Turner is a step in a rite of passage. We step out of the structure of daily life into communitas, then step back into society, changed. Put another way, these 'subjunctive,' or affective and communal, experiences contrast with our 'indicative,' or rational and predictable, everyday experience, where our interactions are governed by roles and rules (St. John 4).

Turner suggests that the spontaneous form of communitas is always short-lived; structure will inevitably develop. When a group wants to hold on to a sense of shared identity which transcends real-life divisions, it develops 'normative communitas,' which blends the two. Here 'a subculture or group...attempts to foster and maintain [...]

spontaneous *communitas* on a more or less permanent basis' (Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* 49). This form applies the temporary bond created during a performance to the hard work of living together in community among and across differences. The experience of the aesthetic moment creates or reinforces a kind of unity which can encourage the collaboration and patience required in the material world. This is precisely the kind of community commitment required of the COs at Waldport, who had to continue living and working together following their performances.

The challenging work of keeping the group's needs foremost in their work together is deepened by paying careful attention to those techniques which may strengthen the group's bond and function. Community development activist Phil Bartle has identified sixteen elements of community strength. Nine elements deal with the resources for community growth and, as such, are 'indicative' considerations. Such elements are essential to 'normative' functioning, but were more or less out of the control of the COs. But seven elements are more 'subjunctive,' or individualized. These are: altruism, common values, confidence, intervention, skills, trust, and unity (Bartle 104-109). These connect most closely to community-building theatre because they were within the control of the artists and the other COs.

Bartle writes, 'as a community develops more altruism, it develops more capacity' (104). The more members of a group are willing to put others and the group first, the more that community will thrive. This is central to my ideal of community-building theatre, which requires: leaders who emphasize the group's goals and needs; participants who think about the larger group throughout the process; and 'performers' who consider and learn from the 'audience.' The whole group must take the feelings of bonding experienced in production and channel those into their work together day in and day out. Bartle also highlights the value of starting with a group that shares significant agreement or experience, 'especially the

idea that they belong to a common entity that supersedes the interest of members within it' (104). For the COs at Waldport, this bond was their shared pacifism. While they had not all resisted the draft for the same reasons, they shared that moment of saying 'No' to Selective Service and accepting assignment to CPS.

Bartle's idea of 'intervention' (106), of creating a break in the regular social order in the interest of improving conditions, can apply to aesthetic efforts: community-building theatre mobilizes all available resources in service of both the shared performance experience and the follow-up work. It also closely matches Turner's idea of spontaneous *communitas* as a liminal state. This relates directly to Bartle's next category, 'skills,' simply 'the ability [...] to get things done' (108). Finally Bartle addresses 'trust' and 'unity'; believing that collaborators will work together with integrity is essential, and it is important that, no matter the differences, everyone is working for the same goals.

Next is what Bartle calls 'confidence,' a condition in which members of a community share 'a vision of what is possible' (105). This ability to look beyond the immediate experience to continuing relationships can build lasting community through theatre.

*Tennessee Justice* provided that look into the future by reminding the COs that injustices were happening daily, and that doing nothing was not an option. Jill Dolan emphasizes that the emotions felt in response to a theatre production can help audience members 'realize that such a feeling is possible, even desirable, elsewhere' (15), encouraging them to *do* something in their real world. Rebecca Solnit writes, 'Every activist movement begins by uniting its participants in important ways, giving them a sense of purpose drawn from the wrongs they seek to right and the shared vision of a better world' (285). Solnit points to the reality that groups are often unified by what they are against. Bruce McConachie has written that 'grassroots theatres [...] provide images for their audiences that help them do the symbolic work of including and excluding that constitutes community' (38). *Tennessee Justice*



presented the image of the relentless District Attorney (DA) as a symbol of that which the COs were against, creating an inclusive community in the process.

### ***Tennessee Justice as Community-Building Theatre***

My notion of ‘community-building theatre’ maintains a dual emphasis on the shared aesthetic moment in the theatre and day-to-day efforts toward advancing a sense of community, while specifically highlighting the value of working with a group with significant pre-existing identities or experiences. This is not to imply that this cannot happen in a theatre filled with strangers; in fact, a temporary bond may be more likely in this instance because the group exists as a group simply for that occasion, willingly ignoring the things which divide them. But I am most interested in those situations where a group of people who know each other well—and therefore have to go on living together when the ‘moment’ is over—are bonded across their differences, and choose to maintain that bond beyond the performance. Whether differences are essential or petty, this bond is created when group members are reminded of what they share, encouraging each to embrace that shared identity.

I do not know whether Martin Ponch and his collaborators created this production primarily for social-political reasons (though some of the other artists thought so, as we will see below). I do believe, however, that Ponch’s definition of aesthetics required him to reach for activist goals. Fortunately, a number of resources capture Ponch’s thoughts on aesthetics, theatre, and politics, including comments on his own motivations for wanting to create and produce this particular play. He was especially taken by the story and plight of these African-American COs because he was personally concerned about race relations and had lived in Tennessee, posted briefly at the CPS camp in Gatlinburg. He told an interviewer about an experience there in which ‘the president of Knoxville College, who happened to be

black, and whom I had invited to visit the camp, was practically run out of the camp because of his color' (Interview).

Ponch already had been 'disappointed' to find 'this Friends [Quaker] camp adhering to regional requirements that blacks not be welcomed there' (ibid). Conversely, Ponch described a situation at Waldport where the 'few blacks at camp...were not apparently... mistreated' (ibid). At least two of these African-American COs at Waldport performed in *Tennessee Justice* as the pastor and as one of the accused parishioners. In this respect alone, Ponch's work was building a larger community within Waldport; he drew in participants who were not involved in other theatre events and he focused the camp's attention on the fact that the experience of pacifism was similar for men of all races. And his play gave voice to the experience of African-American COs, isolated from mainstream American society by both race and ideology.

Another group which Ponch actively sought out to participate in *Tennessee Justice* were the 'Holy Joes,' or the more traditionally religious campers, many of whom were members of the Brethren church, which sponsored and managed Camp Waldport (and many other CPS camps across the country). Ponch described his intentions this way:

My hope was [...] to also get the [...] 'Joes' who were holier-minded to not only come and see this play and enjoy it, and appreciate it for what it said, but also to be involved in it. So—I brought into it something that was not in the article, namely a chorus, a church choir. And the cast naturally, of the choir, were going to be the Brethren people and I also had them double as jury people. (Interview)

To understand the dynamic at play here in recruiting Brethren campers as part of an arts project, some context may be helpful. While it would appear from the outside that these were camps filled with like-minded people, the reality was that there were strong distinctions

made over different approaches to religion, pacifism, and work. As a camp which operated on a model of consensus, Waldport can be seen as a kind of ‘normative communitas,’ to use Turner’s concept. These individuals were committed to fairness, collaboration, and distributed leadership wherever possible. But within that system, there was a great deal of variation and conflict. In fact, it could be argued that it was the many differences which required a rational approach to making rules and keeping the peace.

Education programs were considered one possible solution to these conflicts. To use Bartle’s terms, it was hoped that these might serve as a kind of ‘intervention’ which might emphasize ‘common values,’ thereby increasing ‘trust’ and ‘unity.’ Waldport Education director Glen Coffield proposed that some of these conflicts might be minimized ‘by getting the members of the individual groups together as often as they have common interests to pursue’ (Taylor 47). Coffield identified four conflicting subgroups in a June 1943 report. The groups were:

(1) Overhead men, who [...] are held in disrepute by the project men. In general they are conservative in outlook.<sup>2</sup> (2) Christian Service men [...] (3) Jehovah’s Witnesses [...] (4) The non-religious and liberal religious men....These are intellectuals....These groups tend to scowl at each other and continually backbite. (Qtd. in Taylor 45)

Camp Director Richard Mills believed that religious background was the major divider. He identified the extreme positions as ‘those most concerned with personal piety’ and ‘those that felt that religion is only for the unenlightened’ (Mills 9). The pious members would be Ponch’s ‘Holy Joes;’ the artists were more likely to be intellectual and nonreligious.

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<sup>2</sup> The ‘overhead’ are those who work in the logistics for the camp; those on ‘project’ are working in the woods.

Following the peak of arts group activity in October 1944, conflict over such issues as perceived special treatment of artists, criticism of the artists' lifestyle, and tensions between COs and both camp and Forest Service administrators over the work program had cut off new transfers to the group and minimized camp participation in arts events. In November a camp-wide vote was held to determine the group's future. The artists were supported by a vote of 46 to 13 (Wilson 108), indicating that over twenty percent of the campers who voted would have preferred that the artists just leave. The issues all related to the work that needed to be done: Wilson reported that good 'project' workers were transferring because they didn't want to deal with 'too many Bohemian-type men who are useless on project' (108). At the end of 1944, Camp Director Mills concluded that, while the work of the arts group had been 'entertaining and educational, the ideal of camp unity became somewhat weakened and unfortunately areas of discord appeared' (Mills 11-12). So, where Coffield and Mills had hoped that 'shared experiences' might minimize the conflicts between these contrasting groups, in fact the differences became even more intractable. This was precisely when *Tennessee Justice* was produced, both intentionally and coincidentally addressing many of these issues, at least temporarily.

Performances of *Tennessee Justice* at Waldport took place January 26 and February 3, 1945. Touring performances visited the Elkton, Oregon CPS camp on February 10, and a Methodist church in Eugene on Sunday, February 18 (Sheets, 'Spoken Word' 15). Printer, actor, and musician Adrian Wilson designed the set with fellow CO Kermit Sheets, and ran the lights (Wilson 121). He says there were twenty participants (125); the program names eighteen. Ponch's script for *Tennessee Justice*, which he described as 'lived, not written' (*Tennessee Justice* 1), draws nearly word-for-word from the *Fellowship* court transcript, blending it with a sermon and Biblical quotations. The main innovation is the center section,

in which quotations from the prosecutor alternate with a pacifist sermon from Reverend Marshall, played by African-American CO James Williams.

The other innovation was the choir, composed primarily of COs who otherwise had no involvement with the arts group. This happened because most of the experienced choral singers were what Coffield called ‘Christian Service men’ from the sponsoring Brethren church. Few of the artists were particularly religious; Ponch reached out to them, hoping ‘to arouse some understanding for what the arts people could give to the world among those who didn’t have much understanding of arts’ (Interview). By involving non-artists in the production, Ponch was beginning the process of building community through his production, providing opportunities for participation by COs from across the camp. And at least some of the hymns were intended to be sung by the full assembly as part of Reverend Marshall’s ‘church,’ thus involving the audience as well. At different points the audience represented Marshall’s flock and the crowd in the courtroom, implicating them both as sympathizers and detached observers. Seeing themselves in the story was a first step to recognizing what they shared with the characters and with their fellow audience members.

The script divides roughly into five parts. In the first, District Attorney Mooney grills Reverend Marshall, attempting—unsuccessfully—to get him to admit his responsibility for his parishioners’ pacifism. Next Mooney interrogates one of the men, Reaves (portrayed by African-American CO Glenn Evans), condescending to what Mooney sees as his naïve belief, and ridiculing his use and knowledge of language. The third section consists of alternating passages from Mooney and Marshall, now delivering their ‘closing arguments’: the DA in the courtroom and the pastor in his pulpit. This structure puts the audience in the position of jury, choosing whose summation is most compelling. Then defense attorney Harden, an African-American, addresses his own closing to the jury in a monologue about the brave stand these men are taking, and his own unwillingness to stick his neck out that far.

Harden's performance likely resonated with audiences of men who were, in contrast to the DA, willing to take such risks; this reminder would also have increased the bond between them. The climax of the play happens prior to the verdict, when the church members respond to Harden's speech with a 'vigorous Hallelujah!' and 'those in the church sing' (9). In other words, the high point of the play is the unsuccessful defense, the passion of which each CO hoped his own defense might echo get should he end up on trial. Though they knew the outcome for the ten defendants, the audience—it was hoped—were to be excited by their shared vision and hope that such decisions might be different in the future.<sup>3</sup> The play concludes with the reading of the guilty verdict and the pronouncing of sentences, followed by a stage direction for more music (10).

The response to *Tennessee Justice* was different for the different subgroups at Waldport. In his autobiography, Adrian Wilson—who himself referred to *Tennessee Justice* as 'a discouragingly bad play' (119)—reported on the reactions of three of Coffield's four subgroups. Wilson wrote, 'the Barbary Coast [Jehovah's Witnesses] thought it was the best thing ever done here; the Holy Joes said, 'Maybe the Fine Arts has got some good in it after all;' but the Fine Arts thought it stunk' (121). It is significant that both the Witnesses and the religious campers appreciated the play, because they rarely saw eye-to-eye. The 'gambling and swearing and carrying on' (Sheets, Interview) of the Witnesses offended the religious COs, while the artists were more often allied with the Witnesses, who shared their dormitory. Apparently Ponch's outreach to the religious campers had been successful, allowing Brethren audience members to sing along with hymns they knew and recognize their friends on stage in the choir / jury. For the Witnesses, it is likely that the subject matter, focusing on trials, struck the right note with their experiences; many of them chose to go to prison rather than

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<sup>3</sup> For some of the Waldport COs who 'walked out,' and were ultimately tried, including Ponch, this was in fact the case. A judge in Portland argued that, because CPS was intended to be 'under civilian direction,' Selective Service had not had the authority to assign and transfer men; therefore, they were to be considered free and their cases thrown out (Barber 188).

participate at all in the government's war. In this respect, the production clearly seems to have built at least temporary community across differences, reminding the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Brethren campers what they had in common.

However, these two groups shared an experience of objection with the artists too; so what did the artists object to so vehemently in their response to this production? The central problem seems to have been a perception that Ponch's work privileged message over aesthetics. William Eshelman, a CO and arts group leader, wrote it was 'too political' (*NO SILENCE!* 31), and elsewhere referred to it as 'inferior production' ('Chronology' 14). Artistic quality, as they perceived it, was the primary standard by which most Fine Arts members evaluated their work. The theatre group said that they would choose plays 'because they are good plays, rather than [...] any other single aspect' (Fine Arts at Waldport 2). On the surface, this appears to be an aesthetic philosophy in keeping with Ponch's own, advocating that social or political goals be connected with, if not subsumed within, artistic ones. But the artists apparently focused on difference rather than similarity in this case and did not experience the same kind of unity—temporary though it may have been—that others did.

One source which clarifies the artists' standards is a 'broadside' issued in May 1944. Entitled 'An Indelicate Commission,' it responds to a plan by the War Resisters' League to publish an 'anti-war anthology of verse.' The signers, 'devoted to the furtherance of pacifist creative expression,' included Fine Arts director William Everson, William Eshelman, Martin Ponch, and Glenn Evans. They cited three reasons for objecting. They were concerned that the proposed editor was not experienced enough for the task, and that the selections would be biased and limited. But their main objection was that 'it is strictly political in concept.' In a follow-up document entitled 'An Importunate Proposition' they offered their own alternative:

At the termination of CPS we hope to be able to offer a body of work that will stand as a testament to the creativity, the imagination, the range of insight and interest, *and the particular integrity* of those who have made this answer to a world at war. (Eshelman et al; my italics)

While this document came from the ‘Writers’ Group’ and spoke specifically about a proposed collection of CPS poetry, it is equally applicable to any of the arts group’s efforts. They wanted to be faithful to their politics *and* their art, not one or the other. From the perspective of these artists, *Tennessee Justice* was too one-sided.

Given the artists’ objections, was *Tennessee Justice* successful in bringing a new sense of *communitas* at Waldport, unifying campers around a shared idea, and pointing them to the future with new energy for their shared tasks? It appears that for some of the campers (excepting the artists) it did, and in some cases quite permanently. In keeping with the very personal and individual nature of conscientious objection, this effect varied from person to person. Ponch claimed that he had later met a Brethren CO at a reunion who ‘had indeed had his horizons widened and [...] had come to appreciate the fine arts program’ (Interview). This was one of Ponch’s goals, but it by no means indicates a camp-wide move to new unity and purpose following *Tennessee Justice*. However, the potential was there, and it was realized, at least in places, and certainly over the short term in larger groups.

## **Conclusion**

The experience of creating *Tennessee Justice* bonded the participants through the paradox of reaching out to the lives of others and finding there their own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. In a camp where COs were divided by religion, ideology, and petty disputes, it reminded many audience members what they shared with the characters and with each other: a decision to refuse military service and embrace pacifism. As such, the



production was an excellent example of community-building theatre. It told a story each audience member could recognize, in forms, such as sermons and hymns, they were familiar with.

By ending with a negative outcome for the characters, the play encouraged the audience to do something about a significant injustice. Because of the close connection between the stage situation and that of the audience members, any action they might take would be on their own behalf rather than imprisoned African-Americans halfway across the country. Even though the Waldport COs had little political power, the play encouraged them to remember what they had in common, to defend one another, and to watch out for political and social injustices committed against others. It also may have made them more likely to see one another in human instead of functional terms in their daily work together.

The play built unity between participants and audience, through subject matter, physical arrangement, and singing. It also bonded them at the expense of a new ‘enemy.’ Tennessee Justice gave COs a clear set of heroes (Marshall and his flock) and a villain (DA Mooney). They were reminded that they were in CPS because they had taken a stand against war, and were being treated differently as a result. What they had in common was the ‘enemy’ of Selective Service. By focusing on what they shared, and by developing a sense of trust with one another, participants could get on with the business of ‘imagining and constructing the relationships of an ethical community for the future’ (McConachie 41).

For many of the COs who participated and attended, *Tennessee Justice* broke down stereotypes. By seeing the human side of people they disagreed with, individual COs could look beyond differences to common goals. Artistic activities like *Tennessee Justice* could accomplish this; discussions alone might not, because the discussions generally focused on differences of opinion whereas the play concentrated on common experiences. The ability of *Tennessee Justice* to make a connection with just one CO on a personal level meant more

than managing to convince a majority to vote a certain way in a camp meeting. While Ponch clearly advocated high standards for pacifist art, he was also pragmatic. In *Tennessee Justice*, he believed he had found a project that could both galvanize the COs of Waldport and speak beyond Waldport to a (slightly) larger world about the pacifist experience.

Ponch was pushing for an expanded definition of art; a 'grounded aesthetic' in which 'aesthetic considerations must go hand in hand with those of social activism' (Haedicke and Nellhaus 8). In Turner's language, he hoped to create 'spontaneous communitas' while pushing for the 'normative' form. Ponch's decision to involve a large cross-section of the camp reflects a kind of altruism, as does the COs' willingness to participate. Ponch and his collaborators did not construct specific follow-up activities to the show at Waldport, but they did take it on the road to the Elkton camp and a Methodist church in Eugene, where participant Charles Cooley reports it was well-received (Survey). Ponch, with his cast and crew, wanted to create interesting work their community would value and which would encourage COs at Waldport and beyond. Their efforts added 'strength' to the community in Bartle's terms, and prepared COs to collaborate more effectively day-by-day, in something like 'normative communitas.'

*Tennessee Justice*, with its local focus, involvement from all kinds of participants, and desire for a unifying experience, demonstrates the characteristics and potential of community-building theatre. The community was built by encouraging individuals within it, challenging them, and reminding them they were not alone. Waldport COs were more susceptible to this appeal, living in a 'marginal' state and questioning their ideals. *Tennessee Justice* gave them a renewed picture of their shared pacifist identity. While there was no magical renewal of camp unity, there may have been a move in that direction for some COs. Participating in *Tennessee Justice* provided an 'intervention' which gave Waldport COs a vision of their potential future and imagined life beyond CPS. That vision allowed them to look at

themselves and each other differently, and to think more carefully about the ways they might work together to better their daily situation.

Community-building theatre can be developed or observed in any number of situations, from Broadway musical productions to school plays. What is essential is a unifying factor or experience which can be recreated or reinforced. For audience members and participants, this can provide a reminder of common values and lead to a renewed commitment to one another. This concept has potential application to a range of engaged theatre practices in the contemporary world, encouraging us to look for unifying elements, to remind ourselves of what we share with the groups of which we are part, and to think in terms of effective connections between the emotional impact of a given production and the practical community work which needs to happen following the performance. The art and the ideology must always work together in the service of a compelling theatrical experience. Such moments, productions, or initiatives will yield greater social and artistic results by remaining true to both. Theatre can build sustainable community through authentic performance events which keep audiences ‘on the edge’ in many interesting and important ways.

## **Works Cited**

### **Abbreviations**

<i>LC Spec Coll</i>	Lewis and Clark College, Aubrey Watzek Library Archives and Special Collections, Portland, Oregon.
<i>LC Faulconer</i>	Tracy Faulconer Collection, <i>LC Spec Coll</i> .
<i>LC Sheets</i>	The Kermit Sheets Collections, OLPb006SHE, <i>LC Spec Coll</i> .

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